MASCULINITY
and
REPRESENTATION
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MASculinity
and
representation

A Multimodal Critical Approach
to Male Identity Constructions
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 7
List of Figures and Tables 8
Foreword 9

CHAPTER 1/ONE
DEFINING MASCU LINITIES: BY WAY
OF INTRODUCTION 11

1.1 Who’s Afraid of Conchita Wurst? 11
1.2 On Hegemonic Masculinity and Crisis 14
1.3 Language, Gender and Masculinity 20

CHAPTER 2/TWO
DE-GENDERING MASCU LINITIES 29

2.1 On Men’s Studies 29
2.2 Masculinities across the Gender/Sex Divide 31
   2.2.1 The Sex Role Framework 35
   2.2.2 Biological Framework 38
   2.2.3 Social Construction Framework 40

CHAPTER 3/THREE
MEDIATING MASCU LINITIES 45

3.1 Masculinity in the Media 45
3.2 The visual representation of man 46
3.3 A short history of men’s magazines 48
   3.3.1 From The Gentleman's Magazine
to wartime publications 49
CONTENTS

3.3.2 Post-war publications 51  
3.3.3 From Popeye to the Nineties 52  
3.4 The representation of masculinity 56  
3.5 Re-semiotising men's crisis 60  

CHAPTER 4/Four  
CORPUS AND METHODS 63  

4.1 Men's Health 63  
4.2 The MALEcorpus: Front covers as a genre 70  
4.3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis 75  
4.4 Modality 81  
4.5 The male Gaze 84  

CHAPTER 5/Five  
FRAMING MALE IDENTITIES 89  

5.1 Analysing the MALEcorpus 89  
5.1.1 Cover n. 1 - March 2013 91  
5.1.2 Cover n. 2 - May 2013 93  
5.1.3 Cover n. 3 - November 2013 96  
5.1.4 Cover n. 4 - Jan/Feb 2014 98  
5.1.5 Cover n. 5 - March 2014 99  
5.1.6 Cover n. 6 - April 2014 101  
5.1.7 Cover n. 7 - May 2014 103  
5.1.8 Cover n. 8 - June 2014 106  
5.1.9 Cover n. 9 - August 2014 107  
5.1.10 Cover n. 10 - September 2014 109  
5.2 MMDA 111  
5.3 Concluding remarks 119  

REFERENCES 121
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List of Figures and Tables

List of figures

Fig. 3.1. The *Gentleman’s Magazine* 49
Fig. 3.2. *Men only* 50
Fig. 4.1. Men’s Health cover 67
Fig. 4.2. Genre features in magazine front covers 75
Fig. 5.1. Cover n. 1, March 2013 91
Fig. 5.2. Cover n. 2, May 2013 95
Fig. 5.3. Cover n. 3, November 2013 96
Fig. 5.4. Cover n. 4, January/February 2014 98
Fig. 5.5. Cover n. 5, March 2014 100
Fig. 5.6. Cover n. 6, April 2014 102
Fig. 5.7. Cover n. 7, May 2014 104
Fig. 5.8. Cover n. 8, June 2014 107
Fig. 5.9. Cover n. 9, August 2014 111
Fig. 5.10. Cover n. 10, September 2014 111

List of tables

Table 4.1. MH’s issues 66
Table 5.1. *Multimodal Discourse Analysis Legend* 113
Table 5.2. *Multimodal Discourse Analysis Grid* 118
Table 5.3. *A graph representation of MMDA* 119
This book is a brief attempt to critically discuss some, and only ‘some’, emerging ways of representing ‘masculinities’ in contemporary media discourses. The confluence of very diverse discourses on gender, men, and hegemony has often resulted in the creation of a general, rather fuzzy category we frequently refer to as ‘hegemonic masculinity’. This somewhat arbitrary phrase has been *ab-used* in different fields of research for over 60 years, and surprisingly, it still carries considerable weight today. On the one hand, ‘hegemonic masculinity’ tends to anchor the extensive field of men’s studies, also known as masculinity studies (the critical studies of men) within feminist accounts of patriarchy and sociological models of gender. On the other hand, and this is the main acceptation, the expression is often held accountable for the dissemination of popular anxieties about men and, to a greater extent, ‘boys’ as actors in social practice.

(Mis)Applications of this blurred category can be found in various research fields, ranging from education and social sciences to psychology, and health and counselling, to name but a few. The literature on the topic abounds with references to heterosexual hegemonic masculinity, traditionally acknowledged as the normative gender within the ideological structure of patriarchal culture. This angle of observation, however, does not cater for the diversity of identities we live by, and the manifold ways in which *gender* is articulated through a variety of positioning, languages, apparatuses, organisations and institutions. Different forms of masculinities have been and are constantly constructed, so that what masculinity really means today is inevitably forged by historical influences, cultural circumstances and social discourses, and not merely by accidental biology. According to Berger *et al.* (1995: 3) “gender roles, the subject positions we occupy in society, are constructed from a complex web of influences: some of these effects we control, others we do not”. Thus, the working hypothesis presented here is anchored to the notion that since “our identities are historically forged, it is also important to retain the substance of our individual experience as a theoretical resource” (Seidler, 1989: 1).

In this book, I strongly posit that it is only by engaging with the individual, personal accounts and perceptions of masculinities that it becomes possible to understand and critically discuss what masculinity, or rather different forms of masculinities might, at present, be. Identities are shaped by the multiple, personal experiences each individual has in
the world. Davies (1989: 230) suggests that “our subjectivities are experienced as if they were entirely our own because we take on the discursive practices and story-lines as if they were our own and make sense of them in terms of our own particular experiences”.

Against this backdrop, this volume intends to explore the discursive construction of masculinities through an accurate observation of linguistic and multimodal gendered other-representation. By exploring the nature of systemic functional representation through Halliday’s ideational, textual and representational meta-functions (1978) and their re-elaboration by Kress and van Leeuwen’s analysis of visual resources, this study aims to critically analyse male discourses and their agency within society. The main endeavour of the present research is to bring to the fore the strong link which exists between stereotypical representations of men and discourses of both femininity and sexuality in the construction of dominant tropes of masculinities in British print advertisements. As an engine of consumption, advertising plays a strong role in construing dualistic gender roles and prescribing sexual identities. Within this logic, iconic masculinities such as shaving, having a hearty appetite, smoking cigars, driving fast cars, and drinking liquor, are contrasted with feminine activities such as applying makeup, being on a diet, driving a minivan, doing the laundry, and looking after the home.

Using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological framework, this book outlines how masculine identities interact with the consumption of products, desires, and passions in consumer cultures. Representations of the male body are seen as discursive ‘ploys’ construed at the intersection of consumption and marketing across cultures in multimodal discourses such as advertising. The book analyses a small corpus, the MALEcorpus, comprising 10 print covers from the British edition of the well-known and bestseller magazine Men’s Health. In view of this, the book investigates how masculinity is constructed, both verbally and visually, on the ten covers of the British men’s magazine. It will do so by adapting Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar and Kress and van Leeuwen’s model of visual grammar.

The author is well aware that the conclusions drawn from this study cannot be generalised, since the analysis was conducted on a very small data set. However, it would be interesting to see the same methodology applied on a larger data set in order to provide a more convincing evidence of the way contemporary men are portrayed by the media.