

## **Redefining ‘Masculinity’ and ‘Manliness’ Social Transformation through Popular Cultural Media Representation**

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### **Abstract**

“Women as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look” - this concept is nothing but ‘past’ today. For decades, female body has been represented and objectified passively for satisfying male desires. But now, man has been shifted to the place of a passive erotic object. This ‘reversal movement’ has been caused by the presentation of popular socio-cultural media. Like women, man is also spending time and money more and more in grooming himself. This paper enquires the role that the media play in shaping attitudes towards masculinity. It argues that the media representation of men and masculinity re-defines ‘beauty’ by associating it with its traditional oxymoron, ‘masculinity,’ as well as generates awareness and consciousness in today’s men of maintaining the ‘beauty of masculinity.’ How the media reconstruct the definition of masculinity in the society of Asia. This is an argumentative paper which is totally based on research the media and the related works in this field. My purpose is to inform the world that the picture is being changed now-a-days! What women were used to be at the position of being the spectacle of the other, the position has changed. Men have recently taken the lead of exhibiting themselves.

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Date of Submission: 25-06-2021

Date of Acceptance: 08-07-2021

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Mainstream media representations play a role in reinforcing ideas about what it means to be a “real man in our society in Asian perspective. In most media portrayals, male characters are rewarded for self-control and the control of others, aggression and violence, financial independence, and physical desirability.

‘Masculinity’ is a concept that is made up of more rigid stereotypes than femininity.

Representations of men across all media tend to focus on the following:

- Strength
- Power
- Sexual Attractiveness (which may be based on the above)
- Physique
- Independence (of thought, action)

Male characters are often represented as isolated, as not needing to rely on others (the lone hero). If they capitulate to being part of a family, it is often part of the resolution of a narrative, rather than an integral factor in the initial equilibrium. It is interesting to note that the male physique is becoming more important a part of representation of masculinity in today’s society in the Asian context.

Increasingly, men are finding it as difficult to live up to their media representations as women are to theirs. This is partly because of the increased media focus on masculinity – think of the burgeoning market in men’s magazines, both lifestyles and health.

As the media representations of masculinity become more specifically targeted at audiences with product promotion in mind (think of the huge profits now made from male fashion, male skin, and hair care products such as weights, clothing etc), men are encouraged (just as women have been for many years) to aspire to be like (to look/ behave in the same way) the role models they see in adverts. This is often an unrealistic target to set, and awareness of this is growing.

Whilst some men are concerned about living up to the ideal types represented in adverts, others are worried by what they perceive as an increasing ‘anti-male bias’ in the media. There is growing support for the idea that men are represented unfairly in the media.

For several decades, media critics and feminists have been examining the role of the media in creating and reinforcing stereotypical representations of women and femininity. Only recently, however, have they focus is put on the study of how the media construct, inform and reinforce the notions of 'man' and 'masculinity'.

This paper addresses the representation of men and masculinity in the advertisements/social constructions that are popular in the Asian countries; more specifically, India and Bangladesh. In its reading, it covers topics such as media stereotypes and the increasing eroticized appearance of male models and characters in different forms of adverts: drop down ads, printed as well as filmed advertisements. The paper enquires the role of media play in shaping attitudes towards masculinity in the society.

It argues that the media representation of men and masculinity re-defines 'beauty' by associating it with its traditional oxymoron, 'masculinity,' as well as generates awareness and consciousness in today's men of maintaining the 'beauty of masculinity'.

## II. 'BEAUTY', 'MASCULINITY', AND 'BEAUTY OF MASCULINITY'

The characterization of a person as "beautiful", whether on an individual basis or by community consensus, is often based on some combination of Inner Beauty, which includes psychological factors such as personality, intelligence, grace, politeness, charisma, integrity, congruence, and Outer Beauty, (i.e. physical attractiveness) which includes physical factors, such as health, youthfulness, facial symmetry, averageness, and complexion.

Standards of beauty are always evolving, based on what a culture considers valuable. However, humans who are relatively young, with smooth skin, well-proportioned bodies, and regular features, have traditionally been considered to be the most beautiful throughout history.

The word 'beauty' and 'beautiful' are mostly associated with women. A feature of women that has been explored by researchers is a waist-to-hip ratio of approximately 0.70. Physiologists have shown that woman with hourglass figures are more fertile than other women due to higher levels of certain female hormones, a fact that may subconsciously condition males choosing mates.

The concept of beauty in men is often depicted with very strong martial arts abilities, sports talent, high intelligence, or comedic flair, traits that are usually assigned to the hero/protagonist as in 'bishōnen' in Japan. It breaks down stereotypes surrounding feminine male characters. 'Bishōnen' refers to males with distinctly feminine features, physical characteristics establishing the standard of beauty in Japan and typically exhibited in their pop culture idols.

The term describes an aesthetic that can be found in disparate areas in Asia: a young man whose beauty (and sexual appeal) transcends the boundary of gender or sexual orientation. It has always shown the strongest manifestation in Japanese pop culture, gaining in popularity due to the androgynous glam rock bands of the 1970s, but it has roots in ancient Japanese literature, the homosocial and homoerotic ideals of the medieval Chinese imperial court and intellectuals, and Indian aesthetic concepts carried over from Hinduism, imported with Buddhism to China.

'Ugliness' is a property of a person or thing that is unpleasant to look upon and results in a highly unfavourable evaluation. To be ugly is to be aesthetically unattractive, repulsive, or offensive. Like its opposite, beauty, ugliness involves a subjective judgment and is at least partly in the "eye of the beholder". Thus, the perception of ugliness can be mistaken or short-sighted, as in the story of *The Ugly Duckling* by Hans Christian Andersen.

Although ugliness is normally viewed as a visible characteristic, it can also be an internal attribute. For example, an individual could be outwardly attractive but inwardly thoughtless and cruel. It is also possible to be in an "ugly mood," which is a temporary, internal state of unpleasantness.

'Beauty' and 'ugliness' come rotationally, when 'beauty' is discussed, 'ugliness' automatically takes the floor following 'beauty'. But it is true that a person can never be judged by the apparent beauty but overall inner positive or negative traits. Because "Beauty indeed is a good gift of God; but that the good may not think it to be a great good, God dispenses it even to the wicked."

The synonyms of 'masculinity' are maleness, sexuality, gender, sex, machismo, virility. The term associates with manliness, maleness, robustness, ruggedness, muscularity, etc. It means the properties characteristic of the male sex. The trait of being manly; of behaving in ways considered typical for men.

Masculinity; 'manly character' specifically describes men and boys, that is personal and human, unlike male which can also be used to describe something masculine. When masculine is used to describe men, it can have degrees of comparison—more masculine, most masculine. The opposite can be expressed by terms such as unmanly, epicene. A typical near synonym of masculinity is virility.

Masculinity has its roots in genetics. Therefore, while masculinity looks different in different cultures, there are common aspects to its definition across cultures.

Machismo is a form of masculine culture. It includes assertiveness or standing up for one's rights, responsibility, and selfishness, general code of ethics, sincerity, and respect.

There are so many definitions or stereotypes about 'masculinity' and 'manliness'. Authors have characterized masculinity by aggression, competitiveness, emotional ineptitude and coldness, and dependent upon an overriding and exclusive emphasis on penetrative sex. Another well-known stereotype about 'man' is that a man is "more rational, less emotional". In an ancient literature, Cicero wrote that "a man's chief quality is courage"

### **III. MAX, BANG, YELLOW: EXHIBITING MASCULINITY**

'Max' is the beauty fairness crème for men. 'Bang' refers to the way how adverts focus on 'raw masculinist' image and 'Yellow' is the brand name for the menswear products.

Max Fairness, the beauty product for men are creating new idea that "confidence lies in complexion". The man who uses Fair and Lovely or any other fairness 'Menz Active' crème or Emami Fair and Handsome fairness products, has the confidence that in an interview he takes interview of his employers. Bollywood celebrities like Shahrukh Khan, John Abraham, Arjun Rampal and Shahid Kapoor have taken the lead to increase this idea in men. Today's men want to become 'man' like Khan, Abraham, and Rampal, as they have already become popular because of their own convention of 'masculinity' and 'manliness', i.e. Khan's 'Six Packs' body concept. Salman Khan's "Dixcy Scott" underwear, Sunny Deol's "Rupa Underwear"; 'Yeh Andar Ki Baat Hain' and Saif Ali Khan's "Amul Macho's new ad campaign concept- "Bade Aaram Se" and the likes, shows the audience these celebrities shirtless body exhibition. A man today most likely wants to show his 'manliness' in a way women were supposed to for years. Things are changed or it can be said, transformed by the media in establishing the new concept of 'manliness' and 'masculinity' in the society. This new explosion of new imagery had direct connections to changes in consumer markets. By far the biggest slice of it was associated with developments in three men's markets: menswear grooming products and toiletries. In each of these markets, new products were produced (like new ranges of fragrances; i.e. Axe, Zatak, Hair Gel products; "Set Wet Sexy") or the marketing of existing products was reworked (through new packaging or advertising) so as to appeal to what producers and service-providers identified as new groups of male consumers. The emergence of new designs in menswear was particularly significant in this process – which established the key terms for the coding of the 'new man' as a distinctive new version of 'masculinity'. Man now wants to attract women sexually (as in the ad films of male perfume products of Excite Body spray by AXE - "Even Angels Will Fall", or hair care products; Set Wet Sexy Hair Gel). In the adverts of Shaving crème and after shave lotion male models are viewed as an erotic object and the role of a woman in the adverts is to judge how appealing (sexually) the man is to her. Now it's the woman who looks at the undressed muscular body of a man. For years, female body used to be shown as an erotic object for exhibition purpose. Man always supposed to look, not to be looked at; but now, fashion has taken the lead. Man dares to be in that place and gives away the exhibitionist role to women.

### **IV. MALE GROOMING**

"Venus as a boy, he believes in beauty." So goes a popular melody of the late 1990s by Icelander diva Björk. Her vision of a boy having the qualities of Venus—the Greek goddess of beauty—could not have been the inspirational icon for the increasing number of males who frequently visit parlours to make sure that their grooming is taken care of; but it certainly sees male beauty in a completely different light. Today's men, like the boy in Björk's song, believe in beauty. To enhance their looks and maintain a certain image more and more men are heading towards the parlours that specialize in men's grooming. Caring for one's looks used to be considered the prerogative of women. That perception has taken a beating today. In the last five years or so, educated, affluent men or men with well-paid jobs have emerged as a group that seeks to nurture what nature has endowed them within the looks department. A number of exclusive salons for men that dot the city of Dhaka (Bangladesh) testify that in the race for beauty men are not lagging far behind. Though the trend is a recent one, the number of men resorting to the expert and caring hands of beauticians is certainly on the increase.

So, the beauty business certainly has gone through a change in the last five years to accommodate a new category of clientele – the metro-sexual males, as beauty conscious men are called in current jargon. Catering to this category of men is now a thriving business.

The beauty business is thriving because of metro-sexual males who are willing to spend time and money to look better. Times have changed and with it, the age-old notion that men need to look rugged and macho has become passé. Men are now a more conscious gender, caring about their looks and posture. Looking one's best is important. Men's look has little to do with the colour of the skin. It is not about fairness but about 'freshness'.

Male salons are a new pampering and entertaining concept that cater to men's haircuts – from the conventional to ultra funky, massages, manicures and all other grooming treatments. Why simply look good when one can feel good inside as well? These hair and facial treatments also help the gents take better care of their hair and skin to combat the effects of the pollution and dust of the city. Whatever the reason, men have

started caring more about their personal hygiene and looks and salons have come up with treatments to help them.

For years, it was taken for granted that it is women who had the right to spend hours dressing up for a date while typical man is allowed only a few minutes. While this ritual of making oneself up still remains an integral part of all women, the men of today also have suddenly taken a bold step forward and are resorting to beauty treatment. The men are now more conscious about their looks and their attire. More and more men, especially the younger generation can be seen mulling over the choices of facials they have, the options that they have with various types of haircuts.

Male parlours in Bangladesh have all mushroomed over the last decade and they all offer something different for an individual's hair and facial needs. Every now and then different salons are sprouting up and popular advertising films, billboards and drop down ads of men's wear house and beautification products are creating the necessity for men to go there and look good. Everything is about the image. According to guys, if women can go and make their appearances worth a second look why the men should just sit back? A little attention can go a long way and males of today know that nothing is to be taken for granted. Today, men can be seen going around with blonde, brunette or red hair. Ranging from Teens to males in their Early Twenties, both prefer to add a little of what they feel to be an amount of zing to their dark manes. Many men are also resorting to a potentially harmful process of beautification bleaching to lighten the skin tone.

It is a common trend in teens to keep changing their hair color. Getting a few blonde streaks or going for a total color change has become a norm for many youngsters who are heavily influenced by the fashion and styles they see on TV.

With greater purchasing power and the overwhelming influence of the global media, not to mention the whole concept of male grooming, the urge to go to a place that promises to improve one's looks has reached the Bangladeshi urban male. It's not just about plain male vanity; it is about creating an image for oneself that boosts self-confidence and makes him more acceptable to the world around him. Most of all, this trend has given men the opportunity to take some time out for a little bit of pampering, a privilege that had once been exclusively bagged by women.

A renowned beautician and the CEO of a Men's Beauty Salon in Bangladesh says—"When there is a demand, there will always be a supply," she adds talking about the changing trend in male grooming – "First of all we are all humans. The senses that are working are that we have to present ourselves in the best manner possible. This presentation varies from men to women. The male trend has been changing in the recent past. Apart from hair cut, there is also manicure, pedicure, facials and skin care treatments but the basic concept has changed. Now men are taking care of their beauty."

In *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*; A Practical Guide for Improving Communication in Men-Women Relationships, the author John Gray mentions several traits or the behavioral patterns of men. He says, 'A man's deepest fear is that he is not good enough or that he is incompetent...Not to be needed is a slow death for a man'. This is the reason a man always tends to be under the stress of maintaining his 'manliness', 'masculinity', and 'manhood'.

"Many meanings, positive and negative, are attached to the term 'masculinity'." Said Julia Heiman, Director of The Kinsey Institute at Indiana University and an author of this study. "To ask a large sample of men what comprises their own sense of masculinity is very useful for both the media and for research. These results suggest we should pay attention and ask rather than presume we know."

Although the terms 'masculine' and 'masculinity' have rarely been defined, they appear to have two types of meaning both for psychologists and for the society at large. Masculinity itself is in shift. In the study of masculinity and media, it is found that most commercials directed to male viewers tend to portray women rarely. In fact, in his analysis of gender in advertising, author and University of North Texas professor Steve Craig argues that women tend to be presented as "rewards" for men who choose the right product. He says, at the level of fantasy—portrayals of men are presented idealistically. When he focused specifically on beer commercials, Craig found that the men were invariably "virile, slim, and white". Author and academic Susan Bordo (University of Kentucky) has also analyzed gender in advertising, and agrees that men are usually portrayed as virile, muscular, erotic and powerful. Their powerful bodies dominate space in the ads. For women, the focus is on slenderness, dieting, and attaining a feminine ideal; women are always presented as not just thin, but also weak and vulnerable.

These critics and others suggest that just as traditional advertising has for decades sexually objectified women and their bodies, today's marketing campaigns are objectifying men in the same way. This new focus on fit and muscled male bodies is causing men the same anxiety and personal insecurity that women have felt for decades. Men have started being spectacle of the other. The origin masculinity and manliness are blurring gradually. They have started believing the illusions of new 'masculinity' as established by the media in the society. From a similar perspective, Sean Nixon's examination of 'new man' masculinity explores it as 'a regime of representation', focusing on four key sites of cultural circulation: television advertising, press

advertising, menswear shops, and popular magazines for men; all these hold a huge contribution or play an important role in the popular culture in Asia.

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Farhat Tasannum Farah. "Redefining 'Masculinity' and 'Manliness' Social Transformation through Popular Cultural Media Representation." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(07), 2021, pp. 27-31.