

## **Straight guys do wear make-up: Contemporary masculinities and investment in appearance**

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### Abstract

Masculinity is not what it used to be. Today's men are less limited than previous generations and do things that their fathers would have balked at, including spending lots of time and money on 'grooming' products and services (moisturiser, body hair removal, even make-up). Our research with 'metrosexual men' and men on weight loss programmes shows that (heterosexual) men are indeed interested in their appearance, but also that appearance-related practices are glossed in conventionally masculine terms. We argue that despite the softening of 'masculinity' which allows men to enact a greater range of attributes and activities than before, belying any notion of a 'crisis' in masculinity, we nonetheless highlight the continued operation of orthodox masculinities which may work to marginalise other men and women.

Key words: Metrosexual; appearance; male vulnerability; embodiment; masculinities

### Introduction

Dianne Abbott's claims that a 'crisis' in masculinity afflicts the nation's young men is not borne out by existing research, including that produced by contributors to this book. While some marginalised young men may enact hypermasculine, misogynistic and homophobic behaviours, for example those caught up in gangs, crime and drugs culture, for the vast majority of boys and men overt displays of prejudice, violence and sexual objectification are taboo. Instead, the evidence suggests that young men in particular are developing masculine identities to take up previously feminised practices, notably in the arena of personal appearance, the focus of this chapter. But whether we can claim that such 'new' masculinities equal a more 'inclusive' orientation where, for example, homophobia is decried and homosocial affection between heterosexual men is openly celebrated (Anderson, 2005), is debatable. This chapter considers men's appearance practices, arguing that while men in this day and age may unashamedly care about how they look and connect body image to personal wellbeing, they nonetheless also care about appearing masculine, which sometimes means doing homophobia and criticising women – although often indirectly. In other words, forays into once feminine territory (beauty, emotion, care) do not necessarily mean that masculinity has radically changed but rather has been refashioned to fit with a changing landscape which values appearance, emotional intelligence and individuality.

Men, like women, care about their appearance. We have become a 'somatic society' in the words of Turner (1996), with the body a key resource for making and remaking identities in consumerist and individualistic cultures (Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Shilling, 1993). Individuals have become responsible for designing their bodies and, by extension, their identities. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, the body is now a source of symbolic capital, a site which signals style, status and substance to others. Since men have been traditionally marked as disembodied and rational (Seidler, 1994), the increased visibility of and attention to male bodies may well provoke anxieties around body-image (see Grogan, 2008). On the other hand, masculinity has been inextricably tied to embodiment, typically in labour and sporting contexts (Connell, 1995), and a renewed emphasis on the body may also present opportunities for embodied display and enhancement.

The 1980s witnessed the emergence of male bodies as objects of desire across a range of media (magazine covers; billboards; television advertisements), when consumption began to be 'redefined as an activity that is suitable for men – rather than simply a passive and feminised activity' (Moore, 1989, p. 179). Various explanations have been put forward to account for this shift, crediting fashion and image influences from the gay movement (Simpson, 1994, 2002), equality pressures from feminist movements (Collier, 1992), marketers seeking new avenues in late capitalist consumer societies (Featherstone, 1991) and the advent of the style press confronting men on a daily basis with stylised images of other men's bodies (celebrity actors and models) linked to advertisements for men's products (Gill, Henwood & McLean, 2005). Now, there is now ample evidence that men are investing in their appearance. While men's increasing interest in grooming and image enhancement is nothing new and can be traced back to the Dandies and Marconies of the Victorian era and beyond, it was then practiced only by an elite, wealthy minority, often discreetly (Osgerby, 2003).

Today, as never before in the UK, there are a the plethora of men's grooming and image enhancing products available on the high-street and online, ranging from shaving-related products (razors, gels, creams, oils, balms), to scalp-hair products (styling gels and sprays, shampoos, conditions, hair growth products, epilators), body and non-beard facial products (epilate methods - waxing, electrolysis, tweezing, threading, sugaring, laser hair removal), body tanning and artwork, skincare products (facial and body moisturisers, anti-aging and fatigue creams and gels), cosmetics ('manscara', 'guyliner', face powder, blusher, lip gloss, illuminator), self and specialist teeth-whitening, to cosmetic surgery procedures including major (rhinoplasty, rhytidectomy), minor (mole, tattoo, and cyst excision), self-administrable (Botox, chicken pills, Hydrogel) and lunch-time procedures (laser-liposuction) to name only a few; men are taking up cosmetic surgery in ever increasing numbers in America and Britain, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery and the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (see Aitkenhead, 2005).

If the variety of men's grooming and image enhancing products is a marker of men's interest in appearance, it should be no surprise to learn that the UK market (excluding cosmetic surgery procedures) has enjoyed a steady 4-6% growth rate year-on-year for the past decade or so - currently worth nearly £600 million in the UK (Mintel, 2012) with predictions for it to reach approximately £1 billion by 2016 (L'Oréal, 2010; Mintel, 2012; Superdrug, 2010). This trend appears to be recession-proof, with one in three men continuing to spend more than £10 per week on these

products with 75-85% of men claiming that personal appearance is a key priority, citing anti-ageing, employment progression, social circles and sexual attractiveness as reasons (L'Oréal, 2010; Mintel, 2012; Superdrug, 2010).

But, how do men themselves account for appearance-related practices? In a study of men's 'body projects', Gill, Henwood and McLean (2005) drew on interviews and focus groups with 140 men aged between 15 and 35 in Britain. These authors highlight autonomy as a central theme, with men presenting themselves as 'the individual managers of their own bodies' (2005:55). This research concluded that men viewed their bodies as projects to construct identity, rather than a more holistic entity to be cared for. Such findings support theoretical work on masculinities in which notions of functionality and achievement are deemed hegemonic while emotions are gendered as feminine, coded as weakness and therefore to be avoided (e.g. Seidler, 1994). However, recent research in the context of men's health by Robertson (2006) undermines stereotypical constructs of male (dis-) embodiment. Based on interviews with men on health and lifestyle practices, it was found that the men variously drew upon a range of embodiment repertoires (pragmatic; experiential; visceral and normative – see Watson, 2000) and linked them together in often subtle and complex ways. More recent work in an illness context with men on a cardiac rehabilitation programme (Robertson, Sheik & Moore, 2010) demonstrates that men, for example, do use an experiential account where feelings concerning the body are disclosed, an 'embodied emotionality' which is also connected to other forms of embodiment. For example, improving fitness via the exercise component of the cardiac rehabilitation programme was seen to confer benefits experientially (feeling good), pragmatically (task completion), normatively (looking good) and viscerally (e.g. lower cholesterol readings). Clearly, in-depth qualitative analysis of men's accounts can cast light on the manifold and sometimes contradictory ways in which embodiment is understood and practiced by men across a variety of health and ill-health contexts. An ostensible commitment to particular body projects signifies changing and possibly more progressive masculinities – but how men enact and explain their actions may well invoke more orthodox masculinities.

Building on such work, we will consider contemporary masculinities with reference to studies of appearance and embodiment in which men's accounts are prioritised. Specifically, we will focus on the discourse practices of overweight and obese men on the one hand, and self-identified (male, hetero) metrosexuals on the other – with all parties demonstrating a keen interest in appearance. This focus on male embodiment offers an important site in which to consider the 'crisis' in masculinity and aspects of male vulnerability, and to engage with theoretical concepts from 'hegemonic' to 'inclusive' masculinity (e.g. Anderson, 2005). We start with evidence that men explicitly care about how they look before exploring how men downplay any feminised associations that their appearance-related practices might imply; we then consider instances of male vulnerability in different contexts and discuss implications for changing masculinities. In particular, we will argue that men's bodies, and body-related practices, present possibilities for reconstructing and reimagining masculinities – notwithstanding the constraints prompted by the materiality of the body, and the continued appeal of traditional notions of manhood. The data presented do not point to a crisis in masculinity; rather, heterosexual men are shown to engage positively with once feminised practices while being careful not to appear too soft, effeminate or gay.

### Men do care about appearance

Young, 'metrosexual' men most obviously care about their appearance. A metrosexual has been defined as

a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis—because that's where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are (Simpson, 2002:2)

Indeed, in our online study of 'metrosexual' men who wear make-up (Hall, Gough & Seymour-Smith, 2012a<sup>i</sup>), participants talked in detail and with enthusiasm about their cosmetic use. Briefly, our study considered how men responded to a YouTube tutorial delivered by a young man which was designed to provide advice and tips for other men. Here are two initial responses, posted on YouTube, to the video tutorial:

1. *Overall, good routine. I think that maybe a bit more countouring such as bringing out the tops of your cheek bones the middle of your nose and your chin and forehead would make it a more masculine look. and darkening under the cheekbones and on the sides of the nose and up to the inside of the eyebrow would make you look more chiseled. ☺ Maybe you wouldn't want it that way though. :) glad I'm not the only dude who wears makeup*
2. *you should try mineral makeup! its good and u just never! NEVER can tell that you wearing makeup ... its great for skin too! i recommend mineral power or if you like the good stuff try bare minerals. i started with mineral power by maybelline and as i got better and more experienced i switched to bare minerals ohh it's less time consuming too! in any case, you did great! a+*

Clearly, these men demonstrate knowledge of and investment in a variety of cosmetic products and practices. There is an interest in supporting and advising each other in terms of recommended products and effects, creating a community of practice ('glad I'm not the only dude who wears make-up'), a safe, positive space where men can share tips about cosmetic use and difference is respected ('maybe you wouldn't want it that way though. ☺'). It is also worth noting that there is an emphasis on a 'masculine look' (first extract) and discretion ('u just never! NEVER can tell..'; second extract) – we discuss issues of masculinity in relation to metrosexual practices below.

But many other men are willing to talk about appearance, including 'obese' men. Although being overweight and obesity is widely stigmatised in contemporary societies, largesse can be tied to hegemonic notions of stature, power and even eroticism in certain contexts (e.g. gay 'bear' communities, where large, hairy gay men are celebrated [Gough & Flanders, 2009]; American football [Pronger, 1999]; hip hop culture [Gross, 2005]). In our interview study with men who were participating in a local weight management programme (Gough, Seymour-Smith & Matthews, 2013),

they did not celebrate their larger bodies – but they did position themselves as less problematic than other male bodies, notably those encountered in the media:

*(.) erm (.) (.) I, although, although erm I consider myself obese, I, I've not really felt that I've (.) I'd class myself necessarily with those people that, perhaps the stories in the media concentrate on people who are more...morbidly obese I think they described as being 30, 40 stone....people who can't get into aeroplane and sit on their sit, people who have to knock the walls down in their houses and lift them out to get them in an ambulance and all that sort of thing...*

(Barry, 48)

Clearly, this is a self-serving comparison which functions to minimise body size and any perceived body-related issues. The men also rejected medicalised weight related standards informed by the Body Mass Index, preferring their own, more modest targets around weight loss and definitions of healthy weight. We have also found that other groups of overweight men, including 'gay bears', tend to denounce weight management advice in favour of their own perceived goals and standards (see Gough & Flanders, 2009; Monaghan, 2008).

Once men lost some weight, it was clear that they greatly appreciated their new look:

*...actually losing some weight has been good for me, cos I have lost some weight it's been great obviously cos I wouldn't be taken back, but losing the weight has been great I've noticed my belt goes up a couple of notches and clothes are fitting better that's brilliant...*

(Sam, 30)

*P I used to suffer with er anxiety and I haven't suffered with that since I lost weight*

*P Yeah didn't want to get out of b[ed]...I have noticed a difference since I've lost the weight...cos I've got more go in my step*

*Int: Yeah (.) why do you think that is?*

*P Probably because (.) I've got energy...you know (.) I've lost weight, I can see the benefits cos my clothes are loose...*

(Phil, 34)

The men expressed pride and satisfaction with their slimmer physiques, focusing on their new, improved appearance and better fitting clothes. The benefits are also psychological (a reduction in anxiety, 'more go in my step') – achieving personal weight-loss targets seems to bring about a transformation in body satisfaction and subjective wellbeing. These weight loss success stories echo those found in women's magazines and suggest that (these) men are comfortable within such feminised narratives.

In another study we found that men were quite happy to talk to other men online about their weight loss endeavours and their desired appearance (Bennett & Gough, 2012<sup>ii</sup>). This appearance orientation can be linked to Crawshaw's (2007) notion of 'aesthetic health' whereby men are increasingly called upon as bodily subjects obliged to maintain disciplined, healthy and attractive bodies. Many men on this online weight loss forum also expressed particular interest in getting rid of their 'bellies', 'man boobs' and 'saggy bits' – a concern with stemming 'leaky' embodiment. Others talked about their aesthetic goals in specifically aspirational ways, for example:

*'...putting up a pic of what you want to look like works, I have one on my wardrobe door and I can see the improvements in my body rather than what weight I am as I wouldn't lose any more weight as I tone up'* (Greenz)

Notwithstanding this investment in appearance enhancement by these men attempting to lose weight, and the implied relaxing of traditional disembodied masculinities, we also found that the same men displayed an interest in maintaining or developing a more masculine look, in achieving their aspirations via masculinised activities, and in reaping the heteronormative benefits for their efforts, as we note below.

#### Glossing appearance practices as masculine

Despite contemporary norms emphasising appearance maintenance and enhancement for men, conventional notions of masculinity are still influential. In the words of Edwards (2003: 142):

*'A well-dressed, well-groomed and 'stylish' man still tends to arouse anxieties concerning sexuality and masculinity or evoke the terrifying twosome of the homosexual and the effeminate. Stereotypically, 'real' men don't care what they look like and just 'throw things on' whilst women go shopping and agonize over matters of self-presentation'.*

Our data suggest that at least in some contexts, men work hard to 'masculinise' potentially feminising appearance-related practices. For example, in our study of the online support group for men losing weight, some members construed their body projects in very technical terms:

*'I can see some changes in body shape, my delts are a separate entity again (shoulder balls), if I 'flex' I have noticeable biceps, my legs have some definition. The belly is cutting in and coming up. The visceral (hard belly fat, known to docs as heart attack fat) fat is noticeably decreased. The massive difference though is in my face. Starting to get a proper defined jaw line again.'* (Richy6)

Such accounts echo those from research on bodybuilding, where attention is also focused on acquiring an aesthetically pleasing body judged on muscular mass, symmetry and definition (Roundtree, 2005), a body from which individual bodybuilders can experience much satisfaction (Monaghan, 2008). In the pursuit of manly bodies, the potentially feminising orientation to

appearance is recuperated as a legitimate masculine concern. When communicating about food preparation and consumption, a similar masculinising effort was in evidence:

*'in my opinion my kebab tastes better than the ones you get in the kebab house after a night out! Worked for me and two of me mates Friday night'* (Mitch\_e)

In the context of UK male drinking culture, a night out with friends ('mates') is typically rounded off with some fast food such as a meat-filled kebab; in this example then, the healthy and the masculine are neatly combined – and proven to be effective ('worked for me...'). The kitchen is also construed as a site for moulding muscular bodies:

*'I think the saying 'a sixpack is made in the kitchen and not in the gym' is 100% true'* (Jamie15)

*'Be a beast in the gym and a beast in the kitchen, that's where good bodies are made'* (Richy6)

Here, muscularity is firstly connected to the kitchen which is then likened to the gym as a legitimate space for masculine endeavour ('be a beast') and the production of fit male bodies. This construction of cooking in a masculine way for weight-training purposes has been found in the wider media as a way to further reinforce hegemonic masculinity, e.g. through the use of military and evolutionary metaphors (see Gough, 2007).

This study examined the discussions on an online forum linked to Men's Health magazine – a publication which idealises muscularity and provokes appearance concerns (e.g. Stibbe, 2004; Labre, 2005). It is therefore a very distinctive context where talk of muscularity and hard bodies is to be expected. This contrasts with our study of metrosexual men who wear make-up, perhaps one of the ultimate markers of femininity; so, do we now live in a world where men can wear make-up without fear of ridicule? In general, although we found that the men talked (online) in detail about their routines and favourite products in response to the YouTube make-up tutorial, they tended to stress practical benefits over beautification, as these two posts illustrate:

- 1. its nice to see another guy like me who wears makeup. I wear mine because I have a mild form of rosacea. So along with the help of tanning, I use liquid tan foundation and pressed bronzer power and concealer to make my face look clear. People dont even realize i wear it.*
- 2. nice one !! i also use concealer and foundation, also like to contour. many straight men in Sydney Australia wears make up because we got harsh sun and windy winter down here. Even some NRL players I know wear makeup when they go out.*

Again we see affirmation of fellow male make-up users ('it's nice to see another guy like me who wears make-up'; 'nice one!!) which helps to specify a coherent group identity. Cosmetic use is warranted by health rather than appearance concerns (rosacea – a skin condition), and with reference to the effects of a harsh climate on facial appearance. The first example presents a

personal story while the second implicates many men – straight men, including those men who might be deemed privileged or stereotypically masculine: (Australian rules) football players. So, wearing make-up is ok for men if it is to cover up a skin complaint or to combat the impact of environmental conditions – and it must be applied discreetly ('People don't even realise I wear it').

In addition, cosmetic use was also linked to heterosexual appeal and success, as evidenced in the next extract featuring a post regarding the YouTube make-up tutorial and a response from the tutorial creator:

Post

*hey bro good shit im right there wit ya ... everymorning ...  
my girlfriend loves having a guy who can look flawles :)*

Response (VC - Video Creator)

*Niceeee! aha  
Girls love it\_ actually  
x]*

Invoking the 'girlfriend' and 'girls' in general situates make-up use as a legitimate practice for straight men because it can lead to admiration and attention from women, thus confirming male users as masculine i.e. not effeminate or gay. Recourse to such masculinised signs and activities indicates that it is too early to state that contemporary hetero-masculinities are being superseded or are in crisis (see MacInnes, 2001). Indeed, like two other studies on "metrosexuality" in other online contexts (Hall, Gough, & Seymour-Smith, 2012b; Hall, Gough & Hansen, 2011), our findings suggest that conventional masculinities are not in decline, but are merely being reworked and repackaged in a more image-conscious consumer-oriented society. In particular, the emphasis on not appearing gay highlights the continued influence of homophobia with ostensible gender rebels, thus questioning claims regarding the declining significance of homophobia (McCormack, 2012) and the advent of inclusive masculinities (Andersen, 2005).

#### When bodies 'leak': male vulnerability

We have lots of evidence that men care about their bodies and that they engage in various practices designed to maintain and enhance appearance, ranging from hair shaving to moisturising and cosmetic use. However, inevitably most men have concerns about their bodies, whether it is excess fat, hair loss, height, muscularity, or penis size (see Langdridge et al., 2013). The lean but muscular ideal on show across mass media is thought to have an impact on (particularly younger) men (Pope et al 2000; Grogan, 2008), and the internet is awash with advertisements and information about enhancing penis size, reversing hair loss, losing weight and gaining muscle. Indeed, in 2013 teachers in the UK voiced concern about boys' body image and related problems, a story which generated a lot of comments on the BBC website. Here are two sample posts:

1. *Of course boys feel this way. They're constantly bombarded with the message that if they're not 6'2 and don't have washboard abs then they won't amount to anything. The media, advertising and film have a lot to answer for when it comes*

*to low self esteem in young people, both girls and boys. (138 – ManchesterGreen)*

- 2. I qualified as a youth worker in 1997 and wrote about this problem as part of my qualification - this is not a new problem. I now work as a counsellor and deal with men with eating disorders and body image problems that lead to exercise addiction. The help the NHS offers is designed for females so thousands of teenagers are slipping through the net. (286 – PhelimMc)*

(See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-21864312>)

Although some posts dismiss the significance of body image issues for boys, most do agree that this is an important issue which requires intervention in schools, for example in Personal, Social and Health Education classes (e.g. All Party Parliamentary Group on Body Image & Central YMCA, 2012). The first sample post above highlights height and muscularity as key sites for acquiring status and confidence for boys, with responsibility tied to an image-obsessed popular culture, while the second post, citing the authority of professional experience ('youth worker'; 'counsellor'), suggests a longstanding, extensive problem ('not new...thousands of teenagers') exacerbated by female-designed services and leading to maladaptive coping strategies ('eating disorders...exercise addiction'). Research on embodiment and self-image is emerging which reinforces this picture of boys finding it difficult to deal with bodily imperfections in the context of peer surveillance, idealized media images and sports and physical education cultures which prioritise hard, masculinised bodies and practices (e.g. Kehler & Atkinson, 2010). Clearly, this portrait of young men is far removed from public and media depictions of hypermasculine youth disengaged from society and implicated in violence and crime.

Boys and men who do not fit with current lean, muscular, smooth, athletic body ideals are therefore potentially vulnerable and in need of support. Moreover, the 'war on obesity' will also impact on how larger men feel about their bodies, and in our male weight management study we did encounter much disappointment and frustration with being 'obese':

*Now I don't know whether they were all related to (.) previous war wounds or (.) I mean I do put a lot down to my weight, you know I mean I really do, I'm very conscious of my weight.....(.) hate it... I'm not one of these happy fat blokes...I really am not...absolutely not*

(Malcolm, 63)

*(.) er yeah, I want to lose the weight I've (sighs) I've been like it for too long and I think you just get into a, into a routine of just eating this, eating that, being big, so I think, yeah, I've wanted to be thinner (C yeah) I want to be thinner (P okay) and not be the, the big one of the group cos out of all the mates that I've got, they're all about 12 to 12 stone (C yeah) so it's just, gosh, you know I, I want to be thinner*

(Sam, 30)

In the first extract Malcolm emphatically decries his current bodily size, indicating an acute self-consciousness; similarly, Sam underlines his discomfort at being 'the big one of the group' and his

desire to lose weight so that he is not distinguished from his peers. Of course, it is likely that men who join a weight management group and agree to be interviewed by researchers have to some extent declared their bodies to be problematic. The obese body is now marked as other, signalling excess, irrationality, even immorality (not conforming to images and standard relating to ideal, lean, healthy bodies and lifestyles), despite some critique of the evidence linking obesity to deleterious health (Gard & Wright, 2005; Monaghan, 2008).

Excess skin is also a problem for some men, including those who have lost weight, as we noted in our study of an online male weight loss forum (Bennet & Gough, 2012):

*'...these mags have never really touched on the whole surgery and excess skin side of things, and I see a lot of people who are desperately unhappy after losing all the weight and being confronted by this situation... it's like a kick in the face'* (southernlad)

*'Turns out I need surgery to get my loose skin taken off. I didn't think that I had that much, turns out the belly I was trying to diet away is mainly skin. Still a bit of fat, but mainly 'redundant skin'. I'm gutted to be honest, gutted that I can't finish this on my own, and that I need to have surgery.'* (Richy6)

This issue of loose skin creates male vulnerability ('desperately unhappy'; 'kick in the face'; 'gutted') and a much lamented reliance on external intervention (surgery) which removes control from the men ('gutted that I can't finish this on my own'). The emphasis on looking good is reinforced in those accounts where loose skin is problematised, and can be connected to the magazine aesthetic which idealises lean and muscular physiques and eschews 'leaky' or otherwise imperfect bodies (see Longhurst, 2005). Arguably such magazine-generated norms form part of a wider contemporary cultural push towards visible and regulated male bodies which increasingly impinge upon modern masculine subjectivities (e.g. Bordo, 2003; Gill et al., 2005). In caring for and attempting to control and fashion excessive leaky bodies, these men behave as good citizens who take responsibility for their wellbeing in a climate where 'aesthetic health' is prioritised (Crawshaw, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

The ubiquitous lean, muscular, hairless, topless male torsos in the media, combined with the stigmatisation of obesity, undoubtedly create pressures on men. Of course some physical aspects will be difficult if not impossible to change (e.g. height), although men do make use of make-up products and services to enhance appearance (e.g. tanning to enhance muscularity, face make-up to look more chiselled, trimming to elongate the penis etc.), and cosmetic surgery is being accessed by more men to address perceived deficiencies (Holliday & Cairnie, 2007).

Many men and boys, however, are reluctant to seek help for issues concerning body dissatisfaction (or indeed anything concerning vulnerability): disclosing personal problems is still often coded as

feminine and weak – despite the otherwise expansion of masculinities. Instead of coming forward, many men express their difficulties indirectly, through excessive alcohol consumption, substance misuse or violence against women, children and other men, for example, culminating in a high suicide rate for (young) men (4:1) (see Ridge et al, 2011, for a review of the literature on men and depression). In situations where men have few resources with which to [re]make positive masculinities, whether being unemployed, living in deprived urban environments, older and isolated, dealing with vulnerability will clearly be challenging and may well engender health-defeating practices. For such groups of men the term ‘crisis’ might be applied, although we have to be careful about attributing responsibility. Intersections of class, age and gender conspire to make life more difficult for some men and boys than others: to simply construe this as a ‘crisis’ in masculinity is facile as it neglects the complex interplay between masculinities, local class-based norms, age-related expectations etc. For other men, perhaps those who are in secure jobs, affluent, in good health etc., the term crisis may not be at all appropriate.

As for the softening of hegemonic masculinity and associated inclusivity as proposed by Andersen and colleagues, our research suggests a positive engagement with once feminised ideas and practices in the arena of appearance and embodiment; however, this engagement is still circumscribed by investments in orthodox markers of masculinity. So while men can wear make-up, they do it discreetly, talk about it online only, and emphasise their heterosexuality, and men who attempt to lose weight may well distance themselves from the female world of ‘diets’ and instead talk of desired body shape where muscularity, rationality and autonomy may be foregrounded. Perhaps they know that to publically embody ‘unmasculine’ features such as facial cosmetics, or to openly display emotional vulnerability concerning body weight or shape, is to risk censure in a world where, for example, ‘emo’ adolescents get bullied for looking different (Ward, this volume), and where older gay men are wary of appearing gay in public ‘heterospaces’ (Simpson, this volume). While hypermasculinity may well be rejected and tolerance claimed by most boys and men, the othering of alternative masculinities persists across diverse contexts – and not just in working-class or disadvantaged communities (see Ingram & Waller, this volume).

To conclude, men increasingly find themselves taking on roles and responsibilities which their own fathers never or rarely had to deal with, from more involved parenting to cooking and self-care. This new context brings opportunities and challenges—a chance to re-imagine what it means to be a man, letting go of anachronistic, outmoded aspects of masculinity (e.g. ‘macho,’ homophobic and work-obsessed) while developing hitherto neglected and traditionally feminised qualities such as caring (for self and others), emotional expression/communication (including displays of vulnerability), and attention to body image. Since conventional ideals co-exist with contemporary expectations, negotiating masculinities may be viewed as a balancing act (being caring vs. being ‘soft’; being emotional vs. being ‘wet’; looking good vs. vanity). Talk of a crisis is too simplistic and belies the privileges that many heterosexual men and boys still enjoy as well as the increased freedom to experiment with, say, appearance in ways which only recently were regarded as taboo. How individual men situated in different domains construct masculinities and manage appearance

and wellbeing concerns is a live research area which has produced some telling insights but with more potential for new knowledge.

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