

PIP Title: If he can see it will he be it

PIP Research Question/Statement: To what extent does the media construct a diverse range of inclusive masculinities or reinforce orthodox constructions of masculinity?

Extract Section: Central Material- Chapter 3: An investigation into macro-level constructions of masculinity in the 2000s to the 2020s. To what extent does the media function as a conduit of social change through the representation of inclusive masculinities for Generation Z?

* Please note: extract footnote numbers vary from the original due to formatting.

Central Material- Chapter 3 Extract

The significant impact of macro-level institutions in perpetuating a hybrid narrative of masculinity for adolescents of Generation Z is emphasised by Dr Wong, who contended that “the media is the predominant way that we receive messages about ‘appropriate’ masculinity”.¹ This is important within a contemporary context where young adolescent

Figure 3.1: Questionnaire, Q13b: Does the media provide opportunities for people to engage with, and understand, more inclusive forms of masculinity? (GENERATION Z)

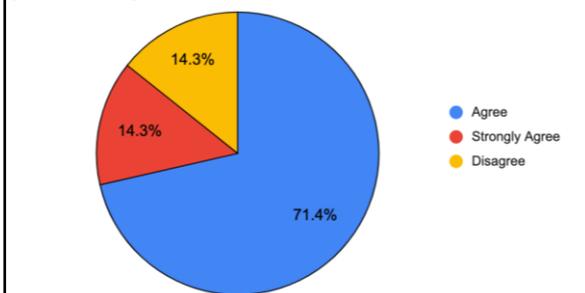
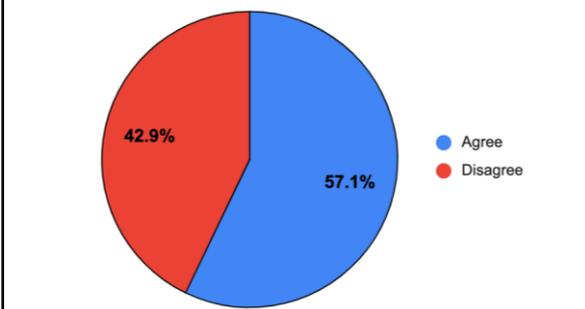


Figure 3.1: Questionnaire, Question 13b: Did the media provide opportunities for people to engage with, and understand, more inclusive forms of masculinity? (GENERATION X)



males regularly consume media which functions as a socialising agent, presenting a ‘script’ that they learn to perform.² Consequently, while the media has historically restricted diversity in expression, the introduction of contemporary values in macro iterations of media has allowed men to interpret masculinity in their own, dynamic way. This is supported by the questionnaire, whereby 85.7% of Generation Z respondents; compared to only 57.1% of Generation X respondents; agreed or strongly agreed that the media has provided opportunities for persons to engage with, and understand, more inclusive forms of masculinity through diverse portrayals at a macro-level (Figure 3.1).³ Arguably, this

¹ Interview, Dr Wong (Sydney University), conducted April 2022

² Clay. R, ‘Redefining masculinity’, *American Psychological Association* (2020), <https://www.apa.org/12/masculinity>

³ All respondents, Questionnaire, Question 13b, March 2022

generational difference can be attributed to a traditional rigidity which positioned males in the 1980s as one- dimensionally “strong and powerful,” and diminished a perceived capacity to also be “loving and understanding”⁴ through conformity to socioculturally constructed norms for men of Generation X. As feminism encouraged greater diversity in male and female social roles, subverting stereotypes of the male as breadwinner and the female as domestic carer,⁵ the institutional power of the mainstream media also provided “*more opportunity for men to explore various understandings of their identity*.”⁶ However, with the film industry functioning as an active participant in the shaping of cultural ideals regarding power and masculinity, while some representations of masculinity are fluid and responsive to social issues such as feminism and global conflict, others seek to stabilise more regressive forms of masculinity.⁷ As exemplified in the divergent perspective of a Generation Z participant who claimed that while there has been some positive change, in their experience the media largely reinforces “*stereotypes of ‘ideal’ masculinity - six packs, short hair, defined jawlines*” and men who do not conform are “*face social pressure*”.⁸ This contemporary ambiguity surrounding masculinity; in which traditional masculine expression is both sanctioned and rewarded;⁹ is exemplified in the contemporary James Bond films, particularly *Skyfall* (2012) and *Spectre* (2015) which “construct a singular version of masculinity rather than accept the reality of [diverse] masculinities”¹⁰ and thus reify the dominant mythology that masculinity is *powerful and aggressive* (63%).¹¹ Hence, these portrayals stabilise rigid masculinity against non-normative performances of a ‘softer’ form of masculine expression which was being promoted via progressive media discourse and micro-level understandings. Therefore, while hegemonic masculinity is a “historically mobile relation”,¹² reforming itself in response to social challenges as evidenced in the adoption of resilience and perseverance in “*heroes such as Iron Man who literally embodies both ‘hard’ masculinity via his armour and vulnerability*”,¹³ traditional forms of masculinity have not been completely deconstructed in contemporary representations.

⁴ Haller, T. *Dissolving Toxic Masculinity*, as cited in Plank, L. *For the Love of Men: From Toxic to a more Mindful Masculinity*. (New York: St Martin’s Griffin, 2019), p.15

⁵ Flood, M. ‘Inside the ‘man box’: how rigid ideas of ‘manning up’ harm young men and those around them’, *The Conversation*, (2020). <https://theconversation.com/inside-the-man-box-143081>

⁶ Generation Z respondent, Questionnaire, Question 12, March 2022

⁷ Horton, Owen R., "Rebooting Masculinity After 9/11: Male Heroism On Film From Bush To Trump" (Theses and Dissertations; University of Kentucky, 2018), p.76

⁸ Generation Z participant, Interview, Conducted April 2022

⁹ Haller, T. *Dissolving Toxic Masculinity*, as cited in Plank, L. *For the Love of Men: From Toxic to a more Mindful Masculinity*. (New York: St Martin’s Griffin, 2019), p.17

¹⁰ Horton, Owen R., "Rebooting Masculinity After 9/11: Male Heroism On Film From Bush To Trump" (Theses and Dissertations; University of Kentucky, 2018), p.76

¹¹ Content Analysis, *James Bond Films* (2012, 2015), Conducted April 2022

¹² Connell, R. W., and Messerschmidt, J. W. ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender and Society*, 19, (2005) p. 832.

¹³ Generation X, Interview, conducted April 2022

As such, while the portrayal of masculinity in popular culture has evolved since the 1980s, it is contested as to whether this change is genuinely inclusive or a tokenistic attempt to challenge dominant discourse around 'toxic' masculinity. The high levels of accessibility of film as driven by globalised advancements in communication technologies, has meant that the media more than ever plays a significant role in shaping social cognition with dominant depictions of masculinity easily consumed and "popular narratives of male heroism demarcating the boundaries of active and 'appropriate' masculinity."¹⁴ Supportingly, the contemporary influence of cinematic constructions of masculinity was articulated clearly in the results of the questionnaire whereby 79% of Generation Z participants agreed that portrayals of masculinity in mainstream media contribute to stereotypes surrounding how men are expected to act, compared to only 51% of Generation X participants,¹⁵ suggesting regressive change over time. The increased impact of inclusive values of masculinity has been reflected across all levels of society as evident through the cyclical impacts seen through the film industry and its impacts on contemporary males. This is supported by primary research which revealed that 85.3% of respondents cross-generationally believe that constructions of masculinity in film have experienced change since the 1980s.¹⁶ As such, from the 2000s, significant alteration to the perceptions of masculinity in action films can be determined as an example of the gradual transformation regarding understandings of how males can express themselves within society. During the 1980s men were typically depicted as, 'hard bodied' and representing traditionally masculine traits such as "*strength, stoicism, courage, leadership, dominance,*"¹⁷ as aligned with dominant patriarchal social values during the period. However, action films from the 2000s somewhat broke away from the norms established as perceptions of traditional masculinity were beginning to be identified as 'toxic' and became synonymous with villains and immoral characters within these films as evident of the acknowledgement that hegemonic masculinity is largely problematic and associated with toxic traits identified in contemporary public discourse.

¹⁴ Butters, G. "Masculinity in Film: The Emergence of a New Literature." *Choice Reviews Online*, 51 (2014), p.956.

¹⁵ All respondents, Questionnaire, Question 6b, March 2022

¹⁶ All respondents, Questionnaire, Question 6c, March 2022

¹⁷ Generation X Respondents, Questionnaire, across questions, March 2022