

# *La mascolinità nella letteratura e nelle arti*

Decostruzione/evoluzione  
di modelli identitari

A cura di

Mariaconcetta Costantini e Federica D'Ascenzo



## IL SEGNO E LE LETTERE

---

*Collana del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne  
dell'Università degli Studi 'G. d'Annunzio'*

### DIREZIONE

Mariaconcetta Costantini

### COMITATO SCIENTIFICO

*Università 'G. d'Annunzio' di Chieti-Pescara*

Mariaconcetta Costantini - Mariapia D'Angelo - Federica D'Ascenzo

Antonella Del Gatto - Elvira Diana - Emanuela Ettorre

Persida Lazarević - Maria Rita Leto - Lorella Martinelli - Paola Partenza

Ugo Perolino - Carmela Perta - Marcial Rubio Áquez - Eleonora Sasso

Michele Sisto - Anita Trivelli

### *Atenei esteri*

Antonio Azaustre (*Universidad de Santiago de Compostela*)

Claudia Capancioni (*Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln*)

Dominique Maingueneau (*Université Sorbonne*)

Snežana Milinković (*University of Belgrade*)

### COMITATO EDITORIALE

Mariaconcetta Costantini - Barbara Delli Castelli

Sara Piccioni - Miriam Sette - Luca Stirpe

---

I volumi pubblicati nella Collana sono stati sottoposti a doppio referaggio anonimo.

ISSN 2283-7140  
ISBN 978-88-5513-206-0

Copyright 2025

*LED Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto*

Via Cervignano 4 - 20137 Milano

www.lededizioni.com - www.ledonline.it - E-mail: led@lededizioni.com

I diritti di riproduzione, memorizzazione e archiviazione elettronica,  
pubblicazione con qualsiasi mezzo analogico o digitale  
(comprese le copie fotostatiche, i supporti digitali e l'inserimento in banche dati)  
e i diritti di traduzione e di adattamento totale o parziale sono riservati per tutti i paesi.

---

Le fotocopie per uso personale del lettore possono essere effettuate nei limiti del 15% di ciascun volume o fascicolo di periodico dietro pagamento alla SIAE del compenso previsto dall'art. 68, commi 4 e 5, della legge 22 aprile 1941 n. 633.

Le fotocopie effettuate per finalità di carattere professionale, economico o commerciale o comunque per uso diverso da quello personale possono essere effettuate a seguito di specifica autorizzazione rilasciata da CLEARedi, Centro Licenze e Autorizzazione per le Riproduzioni Editoriali, Corso di Porta Romana 108, 20122 Milano - e-mail [autorizzazioni@clearedi.org](mailto:autorizzazioni@clearedi.org) - sito web [www.clearedi.org](http://www.clearedi.org)

---

*In copertina*

*Inchiostro blu* - Foto di Chiara Scarlato. Per gentile concessione.

*Videoimpaginazione:* Paola Mignanego

*Stampa:* Litogi

# SOMMARIO

Introduzione	7
<i>Mariaconcetta Costantini</i>	
Man and Gentleman in Gaskell's <i>North and South</i> and Dickens's <i>Great Expectations</i>	23
<i>Phillip Mallett</i>	
Off the Beaten Track in the Kingdom of Italy with Thomas Adolphus Trollope: Questioning Victorian Models of Masculinity through Narratives of Travel in <i>A Lenten Journey</i> in <i>Umbria and the Marches</i> (1862)	39
<i>Claudia Capancioni</i>	
Alcune riflessioni sui personaggi maschili della letteratura vittoriana. Il caso di Ellen Wood	57
<i>Salvatore Asaro</i>	
Contre-modèles de la masculinité dans les fictions de Georges Eekhoud	73
<i>Federica D'Ascenzo</i>	
"Middle-Aged, Anti-Female Single Men" and Middle-Aged Robust Female Vampires in E.F. Benson's "Spook Tales"	89
<i>Ruth Heholt</i>	
Une identité complexe. Masculinité, écriture et censure chez Julien Green	105
<i>Fabio Libasci</i>	
Hardly at War: Figuring Unheroical Masculinity in WW2 British Culture	123
<i>Marilena Parlati</i>	
Impuissances masculines chez Romain Gary	141
<i>Maxime Decout</i>	
L'eterno mascolino futuro prossimo. Il protagonista transumano della trilogia antropologica di Borislav Pekić	155
<i>Persida Lazarević Di Giacomo</i>	

L'universo maschile nei film di Jane Campion, tra padri ingombranti e il rovesciamento della mistica virile <i>Anita Trivelli</i>	171
Alcune riflessioni sul modello di mascolinità nell'Egitto distopico di Ahmad Khālid Tawfiq <i>Elvira Diana</i>	187
Raccontare la mascolinità, decostruire la mascolinità. Il caso letterario di Francesco Piccolo <i>Chiara Scarlato</i>	201
From Gender Stereotypes to Toxic Masculinity: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Men in Advertising <i>Giulia Magazzù</i>	217
Gli Autori	235

# FROM GENDER STEREOTYPES TO TOXIC MASCULINITY

## A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Men in Advertising

*Giulia Magazzù*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7359/2060-2025-magg>

### ABSTRACT

Historically, advertisements have often showcased men in positions of dominance, reflecting patriarchal stereotypes and leading roles in their interactions with women. However, the representation of masculinity has gradually evolved. Today, several businesses align their marketing slogans and campaigns with gender equality initiatives, challenging the harmful aspects of masculinity. To analyse how masculinity has changed in recent years, this chapter employed the concepts of multimodality and critical discourse analysis to focus on the 2019 Gillette campaign that encouraged social responsibility and advocated a fresh, more encompassing depiction of masculinity, juxtaposing it with a L'Oréal advertisement of 2018.

KEYWORDS: advertising; CDA; Gillette campaign; L'Oréal; masculinity; multimodality.

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising, a multimodal process involving print, audio, and audiovisual mediums, aims to persuade consumers to purchase or use goods or services. It uses language, imagery, and music to convey messages. Advertisements use various strategies, including factual information, technical evidence, demonstrations, and animations. The multimodal nature of advertising creates a compelling narrative that attracts the audience's attention. Given the extensive use of multimodality in television advertisements, this area has become a compelling focus for research. The integration of writing, speech, images, and sound in television commercials highlights the potential for multimodality over print or audio advertisements.

This chapter examines the theories of masculinity in light of recent mainstream critiques of what is often referred to as “toxic” masculinities<sup>1</sup>, such as the #MeToo movement. This was achieved by analysing two television advertisements that depict masculinity in contrasting ways. The first is a L’Oréal Men 2018 advertisement and the second is Gillette’s “We Believe”, released on 13 January 2019. These brands were chosen because they specifically sell skincare products for male consumers. This chapter focuses primarily on the language and visuals used in these commercials to portray masculinity. It examines how these elements contribute to the evolving depiction of masculinity and how these transformations are theoretically framed within the concepts of “inclusive masculinity” and “hegemonic masculinity”<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. INTERSECTION OF MALE ADVERTISING AND DOMINANT MASCULINITY

Over the past few decades, the depiction of gender roles in advertising has consistently been a focus of scholarly investigation. Stereotypical portrayals of both men and women have long been prevalent in advertisements. Early research from the 1970s first identified the widespread use of such stereotypes<sup>3</sup>. Grau and Zotos emphasised that societal transformations, shifts in family structures, and evolving workforce demographics have significantly changed the representation of both genders in advertising<sup>4</sup>. Communication studies explore stereotypes in advertisements, their challenges, negotiations, and contested nature, with a focus on audience reactions through meta-analyses and reviews<sup>5</sup>.

During the 1990s and the 2000s, researchers demonstrated particular interest in exploring the existence and evolution of gender stereotypes in advertisements and how these mirrored wider societal shifts<sup>6</sup>. Grau and Zotos also indicated four primary domains in which existing and future research can offer innovative insights. First, there has been a discernible

---

<sup>1</sup> Harrington 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Connell - Messerschmidt 2005.

<sup>3</sup> McArthur - Resko 1975; Belkaoui - Belkaoui 1976; Hawkins - Coney 1976.

<sup>4</sup> Grau - Zotos 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Wolin 2003; Eisend 2009; Grau - Zotos 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Haywood - Mac an Ghaill 2003; Wolin 2003; Zawisza - Cinnirella 2010; Akestam 2017.

transition from focusing on gender depictions in print and television media to online platforms. Second, an increasing awareness of the need to consider previously marginalised segments of the population, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) consumers has emerged. Inclusivity widens the research perspective and ensures a more accurate reflection on society. Third, Grau and Zotos highlighted the recent trend towards “femvertising”, a type of advertising aimed at empowering women. Finally, they note a burgeoning trend towards a more nuanced focus on male roles. The following broad-ranging analysis acknowledges the evolving landscape of advertising, underscoring the deeper societal implications of these changes in shaping and reflecting on our understanding of gender roles.

### 3. TOWARDS A MULTIMODAL UNDERSTANDING OF DISCOURSE

There are several ways to understand the term ‘discourse’ in the humanities and social sciences. Most notably, Michel Foucault and poststructuralism profoundly affected how modern social and cultural theorists define discourse as the process through which we debate and comprehend our social experiences. This is how discourse works to structure and generate meaning in a certain social setting<sup>7</sup>. Foucault’s distinctive viewpoint offers a novel definition of discourse as “the practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak”<sup>8</sup>. This interpretation has led modern cultural theorists to perceive discourses as a compilation of thoughts, images, and practices that provide avenues to discuss specific topics, social activities, or institutional sites within society<sup>9</sup>.

Critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis (CDA) are two disciplines that are particularly aware of discourse as a social action<sup>10</sup>. According to Mills, this point of view has led to a “fusion of linguistic and cultural theory” in how speech is studied<sup>11</sup>.

According to the theory of multimodality, as articulated by Kress and van Leeuwen, several forms of communication commonly interact to form discourses. According to this premise, “common semiotic principles

---

<sup>7</sup> Edgar - Sedgwick 1999, 117.

<sup>8</sup> Edgar - Sedgwick 1999, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Hall 1997, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Wodak - Meyer 2001; van Leeuwen 2008; van Dijk 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Mills 1997, 10.

operate in and across different modes”<sup>12</sup> and support the creation of specific discourses.

Multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) concentrates on more specialised areas and offers analytical viewpoints for assessing more general communication contexts in which multimodality is relevant<sup>13</sup>. This includes sectors impacted by education<sup>14</sup> as well as those impacted by information and communication technology (ICT)<sup>15</sup>.

It is also important to note that gender and multimodality have recently been investigated critically because of research by Machin *et al.*, which raises concerns about the affordances communicators use in each usage context and the ideological goals they aim to achieve to reveal meanings about gender and sexuality<sup>16</sup>. Since gender roles in society have evolved to challenge traditional gender hierarchy structures and raise ethical questions about female representation in the media, the pervasive, ideologically and ethically dubious nature of advertising has been driven by feminist thought and has remained relevant and timely<sup>17</sup>.

Ledin and Machin emphasised the need for “clear, robust concepts [in multimodality] that can be used as part of CDA with its emphasis on digging out the discourses buried in texts to reveal... power relations and ideologies”<sup>18</sup>. As an interdisciplinary approach, multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) seeks to break research out of its disciplinary silos by combining contributions from several domains to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of the textual and discursive interactions across diverse semiotic modalities (verbal, visual, haptic, auditory, etc.). Using a collection of analytical instruments from MCDA<sup>19</sup>, we pursued our goals for the research. MCDA analyses texts based on lexical, grammatical, and other semiotic decisions to uncover the underlying discourses and the power structures that uphold them. In other words, our question is: How is toxic masculinity represented in the two advertisements?

The first video represents a conventional advertisement, portraying all the stereotypes of masculinity (men who care about their appearance,

---

<sup>12</sup> Kress - van Leeuwen 2006, 2.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Norris 2004; Baldry - Thibault 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Kress *et al.* 2001.

<sup>15</sup> LeVine - Scollon 2004; Odysseas 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Machin *et al.* 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Reeser 2015; Azar - Aimé - Ulrich 2018; Liljedal - Berg - Dahlén 2020; Zayer - McGrath - Castro-González 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Ledin - Machin 2020, 60.

<sup>19</sup> Kress - van Leeuwen 2020.

focusing on their jobs and on workouts), while the second advertisement marks a significant shift for the famous shaving brand Gillette. The following sections present the analysis of the two videos from the multimodal critical discourse analysis point of view.

#### 4. A CONVENTIONAL ADVERTISEMENT: L'ORÉAL FOR MEN

This advertisement, distributed in 2018, portrays several men in their daily activities: waking up in the morning, going to work, and working out. The *fil rouge* is represented by the skin care products of L'Oréal. According to Kress, texts are made as messages to others. In the case of this commercial, men, specifically millennials, are viewed as masculine when they care about their aesthetic appearance<sup>20</sup>. The narrating pattern demonstrates this. Every narration's phrasing gives the impression that the creators are "commanding" the audience to carry out particular stereotypical masculine behaviours. This is justified by using the word "hunk" (an informal way to address a handsome young man). This word is used as a form of suggesting to the viewers, particularly millennial male ones, that in order to be viewed as a "hunk", they need to do several things first. First, having a stylish hairstyle ("You must have a fashionable hairstyle"). While having stylish hair is stereotypically attributed to women, men are also paying attention to their physical appearance and "re-construct their idea of what it is to be males"<sup>21</sup>. Another message from this advertisement is that product consumers will appear more manly if they are responsible men. It emphasises the word "job" in an effort to make millennial men feel more manly by making them more responsible. "Work-life balance", which emphasises the idea that "being responsible is masculine", further justifies this.

Thus, the commercial's message suggests that millennial men are deemed manly if they take pride in and are accountable for their appearance. Based on the aesthetic appearance of millennial men, the advertisement presents a masculine image in a number of frames.

As depicted at the beginning of the commercial<sup>22</sup>, the actor wears a brown blazer. According to Cerrato, brown denotes masculine qualities<sup>23</sup>. As far as positioning is concerned, the actor is removed quite some

---

<sup>20</sup> Kress 2010, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Harrison 2008, 56.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIG-0nsPcmk> [26/04/2025].

<sup>23</sup> Cerrato 2012, 3.

distance from the viewers. This is measured by the extent to which a person's body is seen in the image; in this case, his upper body, face, and clothes are mostly seen.

Thus, the image attempts to emphasise what he is wearing, implying that his clothing makes him look masculine. Also, this advertisement<sup>24</sup> depicts several colours that denote masculinity. The two actors wear blue shirts; a colour that conveys masculinity<sup>25</sup>. Second, yellow is considered to generate energy<sup>26</sup>. This use of yellow fits the image as the actor is portrayed walking on a treadmill to strengthen his muscles, suggesting a desire to appear masculine. The video also<sup>27</sup> shows an actor water-skiing in the sea, a dangerous action that creates the image of a man loving challenges and thus appearing virile.

Towards the end of the commercial<sup>28</sup>, the actor is seen on the right-hand side of the scene, while on the left, we can see an old picture which shows how skinny he was. The positioning on the left marks a "point of departure", while the positioning on the right marks the "new one which viewers must pay special attention to"<sup>29</sup>. Thus, this positioning encourages males to pay attention to their muscles to appear more virile.

The verbal and nonverbal features of this advertisement project an image of masculinity, inviting male viewers to buy L'Oréal Men products to be more virile, looking like the actors starring in the commercial. The greater attention given to male bodies in Western countries, where men are increasingly encouraged to care about their physical features, is highlighted by the considerable emphasis on enhancing and improving the male face. The advertisement links the promoted products to traditional ideas of masculinity by using masculine features and methods (e.g., virility, emphasis on the agential male protagonists). This aids in the commercials' efforts to restore men's dominance and authority in society. Men are thus referred to as independent, self-governing individuals with the ability and right to "do something about" their ageing skin as long as their virility endures. The increase in men's aesthetic labour in this advertisement alludes to the financial, time, and physical resources needed to conduct or undertake beauty work or to improve the male body. Therefore, the enhancement of the masculine physique transforms the use of skin-

---

<sup>24</sup> Timecode: 00:14.

<sup>25</sup> Cerrato 2012, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Cerrato 2012, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Timecode: 00:10.

<sup>28</sup> Timecode: 00:19.

<sup>29</sup> Kress - van Leeuwen 2006, 181.

care products into an act by which men can uphold their already advantageous position in society. The next section focuses on an advertisement that conveys a different reflection of masculinity that fits into current society, in which greater attention is paid to fighting gender stereotypes.

## 5. AN UNCONVENTIONAL COMMERCIAL: GILLETTE'S "WE BELIEVE"

A specific commercial that debuted during the 2019 Super Bowl received a significant response and sparked one of the most heated discussions on masculinity in recent memory<sup>30</sup>. The first line of the relevant Gillette advertisement is the company's catchphrase, "The Best a Man Can Get". It dares to ask the audience, "Is this the best a man can get?" immediately. The commercial shows different instances of harmful male behaviour such as bullying, misogyny, sexual misconduct, and toxic masculinity, while acknowledging important social movements such as #MeToo.

In this advertisement, Gillette's original slogan from 1989 is ingeniously reinterpreted to harmonise with this revised perspective, transforming into "The Best Men Can Be"<sup>31</sup>.

Referencing Luyt's study on masculinity and race in advertising<sup>32</sup>, it is evident that hegemonic masculinity is not solely related to men's dominance over women<sup>33</sup>. Rather, it also encompasses hierarchies among men, often influenced by social differentiators such as race, sexuality, and social class. Luyt's research, conducted in South Africa, concludes that, generally, "white men are depicted as standard-bearers of dominant masculinity, while black men are marginalised"<sup>34</sup>.

In this context, Gillette's advertising pioneered new grounds for diversity in two different ways. First, it covers men of all ages including young men, older men, teenagers, and toddlers. The underlying message is that men of all ages should be concerned about gender equality and reject sexual misbehaviour. Most African-American males shown in the advertisements also behave respectfully towards women or support their empowerment, which is more noticeable. Some even corrected their white colleagues when the latter acted inappropriately. This image sharply contrasts with the stereotype that African-American males are

---

<sup>30</sup> Ganev 2019.

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYaY2Kb\\_PKI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYaY2Kb_PKI) [15/07/2024].

<sup>32</sup> Luyt 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Connell 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Luyt 2012, 35.

typically connected with criminality and parental abandonment in commercials and the media<sup>35</sup>.

The advertisement can be dissected into 23 scenes, 10 of which show toxic masculinity and 10 displaying positive masculinity. Let us delve into an analysis of the most consequential scenes.

The scenes depicted in the advertisement are steeped in aggression and domination, mirroring the toxic traits often associated with traditional views of masculinity. The opening scene introduces viewers to a young boy being chased by a group of peers – a glaring representation of physical bullying.

SCENE 1	SCENE 2
Timecode 0:11	Timecode 0:16
<i>Visual in frame</i> [A boy is escaping from a group of boys. The boys were shouting.] <i>Narrator</i> “Is it?”	<i>Visual in a frame</i> [A mom is hugging her son who is crying while text messages are written “FREAK!” “Sissy!”, “You are such a loser”, “Everyone hates you” keep popping out.] <i>Narrator</i> “We cannot hide from it.”

This powerful imagery underscores the societal issue of aggression, which is often fuelled by unchecked dominance. The raw portrayal of physical bullying is swiftly followed by an equally impactful scene illustrating cyberbullying. Here, the offender and victim are shown, portraying a realistic reflection of the pervasive bullying epidemic of the digital age. Several derogatory terms punctuate the second scene, each serving as hurtful slurs within the context: “freak”, “hates”, “sissy”, and “loser”. These particular expressions, comprising an adjective, a verb, and two adverbs, are commonly used to belittle, demean, and undermine the self-esteem of an individual or group. The harsh language within the second scene conveys a strong sense of disparagement and contempt; an attack on not only someone’s actions but also their very identity. This highlights the profound and lasting impact of such toxic behaviours on a person’s self-perception and mental health. Three interconnected systems – information value, salience, and framing – achieve compositional meaning<sup>36</sup>. Left and right structuring is not particularly helpful in progressive images, as Baldry and Thibault pointed out<sup>37</sup>; the Given is made

<sup>35</sup> Bogle 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Kress - van Leeuwen 2006.

<sup>37</sup> Baldry - Thibault 2005.

up of informational invariants, while the New information is interpreted by dynamically salient informational variants or transformations. Since the visuals in an advertisement are progressive and always changing, it is impossible to examine compositional meaning in the form of a static frame alone. Every shot is an integral part of the scenario, contributing fresh details to the overall interpretation of the visual meaning. In *Scene 1* we see a young boy chased by his peers, while in *Scene 2* we see the same boy being comforted by his mother. This kind of transition makes the boy and his mother seem like fresh information, trying to pique viewers' interest in personal relationships. The visual displays show continuously changing fresh information as they develop throughout time.

---

SCENE 3

---

Timecode 0:29

---

*Visual in frame* [A woman and several men in a meeting. When the woman tries to speak, the boss suddenly interrupts her. Then the woman keeps silent.]

*Narrator* "Making the same old excuses."

Dialogue Boss: "What I think she is trying to say ..."

---

*Scene 3* portrays patriarchal activities, which is another component of hegemonic masculinity. A lady is at a business conference with several males in the scenario. The supervisor interrupts the lady as she begins to speak, implying that her viewpoint may be unimportant and unlikely to be taken seriously with the remark, "What I think she is trying to say ...". This interpretation is likely accurate, as suggested by the woman's reaction captured in the third scene. In the backdrop, the commercial's narrator comments, "making the same old excuses", indicating the ongoing and normalised patriarchy within society. The descriptors' "same old" in the context of "excuses" highlights this system's repetitive nature and deep entrenchment.

---

SCENE 4

---

Timecode 0:44

---

*Visual in frame* [Some news about sexual harassment.]

*Narrator* "But something finally changed."

Dialogue Newscaster: "Allegations regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment ..."

---



---

SCENE 5

---

Timecode 0:50

---

*Visual in frame* [Several standing guys are displayed in a relay.]

*Narrator* "Because we believe in the best in men."

---

These scenes illustrate a significant shift from the portrayal of toxic masculinity. The narration, which is in rhythm with the news anchors deliv-

ering the news, says, “But something finally changed”, as clips of news headlines on sexual assault and harassment are played. In this context, the word “finally” denotes a long-awaited change. This refers to toxic masculinity that has been assimilated and accepted by society. However, certain organisations are now realising that this toxicity must be reduced.

In *Scene 5*, three men can be seen gazing into what appears to be a mirror; they are salient and in a “demand”<sup>38</sup> position, calling into question the viewers, as the narrator declares, “Because we, we believe in the best in men”. The underlying message of this phrase is to inspire men to reject toxic masculinity and work towards being their best selves. Gillette’s strategy was to inspire and sway people, particularly male customers, to join the movement.

SCENE 6	SCENE 7
Timecode 0:59	Timecode 1:04
<i>Visual in frame</i> [Two guys try to film some girls, but the other guy stops it.]	<i>Visual in frame</i> [A guy tries to flirt with a girl who passes by, but another guy stops it.]
<i>Narrator</i> “To say the right thing.”	<i>Narrator</i> “To act the right way.”
Dialogue Guy 1: “Smile, sweetie.”	Dialogue Guy 1: “Wow ...”
Guy 2: “C’mom.”	Guy 2: “Not cool, not cool.”

*Scenes 6* and *7* are pivotal because they serve as junctures at which toxic masculinity intersects with positive masculinity. These sequences highlight misogyny as an example of toxic masculinity. Definitive phrases are used in the advertisements to embody the notion of positive masculinity. These scenes aim to inspire viewers to be courageous in voicing their opinions and taking appropriate action. This dialogue is visualised through contrasting displays of toxic and positive masculinity. In *Scene 6*, the girls are defended or protected by a young man who interjects, saying “C’mom” to Guy 1.

*Scene 7* reveals an attempt to counteract toxic masculinity. Here, the second actor uses negation to discourage the first man’s inappropriate behaviour. This use of negation signifies that the actions Man 1 is about to undertake are both disrespectful and unacceptable. Also, the man who is being stopped is a white man, and the one who is saying “Not cool, not cool” is a black man. Gillette also discusses what Connell

<sup>38</sup> Kress - van Leeuwen 2020 point out that images in which the participants make eye contact with the viewer are demand images through which they symbolically demand something from the viewers. Besides, a demand act can be combined with facial expressions like smiling, pouting, or pointing at the interactive participant (the viewer).

and Messerschmidt noted in their work, which is that non-hegemonic masculinities – such as those involving racial groups other than white men, who have historically been the majority – as well as women are devalued within hegemonic masculinities<sup>39</sup>.

These two scenes, along with most of the video, have low colour saturation. According to Ledin and Machin, this creates an impression of emotional temperature and suggests that the message is trying to be subdued, possibly in an effort to strike a balance with how strong and contentious the message is<sup>40</sup>. It also lends the subject a more serious tone. Ledin and Machin suggested that less saturation should be used with an older target audience, which makes sense given that razors are used by men who are going through adolescence and beyond.

---

SCENE 8

Timecode 1:31

---

*Visual in frame* [Some little boys are displayed in a relay, then the old Gillette's Tagline, "THE BEST A MAN CAN GET", comes out.]

*Narrator* "Because the boys watching today will be the men of tomorrow."

---

*Scene 8* depicts young boys engaged in a relay race. This act of participation symbolises a collective and competitive spirit often associated with masculinity. Interestingly, the narration adopts the present future tense, suggesting that boys will replicate the behaviours they witness in their environment. This linguistic choice emphasises the importance of educating young boys to display positive masculine conduct as exemplified in the preceding scenes. In a powerful culmination, the advertisement unfolds Gillette's long-standing tagline, "THE BEST A MAN CAN GET". The lack of boldface font, according to Ledin and Machin, suggests shyness. This could be done to counterbalance the powerful message the commercial uses voice and visuals to convey. Furthermore, the three kids are in a demand stance as they stare straight at the off-frame individual who is in the same location as the viewer<sup>41</sup>. As a result, the image act helps to draw in viewers by directly challenging those who are being observed. This advertisement is particularly adept at presenting scenarios that encapsulate stereotypical male behaviours that affect children's aggression, competitiveness, and bullying. Moreover, it does not stop depicting

---

<sup>39</sup> Connell - Messerschmidt 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Ledin - Machin 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Kress - van Leeuwen 2020.

men as engaging in disrespectful attitudes towards women. However, in the latter half of the advertisement, the boundaries are truly pushed, and the traits previously considered commonplace are openly condemned as severely inappropriate. The men portrayed undergo a radical shift in their attitudes, challenging entrenched prejudices and promoting more empathetic, respectful, and congenial forms of masculinity.

As we navigate the transformative portrayal of masculinity in the Gillette advertisement, we observe men actively admonishing and preventing other men from indulging in certain behaviours. Here, we get a glimmer of the objectification of women, as women are considered as both the beneficiaries of interventions by other men and as possible targets of harassment by certain males.

While holding men accountable for sexism and misogyny is important, it is just as essential to carefully consider how the advertisement presents the ideal masculine social structure. The unique portrayal of masculinity in the advertising substitutes a well-behaved and moderate form of masculinity in sexism and catcalling. However, upon closer inspection, one cannot help but notice how this new depiction of masculinity still seems to align with the traditional paradigm. According to Gillette, men still have the role of rescuing women, and fatherly figures still carry the responsibility of instructing boys on appropriate behaviour concerning both genders. While Gillette's portrayal of masculinity challenges toxic masculinity, it does so within the patriarchal framework, facilitating a transition from toxic to empathetic masculinity but failing to question the patriarchal structure that continues to marginalise women.

Men are expected to exhibit civilised, non-sexist behaviors while also embodying societal norms of masculinity, excelling in sports, and protecting women and children. This juxtaposition of expectations encapsulates the complexity and paradox of the evolving notions of masculinity in the 21st century, raising more questions than answers, and opening a vast landscape for further examination and discourse.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Advertisements, utilizing multimodal communication, employ language and visual elements to convey persuasive narratives. Analyzing these commercials, considering context and interpretation, helps uncover the underlying portrayal of masculinity. This menvertising technique challenges

conventional masculinity and promotes diverse but equal portrayals of men<sup>42</sup>. Although menvertising is a relatively recent and underexplored concept in academia, it offers promising potential for analysis. It scrutinises tensions, negotiations, and responses to traditional masculine stereotypes while endorsing newer male representations that counter dominant masculinity and its privileges. Brands sometimes adopt a progressive stance, creating campaigns that may initially seem to enable social change, but may end up commodifying gender roles and reinforcing traditional stereotypes. Alternatively, they may reaffirm traditional values and stereotypes. The L'Oréal Men advertisement fits the stereotypical definition of a man as young, attractive, and prosperous. The advertisement exalts dominant, conventional toxic masculinity, emphasising the most stereotypical characteristics of a static masculinity that is cynical toward new forms of masculinity and incapable of negotiating diverse topic positions to gain the cooperation of the male audience.

The Gillette advertisement tends to favour a more sympathetic masculinity. However, Gillette's concept of the "ethics of doing the right thing" simultaneously connects non-toxic masculinity to post-feminist and neoliberal individualistic ideas, demonstrating that the formation of masculinity is still fundamentally patriarchal. Gillette's campaign appears to be a success from the standpoint of menvertising by offering fresh opportunities to redefine masculinity and promote equality in gender relations, regardless of whether this success results from monetising gender activism or a serious effort to bring about societal change. According to Connell and Messerschmidt, this advertisement is a commendable effort to subvert hegemonic masculinity and cease perpetuating conventional gender norms<sup>43</sup>. In contrast to women's struggles, hegemonic masculinity is the focus of this advertisement. According to Connell and Messerschmidt, this approach can help us better comprehend the situation and move toward the prospect of changing hegemonic masculinity. Finally, this study focused on the representation of men in advertisements and how they are depicted in terms of language and image. The analysed advertisements do not represent a general trend on their own and future research could potentially broaden the purview of the study to encompass contentious commercials in diverse formats and environments. The analysis could be implemented and applied to other advertisements, especially when it comes to gender issues. This would enable a comparison

---

<sup>42</sup> Pando Canteli - Rodriguez 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Connell - Messerschmidt 2005.

and contrast of the outcomes across contexts to ascertain if the observed effects are context-specific or universal.

For future research, it would be interesting to draw on other data and to identify ‘women’ as an analytic variable, comparing how they are represented in print and visual advertisements in linguistic and visual terms as compared to men, as well as analysing the representation of androgynous and non-binary people. These themes could offer new prompts for the study of gender stereotypes which would produce insightful findings.

## REFERENCES

Akestam 2017

N. Akestam, *Understanding Advertising Stereotypes: Social and Brand-Related Effects of Stereotyped versus Non-Stereotyped Portrayals in Advertising*, Gothenburg, Brand Factory, 2017.

Åkestam et al. 2021

N. Åkestam - N.S. Rosengren - M. Dahlén - K.T. Liljedal - H. Berg, “Gender Stereotypes in Advertising Have Negative Cross-Gender Effects”, *European Journal of Marketing* 55, 13 (2021), 63-93.

Azar - Aimé - Ulrich 2018

S.L. Azar - I. Aimé - I. Ulrich, “Brand Gender-Bending: The Impact of an Endorsed Brand Strategy on Consumers’ Evaluation of Gendered Mixed-Target Brands”, *European Journal of Marketing* 52, 7-8 (2018), 1598-1624.

Baldry - Thibault 2005

A. Baldry - P. Thibault, *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis: A Multimedia Toolkit and Coursebook*, London - New York, Equinox, 2005.

Belkaoui - Belkaoui 1976

A. Belkaoui - J.M. Belkaoui, “A Comparative Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Print Advertisements: 1958, 1970, 1972”, *Journal of Marketing Research* 13, 2 (1976), 168-172.

Bogle 2001

D. Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, New York, Continuum, 2001.

Bordo 2000

S. Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private*, New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

Cerrato 2012

H. Cerrato, *The Meaning of Colors*, London, Routledge, 2012.

Connell - Messerschmidt 2005

R.W. Connell - J.W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept", *Gender and Society* 19, 6 (2005), 829-859.

Edgar - P. Sedgwick 1999

A. Edgar - P. Sedgwick, *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*, London - New York, Routledge, 1999.

Eisend 2009

M. Eisend, "A Meta-Analysis of Gender Roles in Advertising", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 38, 4 (2009), 418-440.

Ganev 2019

D. Ganev, "Gillette Ad Controversy. Social Media Insight".

<https://commetric.com/2019/02/07/gillette-ad-controversy-social-media-insights/>

Grau - Zotos 2016

S. Grau - Y. Zotos, "Gender Stereotypes in Advertising: A Review of Current Research", *International Journal of Advertising* 35, 5 (2016), 761-770.

Hall 1997

S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London, Sage - The Open University, 1997.

Harrington 2021

C. Harrington, "What Is 'Toxic Masculinity' and Why Does It Matter?", *Men and Masculinities* 24, 2 (2021), 345-352.

Harrison 2008

C. Harrison, "Real Men Do Wear Bascara: Advertising Discourse and Masculine Identity", *Critical Discourse Studies* 5, 1 (2008), 55-74.

Hawkins - Coney 1976

D.I. Hawkins - K.A. Coney, "Advertising and Differentiated Sex Roles in Contemporary American Society", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 4, 1-2 (1976), 418-428.

Haywood - Mac an Ghaill 2003

C. Haywood - M. Mac an Ghaill, *Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research, and Social Practice*, New York, McGraw Hill Education, 2003.

Kress 2010

G.R. Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*, New York, Routledge, 2010.

Kress - Jewitt - Ogborn - Charalampos 2001

G.R. Kress - C. Jewitt - J. Ogborn - T. Charalampos (eds.), *Multimodal Teaching and Learning: The Rhetorics of the Science Classroom*, London - New York, Continuum, 2001.

Kress - van Leeuwen 2020

G.R. Kress - T. van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, London, Routledge, 2020 (2006).

Ledin - Machin 2020

P. Ledin - D. Machin, *Introduction to Multimodal Analysis*, 2nd edition, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

Levine - Scollon 2004

P. Levine - R. Scollon (eds.), *Discourse and Technology: Multimodal Discourse Analysis*, Washington (DC), Georgetown University Press, 2004.

Liljedal - Berg - Dahlén 2020

K.T. Liljedal - H. Berg - M. Dahlén, "Effects of Nonstereotyped Occupational Gender Role Portrayal in Advertising: How Showing Women in Male-stereotyped Job Roles Sends Positive Signals about Brands", *Journal of Advertising Research* 60, 2 (2020), 179-196.

Luyt 2012

R. Luyt, "Representation of Masculinities and Race in South African Television Advertising: A Content Analysis", *Journal of Gender Studies* 21, 1 (2012), 35-60.

Machin - Caldas-Coulthard - Milani 2016

D. Machin - C.R. Caldas-Coulthard - T.M. Milani, "Doing Critical Multimodality in Research on Gender, Language and Discourse", *Gender and Language* 10, 3 (2016), 301-308.

McArthur - Resko 1975

L.Z. McArthur - B.G. Resko, "The Portrayal of Men and Women in American Television Commercials", *Journal of Social Psychology* 97, 2 (1975), 209-220.

Mills 1997

S. Mills, *Discourse*, London - New York, Routledge, 1997.

Norris 2004

S. Norris, *Analysing Multimodal Interaction: A Methodological Framework*, London - New York, Routledge, 2004.

Odysseas 2005

C. Odysseas, "Multimodal Discourse Analysis: Media, Modes and Technologies", *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 9, 4 (2005), 602-618.

Pando-Canteli - Rodriguez 2012

M.J. Pando-Canteli - M.P. Rodriguez, "'Menvertising' and the Resistances to New Masculinities in Audiovisual Representations", *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021), 493-513.

Reeser 2015

T.W. Reeser, "Concepts of Masculinity and Masculinity Studies", *DQR Studies in Literature* 58 (2015), 11-38.

Renkema 2004

J. Renkema, *Introduction to Discourse Studies*, Amsterdam - Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2004.

van Dijk 2015

T. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis", in D. Tannen - H.E. Hamilton - D. Schiffrin (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Chichester, Wiley Blackwell, 2015, 349-371.

van Leeuwen 2008

T. van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*, Oxford - New York, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Wodak - Meyer 2001

R. Wodak - M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London - New York, Sage, 2001.

Wolin 2003

L.D. Wolin, "Gender Issues in Advertising. An Oversight of Research: 1970-2002", *Journal of Advertising Research* 43, 1 (2003), 111-130.

Zawisza - Cinnirella 2010

M. Zawisza - M. Cinnirella, "What Matters More, Breaking Tradition or Stereotype Content? Envious and Paternalistic Gender Stereotypes and Advertising Effectiveness", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 40, 7 (2010), 1767-1797.

Zayer - McGrath - Castro-González 2020

L.T. Zayer - M.A. McGrath - P. Castro-González, "Men and Masculinities in a Changing World: (De)legitimising Gender Ideals in Advertising", *European Journal of Marketing* 54, 1 (2020), 238-260.