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Dominic Andres is the editor and publisher of *Roughhouse Magazine*. He has been published by Altitude Press, Catholic Exchange, and others. His past work includes essays on philosophy and politics, coverage of scientific advancements, and historical narrative.

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David Maywald currently serves on the board of three organisations as a Non-Executive Director, with a governance portfolio that encompasses charities, foundations, and private businesses. He is proud to be a champion for boys and men, while also supporting girls and women.

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INTRODUCTION

This issue of *New Male Studies: An International Journal* offers three articles on rap, Instagram, and the dowry system and three brief articles on comics, film, and the politics of male wellbeing.

The first article, Gary Senecal and Kevin Roy's "**Eminem and the Conversion of Masculine Ideals in Rap,**" observes "Hip-hop and rap music in the 90s was overwhelmingly dominated by egregious claims to aggression, sexual dominance, and one's violent capabilities." The authors argue "Eminem's work moves in a stark contrast to the mainstream notion of hegemonic masculinity (dominant, intimidating, and stoically detached from emotions) to an expression of subordinate masculinity (empathic, emotionally vulnerable, and open to critical exposure)."

Rhea Milson's "**Instagram vs. Reality: Perfectionistic Instagram Use and Body Dissatisfaction in Young Men,**" notes that "presenting perfection on Instagram is negatively associated with body dissatisfaction" for young women. Her article investigates whether "this is the case for young men." Her "findings revealed that perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram was positively associated with body dissatisfaction (drive for muscularity and height)." She suggests this research "may be a useful way of conceptualising perfectionistic self-presentation, to further understand male body dissatisfaction, particularly regarding drive for muscularity and height."

The final article of the issue, Shah Mirza's "**How the Dowry System Checks Hypergamy,**" acknowledges "in dowry practicing civilizations, hypergamy is of greater concern." His article demonstrates how "the dowry-system discouraged hypergamy and helped maintain an ecosystem of balanced and equal marriages, especially within a society so often characterized by monogamous marriage and private-property ownership." Mirza suggests that "perhaps it is time to revitalize some of the core principles of the dowry-system, rather than continuing to blame men for 'falling behind' or 'not stepping up' and continuing to insist that men should be the ones tasked with the financial burden of marriage."

In his brief article, "**Roughhouse Magazine: formation by imitation,**" Dominic Andres explains his rationale for creating something new for boys to read: "it would be an excellent thing if there were some magazine that boys could look forward to, that families could trust, and that contained writing that was actually worth reading," concluding "a magazine of this sort is something badly needed, both by boys

and by their parents.” Andres observes, “The positive public reception of *Roughhouse Magazine* has filled me with real optimism for the future of men, and of our society and culture.”

David Maywald’s “**When did Hollywood make movies that men actually wanted to watch?**” claims “it has been a quarter-century since the last big cluster of films that were made for men, around 1999”; he explains, “The lost decade of woke Hollywood has been a desert for positive depictions of masculinity, with superficial strong female leads and diversity-washing that has crowded out any space for healthy masculinity.” Deriving from an initial poll conducted on LinkedIn and Facebook, inviting respondents to name “the all-time best movies for men,” Maywald analyses “how the prevalence of men’s movies has varied over time.”

This issue’s final brief article, Jerome Teelucksingh’s “**Politicization of men’s issues**,” argues that “for many years, men’s issues in the Caribbean and across the globe have been forgotten or overlooked.” He explains that this “marginalization and alienation of men has contributed to premature deaths and mental health issues among men.” He adds that when “safe spaces for men” have been created, they “often seems like tokenism because the problems facing men continue to persist”—a situation “further complicated with men’s groups that are feminist-oriented.”

The opinions expressed by the authors in this issue do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Team. The articles published here are offered in a spirit of open, evidence-based dialogue regarding sex, gender, relationships, and issues related to the experience of males.

We appreciate the authors’ thoughtful contributions to this issue. This journal is made possible through the generous support of our donors. If you would like to donate to *New Male Studies: An International Journal*, please contact me at dgouws@aimhs.com.au.



Dennis Gouws
Editor



Photo by Amanda Valverde: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-man-sitting-on-a-wall-with-graffiti-on-it-28117407/>

EMINEM & THE CONVERSION OF MASCULINE IDEALS IN RAP CULTURE

Gary Senecal & Kevin Roy



ABSTRACT

Throughout his career, Eminem has offered a deep examination of authenticity and masculinity as lived through the radically heteronormative and hegemonic world of hip-hop music. Hip-hop and rap music in the 90s was overwhelmingly dominated by egregious claims to aggression, sexual dominance, and one's violent capabilities. Eminem's work moves in stark contrast to the mainstream notion of hegemonic masculinity (dominant, intimidating, and stoically detached from emotions) to an expression of subordinate masculinity (empathic, emotionally vulnerable, and open to critical exposure). Not only is Eminem able to stand between these two traditional norms of masculinity in his positioning as a protector of the oppressed, but he can occupy several categories of masculine identity at the same time.

Keywords: hip-hop, Eminem, masculinity, rap

INTRODUCTION

From the first moments of his bizarre entrance into the hip-hop world, Eminem presented an alternative vision for modern masculinity - one that exchanges themes of dominance, self-aggrandizement, and *sexual conquest* for those of *authenticity*, *vulnerability*, and *relational consciousness*. In so doing, he changed the trajectory of the industry and helped reexamine otherwise glib, rigid, and confining ideals of American masculinity. In the last twenty-five years, American hip-hop music has experienced a renaissance in how it presents masculinity through the artist. We will argue that Eminem, as a bizarre outsider, served as an early prophet for initiating momentum around reframing masculinity in rap music and, perhaps, in American culture at large. The unique space of outsiderhood allowed Eminem an opportunity and a willingness to broach the otherwise unspeakable and shatter the all-too-common, stale, hegemonic masculine norms expressed in rap music in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Ultimately, we are arguing in this paper that prior to the arrival of Eminem, much of the mainstream American rap industry centered the genre on themes pertaining to masculinity through a hetero-alpha image. Male rappers boasted about sexual prowess, money, power, no perceivable sensibility to angst, and a capacity to end the life of an enemy with unwavering conscience. Undoubtedly, there were larger calls for systemic justice and the raising of a social conscience throughout hip-hop's young existence. However, only rarely were there commitments to introspection, self-awareness, and personal vulnerability in this quest. In many instances, the public image of the rapper was of primary importance in the music itself, at the expense of meaningful questions about the *self*, *empathy*, *intimacy*, or *vulnerability*. Arguably, mainstream rap music was missing not only a fuller vision of masculinity, but lacked an authentic expression of masculine identity, itself not dissimilar from the 20th-century American culture from which it sprang.

The monumental success of Eminem cannot be pinned simply to his extraordinary talent – though his pure ability in the genre cannot be dismissed. Certainly, there have been other monumentally talented rappers through the years, yet very few have endured the lasting success of Eminem without following his thematic example. Rather, it seems that Eminem's music hit a cultural nerve and filled a gap in the landscape of our own popular ideology. Eminem's music provided a striking example of an *integrated*, *vulnerable*, and *authentic self* in a rap industry starving for that exact thing. He exposed with unflinching ferocity the warts of his own psyche alongside the warts of our age, and, remarkably, this ugliness enthralled us and made ridiculous our preference for facade. The honest, vulnerable self that had seemed so absent in popular culture - particularly in depictions of masculinity and its stoic bravado - was now blasted across our screens and radios, plunging listeners into a new ideological age, one where it was no longer safe to hide behind the macho-façade, one where private vulnerability became the topic for public exploration.

VICIOUS VULNERABILITY

Blessed and cursed with a dichotomy of seemingly unbridgeable traits – viciousness bordering on sociopathology juxtaposed with the vulnerability of neurosis, acute self-awareness, and deep empathy - Eminem's musical career and discography have been lined with unwrapping the messiness of both intrapsychic and interpersonal tension. At the earliest moments of his career, one can literally feel the cognitive and emotional tension of a young man trying to spin tales about the suffering and rage that is ubiquitous in the underbelly of American society. In his early work, these songs and lyrics are by no means the majority of his work, but they stand out vividly and have often received the highest levels of acclaim (*Rock Bottom*; *Stan*). However, in the first half of his career, this straining of neurotic or empathic expression is always juxtaposed with some alpha hetero masculinity bordering a line of sociopathic tendencies. In these lyrics - the majority of Eminem's music in his early work - there is a fundamental emotional chasm almost always walking a line of humor, slander, and viciousness. So much of this music involves an investment by Eminem into the image of a combatant, humiliator, and antagonist. In other words, the extreme logical conclusion of hetero-alpha masculinity in hip-hop culture.

However, as his career develops, the tone of empathy, social consciousness, neurosis, and responsibility grows to take up a much larger space alongside the vicious and sociopathic pieces. Specifically, after Eminem's *Relapse* album and his personal recovery from benzodiazepine addiction, his work becomes more intentionally devoted to reshaping his position as an American rapper and, consequently, as a symbol of a newly founded masculinity to others. In short, Eminem's later work involves a substantive shifting on the spectrum of viciousness and vulnerability. Throughout this shifting, the acerbic tone of a trailblazer for a new trajectory of masculine norms never truly fades. His later material is unequivocally devoted to questions of protecting the vulnerable, voicing his own insecurities, usurping any glib narrative around a man's position in the family, empathizing with the marginalized and taboo, contextualizing success, as well as bitter self-examination and personal critique of his own decency.

As mentioned previously, every one of these themes is present in the very beginning of his career, and much of this article will flesh out this presence in the first half of his career. Nonetheless, there becomes an unequivocal commitment to these themes in his most recent work, and these premises are at the forefront of reshaping the trajectory of masculinity in American culture. Through his efforts to reframe masculine identity, Eminem opens a path forward for men in rap music that has altered the fundamental landscape of the genre. In terms of reshaping masculine identity, we would be cautious in arguing that Eminem is the most influential rapper of the last twenty-five years; the position on that throne is likely reserved for either Kendrick Lamar or Jay-Z. However, if Kendrick Lamar or Jay-Z are the more transformational artists of this period, Eminem serves as a John the Baptist figure, clearing the way for the new expressions of masculinity via his revolutionary and, ultimately, prophetic ability to juxtapose competing trajectories of masculinity in his art.

THEORIES OF MASCULINITY

Raewyn Connell (1987) defines four basic categories of masculinity, all focused on defining and categorizing a range of practices and attitudes directed toward structural and gendered power. According to Connell, masculinity manifests itself in distinct ways, and an individual may incorporate different concepts of masculinity throughout his life. Nonetheless, the most dominant form of masculinity manifests itself as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity traces its roots back to the work of Gramsci (1971) and is defined by its positioning of dominance, consensus, and is underpinned by force. This form of masculinity carries the most cultural capital and emphasizes heterosexual norms, physical strength, and the suppression of emotions. Finally, hegemonic masculinity does not need to be controlled solely by those who have systemic power. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) examine how even working-class men who are otherwise systemically inept at exerting large displays of force on society can still behave in hegemony in their interpersonal and day-to-day encounters. Undoubtedly, 1990s and early 2000s rap music and hip-hop culture absorbed hegemonic norms of masculinity and laid a groundwork for what it was to be a man in that cultural epoch.

For Connell, the breakdown of masculine trajectories continues into categories beyond hegemony. Complicit masculinity is a category fit by men who cannot themselves uphold or do not have the ability to engage in hegemonic masculinity. However, men who fall into the category of complicit masculinity refrain from challenging hegemonic masculinity and often admire men who are able to display hegemonic tendencies. Another category of men who themselves do not have the ability to display hegemonic masculinity or behave in hegemonic tendencies falls into a category of marginalized masculinity. Unique to men who fall under the concept of marginalized masculinity, similar to those defined by complicit masculinity, are likely to admire, albeit from a distance, the strength and power exhibited by men who are hegemonic. However, men who fall under the concept of marginalized masculinity have some specific trait – typically race or disability – that by nature will prevent them from any participation in hegemonic masculinity. Thus, those who fall under the category of complicit masculinity may not themselves have the ability to display hegemony, but they are allowed to participate in the culture of hegemony through supporting hegemonic men. To offer an analogy, complicit men may not have the skills to fight in the coliseum, but they sure as hell are allowed to be in the stadium to cheer on the bloodlust. On the other hand, marginalized masculinity defines men who find themselves in awe of some aspects of hegemony – strength and power, in particular – though they are wholly and unequivocally excluded from participation in or the support of hegemony. In this analogy, these are the men who wear the team jersey, but are not allowed to watch the games, most likely because of their race or some disability.

Finally, Connell offers a category of masculinity that is termed subordinate masculinity. Subordinate masculinity describes a category of men whose qualities, traits, and values stand in stark juxtaposition to those of hegemonic masculinity. These are men who are comfortable exhibiting physical weakness and vulnerability, as well as a tendency to be candid, sensitive, and expressive with their emotions. These men are typically defined as effeminate, neurotic, and open.

These men are poets, not warriors. They fit neither the structure of hegemonic power nor do they long to participate in the aggressive and violent tendencies to dominate one's peers.

Eminem's work is unique because he so clearly dabbles in most of these categories and, thus, serves as a transcendent vehicle to these traditionally accepted categories of masculinity. As mentioned, Connell argues that there is fluidity to these categories throughout a man's lifespan and that at different ages and phases, men may find themselves falling into different categories of masculine identity in relation to these hegemonic tendencies. Thus, if this were all that Eminem's career was – a shift from hegemonic masculinity to subordinate masculinity – it would not be singular. Therefore, what is profound and singular to Eminem's career is the ability to occupy several of these categories of masculine identity *at the same time*.

Undoubtedly, there is some shifting along the spectrum through his music - the sociopathic motifs present in *Kill You* (early career) are a far cry from the neurotic self-awareness portrayed in *Lose Yourself* (early middle career) and the compassionate protector role taken in *I'm Not Afraid* (later middle career). Nonetheless, Eminem's display of masculinity is unique because he can stand in these juxtaposing categories of masculinity within the same album, the same song, and even within the same verse. *The Marshall Mathers LP* has tributes to hegemony followed immediately by the unprecedented displays of empathy and compassion. One of the starkest examples of this is the last note of Eminem's bizarre cackling apology at the end of *Kill You* flowing seamlessly into the angelic ballad of Dido's chorus in *Stan*. This song in particular – *Stan* – is such an outlier in the contemporary history of hip-hop that it is shocking to reflect on just how revolutionary of a hit this became. Nonetheless, *Stan*, though undoubtedly an outlier to rap music, is by no means an outlier in Eminem's discography.

Furthermore, *Stan* is not merely an expression of subordinate masculinity amid hegemonic masculinity. The song itself is an expression of both hegemonic tendencies or frustration and aggression, as well as a sensitivity for the voiceless and downtrodden that is displayed through subordinate masculinity. The song is also, in some ways, an expression of marginalized masculinity, with Eminem standing as the champion and outside observer to a culture – hip-hop music - that he has still not been fully accepted into. Finally, it was the category of complicit masculinity that Eminem was accused of when he was scapegoated for the hegemonic display of violence in the Columbine massacre.

In summation, the singularity of Eminem's contribution to masculine norms is this ability to transcend the traditional normative categories by keeping an investment in multiple trajectories at once. Through this, he is able to advance the narrative of what it means to be a man in rap culture; his ability to push forward a juxtaposition of hegemonic and subordinate tendencies, though initially confounding, was ultimately revolutionary for rap music in the 21st century.

MASCULINITY IN AMERICA - MASCULINITY IN HIP-HOP

Perhaps nothing has changed more drastically – and is subject to continue to change more drastically - in American culture in the last two decades than the concept of masculinity and the



role that traditional masculinity has in influencing society, organizations, and leadership. A more appropriate way to term this shift would be to express the utterly diminishing role those traditional expectations of alpha masculinity have played in leadership and influence in American culture.

Many fields have experienced zeitgeists along the pendulum of acceptance for traditional masculine norms. Although some fields of American culture are still painfully working through this shift, it could be argued that no field has been affected more by the shifting role of masculinity in American culture than rap music. The discography of Jay-Z, Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar, Drake, Chance the Rapper, Logic, Childish Gambino, Kid Cudi, YBN Cordae, Joyner Lucas, Run the Jewels, J. Cole, Tyler the Creator, Frank Ocean, and Mac Miller - among what feels like almost countless others - represent just how far the shift in images of masculinity have developed in hip-hop culture and art. Despite the myriad examples of this shift, one epitomizing example is Jay-Z's *4:44*. The album, revolutionary in a series of ways, devotes a track to an overwhelming emotional experience he had when his mother expressed to him that she spent her life as a closeted gay woman and had finally found love later in her life. Put bluntly, to consider this as a track on an album from arguably the most important figure in rap music would have been inconceivable as short as fifteen years ago.

What is most striking in the current analysis of rap and hip-hop is just how vulnerable and neurotic the genre has become. What it is to be a "man" in rap has been fundamentally usurped by this stylistic shift. When comparing the current tone of hip-hop with 1980s-90s rap, such a drastic shift could not be clearer. Frank Ocean is the first openly gay rapper; Chance the Rapper has replaced acid rapping for an existential quest for meaning, the search for God, and a devotion to both fatherhood and social justice in Chicago; Kendrick Lamar openly questions whether or not he is doing enough to serve as a role model and leader in his community; Childish Gambino's art is tender, layered, and anxious; Jay-Z has taken a reflective and accountable tone for his public marital infidelity and the emptiness and emotional trauma that it caused. Then, despite the heated nature of debate he provokes, there is the deep and profound influence of Kanye West's early work, defined by a neurotic style, on contemporary rap culture. Yet, despite the profound efforts in reshaping masculine norms by each of these artists, no rapper has done more than Eminem to initiate this new wave of masculinity as neurotic vulnerability, candid reflection, and self-examination into the genre of hip-hop.

THE FATHER

Apart from a one-off toe-dip in the water with Will Smith's *Just the Two of Us* and Ed O.G. & Da Bulldogs' *Be a Father to Your Child*, fatherhood was something that 1990s mainstream hip-hop was largely uncomfortable talking about and exploring with any nuance. Likewise, 1990s American entertainment culture had relegated fatherhood to the useless buffoon archetype (e.g., Homer Simpson; Al Bundy), or the all-knowing Super-dad (e.g., Cliff Huxtable; Eric Camden). Either way, there was little attempt at some authentic examples of what it was like to be a father through the day-to-day challenges of communicating with children, mentoring and protecting them, and struggling to balance the demands of a full-time job with the desires of intimacy with one's children. Al Bundy was just a worker, too tired from his meaningless job and nostalgia for

his youth to mentor his children. Cliff Huxtable was home with his children more than any actual doctor could only dream of. Both of these caricatures were misleading representations and, thus, inauthentic expressions of fatherhood. Furthermore, these were only expressions of fatherhood in pop-culture. In rap culture, there were almost no expressions, let alone authentic expressions, of what it was to wrestle with the demands of fatherhood.

Eminem's depiction of fatherhood filled the vacuum of inauthenticity in both American and rap culture. This was often a messy narrative of fatherhood, one mixed with unabashed expressions of affection (*Hailie's Song*); strong desires of protection (*Mockingbird*); unequivocal solidarity and devotion ('97 *Bonnie & Clyde*); an existential sense of dread and responsibility (*When I'm Gone*; *Mockingbird*; *Castle*); regret over his failings as a father (*When I'm Gone*; *Arose*); and, perhaps most uniquely, unabashed expressions of silliness, playfulness, and humor (*My Dad's Gone Crazy*).

The repositioning of the role of the father through the lens of Connell's masculine norms is worth examination here, too. There is a radical tension of hegemonic and subordinate masculinity in the rapper's examination of fatherhood. He is undoubtedly a protector of his child and will commit violence to defend her or bring justice to her (*Mockingbird*). A biographical example of his hegemonic stance as a father is the rap beef between Eminem and Ja Rule over Ja Rule disrespecting Hailie on a track, referencing her growing up to be a slut like her mother. This beef was not worked out through a rap battle; this became a war, enlisting soldiers from two record labels (*Shady Aftermath* versus *Murder Inc.*), that fanned flames of tension between the two labels and influenced a series of assaults, stabbings, and bullets flying into record buildings. However, despite this traditional and hegemonic stance of the father as the protector, there is likewise a pronounced and unabashed sensitivity, affection, and vulnerability in Eminem's relationship to his daughter – Hailie Jade.

When I'm Gone seems to epitomize the unique shift Eminem contributed to when examining his role as a father. This piece is littered with contradictions and tensions; a constant tug-of-war for a single parent between the demands of a successful career and the unending needs of a child. Eminem lucidly paints a picture of this tension, rapping about his attempt to write a song while at the park with his daughter. This example transcends both the typical images painted around fatherhood at the time. Like the overworked and aloof Bundy-dad, Eminem finds himself distracted and detached while sitting at the park with his child. Like the omniscient and omnipotent super-dad, Eminem is indeed with his child at the park, putting the time in and offering the attention and intimacy the child demands.

However, unlike either of these glib masculine narratives, Eminem does not offer himself or the listener a peaceful resolution to the tension. The tension between ideals and demands is too much for the father to bridge. He cannot be both the powerful corporate worker and the committed father. One of these will always give way and, at this point in his career, the work wins. The song ends with expressions of regret, hopelessness, and suicidal ideology.

Finally, perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of Eminem's expression of fatherhood is the unabashed and shameless exposure of his own vulnerability to demonstrate affection for his daughter. Put simply, *Hailie's Song* was an unprecedented track in rap music. The track is one-part confession – I need my daughter for my own sanity – and one-part homage – Hailie Jade is the most important human being in my life. Beyond the confession of his own weakness to self-actualize without his daughter, the dedication is layered with vulnerability. This is the first song that Eminem sings on, a pattern that covers basically the first two-thirds of the track. His neurotic demeanor is present in his self-awareness that this attempt is a leap of faith and skill (*"I can't sing. I guess I'll fucking sing"*). Lyrically, the prose would be unrecognizable from a Barbara Streisand ballad if read in a blind test. In short, this track is no glib nod to the superficial emotions one might feel around the theoretical concept of fatherhood. *Hailie's Song* is a deep dive into subordinate masculinity as well as the vulnerability of affection a father can feel for a daughter and a father's confession of need for his daughter. Eminem's unprecedented trailblazing here offered a space for rappers to begin to broach these themes and widen the concept of masculinity as it relates to fatherhood in hip-hop culture.

THE SON

Though there is much crossover in rap culture between the examination of the role of father and the son, rap music unequivocally has more to say about being a son than being a father, at least as far as quantity of work goes. Up through 2002, there were a myriad of Mom-songs in hip-hop and R&B, and after 2002, as the role and nature of hegemonic masculinity as dominant began to turn in hip-hop, almost every famous rapper has a song devoted to mom. Prior to Eminem's scathing expose of the mother-son archetype, many of the mom tracks offered in hip-hop and R&B were relatively glib, portraying the ego-ideal mother as an archetype of the steadfast and sacrificing mom – a woman of unwavering compassion and enduring support through turbulent times. Rarely is there a deep introspective investigation of the complexity of this relationship and the nature of such sacrifices save for 2-Pac's *Dear Mama*. Shakur's devotion track is deeply introspective and even revolutionary in the examination of personal culpability for a relationship that was complex, stressful, and, at times, strained. Yet, in his examination of his mother's role in the stress of the relationship, in lockstep with former mom-tracks in the genre, there is reticence to put responsibility at the foot of mom, and much of the track is still devoted to the archetype of the unshakeable matriarch.

However, most of these works stand in stark contrast with the more scandalous, long-suffering, and traumatic portrait Eminem paints about the otherwise sacred bond between mother and son. Eminem's work on his mother seriously counters the typical American mother archetype as the all-suffering and infinitely patient nurturer; the rock who bears the weight of her son's maladies until those failings miraculously give birth to success and peace. Instead, Debbie Mathers is the albatross tied around her son's neck and a weight that must be lifted for him to find peace, self, and sanity.

Ironically, Eminem's birth into the world of rap music is through the canal of his beleaguered and traumatic relationship to his mother. *My Name Is* was Eminem's first major release under the

guidance and promotion of Dr. Dre. Much of this song lyrically exposes his own mental fragility, a lack of psychic homeostasis, and a tendency for sociopathology that can be tied directly back to his mother as a failure. In one of Eminem's deepest dives into sociopathic tendencies and unabashed violence against women – *Kill You* – he opens the track with a quasi-biographical refrain. He addresses how the roots of his violent tendencies are derived from a lie. It was his mother who misled him about his father, and it was his mother who attempted to conceal her own unstable tendencies. It was a story of the mother blaming her son and his estranged father for any of her own personal dysfunction.

Beyond Eminem opening us into the world of an estranged and dysfunctional relationship between mother and son, it is ultimately Eminem's *Cleanin' Out My Closet* that offers a singular examination of both the mother-son relationship. This track fundamentally reexamines the role of the son's masculinity toward his mother and continues with the overarching theme of this essay – that Eminem's uniqueness in shaping the expression of masculinity in rap music is found in his ability to juxtapose masculine norms of hegemony and subordination. It tells a story of a relationship founded on lies, betrayal, abuse, and trauma – a narrative rarely confessed to as the responsibility of the mother in rap music. However, nothing about Eminem's music is either trite or glib. The song expresses a contrast of emotions, contraposing a hegemonic longing for justice and vengeance against his mother with a sense of compassion for her inability to ever really understand the depth of the pain she caused her son. Ultimately, the chorus tells the tale on this track – a son who is sympathetic to the pain he has caused his mother by exposing these wounds versus a young father who is necessarily attempting to exorcise the demons of his childhood so that he can process the wounds and refrain from bringing the same trauma to his child.

THE HUSBAND

There is an utter dearth of music devoted to the exploration of marriage in rap music. Through the 1980's and early 2000's rap music, there are indeed a surplus of songs written about intimacy and love. However, only a few of these tracks directly address the questions tied exclusively to marriage (e.g. fidelity, responsibility, intimacy, trust, and longevity). Even artists who were married were reluctant to rap about it, and many songs about love and fidelity were focused on the sexual aspect of intimacy or homages to physical beauty and, thus, are devoid of many of the emotional or social factors that support intimate relationships.

To be fair, this is no longer the case in the world of hip-hop. A short examination of the last ten years of hip-hop provides a wellspring of lyrics devoted to the more emotional and social aspects of intimacy, the complexity and work tied to fidelity, as well as a more authentic yearning for a committed and monogamous form of intimacy. I argue that this is the case, at least in part, because of Eminem's contribution to broaching the topic of marriage in rap music, as well as his drive to open the nuances and complexities foundational to intimacy.

There is no single individual to whom more of Eminem's music is inspired by or devoted to than Kim Scott. Twice married to Kim, she witnessed the transformation from a Detroit-based laborer named Marshall Mathers to the international superstar Slim Shady. Eminem often alludes



to Kim's struggle with this overnight transcendence into the fame for her husband. Regardless, Kim and Marshall wrestled with stability from the most nascent phases of their love, entering a volatile pact that was almost destined to touch the extremes of intimacy.

'97 *Bonnie & Clyde* and *Kim* both open the listener into this world of volatility; radical pendulum swings from love-to-loathing; from fidelity-to-lies; from ecstasy to trauma. *Kim* is not merely a track about violence. It is, again, a juxtaposition of hegemony and subordination. While Eminem is dragging the tied-up Kim through the woods to slit her throat, he is sobbing, pausing, confessing and expressing the vulnerability of being cheated on. There is no doubt of hegemony in these murderous tendencies; however, they are coupled with the subordinate masculinity of frailty, insecurity, and the pain that comes from losing control of our loved one's choices.

Other tracks in Eminem's discography further the juxtaposition of these masculine norms, bending deeper on the spectrum toward empathy and subordination. *Love the Way You Lie* and *Bad Husband* are confessional apologies to his ex-wife. They are contextual and reflective ballads, upholding a narrative of personal responsibility for his personal flaws and shortcomings as a husband, as well as sensitive to the complex nuances of an abusive and failed relationship. All in all, these expressions of husbandry are not idealized, diminished, nor sexualized. *Love the Way You Lie* is an empathic and confessional examination of self-injurious tendencies that arise in loving relationships. Reflection is offered on the confounding nature of human desire, the primordial and pervasive fear of human rejection, and the tendency to harm those whom we love and trust the most. *Bad Husband* is a candid and vulnerable expression of responsibility for his personal failings in love. After spending, roughly, a whole career scapegoating Kim Scott as a source of his trauma and volatility, Eminem is accountable to his ex-wife and failed marriage. He is fully aware of his own duality – both loving and volatile – and how this likely caused incurable wounds. Ultimately, these tracks stand as a frank expression of the truly difficult labor of marriage. They are far beyond the glib exposition of a father as a savior/protector or the checked-out-dad.

FRIENDSHIP

There has always been a culture of solidarity in rap music, one that from its nascent days centered primarily on shows of violence, devotion, and tribal primacy (e.g., East Coast vs. West Coast; Shady Aftermath vs. Murder Inc., etc.). The most foundational question of one's friendship was typically determined by his propensity to commit violence – even murder – on a perceived enemy of the group. This tendency parallels American popular culture – primarily in all the cop and war dramas – where friendship and masculinity are inherently violently linked.

Eminem is not immune from this hegemonic expression of friendship. Dr. Dre's *Chronic 2000* album was in many ways Eminem's encore to the hip-hop community. The two tracks he appears on – *What's the Difference* and *Forgot About Dre* – are resounding and unequivocal testimonies to the depth of loyalty Eminem has to Dre. Yet, as is often the case with Eminem, this expression of loyalty is layered and cannot be limited to hegemonic and tribal devotion.



His expressions of friendship and loyalty to Dre are nuanced with sentiments of affection, candor, vulnerability, and humor without any necessary link to hegemonic tribalism. He is not the only rapper to endorse a subordinate form of masculinity and express a sense of vulnerability and need for his friend. The most iconic example of this sentiment is probably Puff Daddy's *I'll Be Missing You*; however, other tracks present themselves even from the 1980s to the early 2000s.

Even though Eminem was not the first rapper to muse on the vulnerability and affection of friendship, as always, he ups the ante on these sentiments. I can find no other documented case in any single rap song prior to Eminem of one male rapper saying unequivocally to another male rapper "I love you." This is precisely how Eminem opens his verse on Dr. Dre's *What's the Difference* (*I don't know if I ever told you this, but I love you, dog*). Much of *What's the Difference* is a track about friendship, with Dr. Dre opening the first verse reflecting on regrets and misconceptions about beef he's had with former members of NWA. Dre regrets misconceptions about himself that have grown in the hip-hop world, including how he might be living his life and who he might be close with after NWA. His deepest regrets seem to come over an unnecessary beef formed between he and Eazy-E, culminating with Dre expressing a sense that he would do anything to squash this conflict. Dre's laments and vulnerability are a stark contrast with Xzibit's (second) verse on the track. Xzibit demonstrates his "differences" through a more or less hegemonic display of power and alpha masculinity. In many ways, it's Dre's verse on this track that is the most vivid expression of subordinate masculinity, overall. Yet, despite the fact that the rest of Eminem's verse is devoted to displays of hegemony, sociopathic violence, and sadistic desire, it is his unparalleled and succinct expression that steals the show – *I love you*.

Eminem's other most profound expression of friendship comes in his work on Dr. Dre's track, *I Need a Doctor*. Like most of Eminem's best work, it is impossible to categorize his work on this track as merely an expression of subordinate masculinity. The juxtaposition of his work here is of a caustic honesty and a waning need for the support of his friend and mentor. Eminem's verses on this track are reflective of a time when both rappers' careers were at a crossroads. Eminem's infamous relapse into benzodiazepine addiction is well accounted for (Weisman, 2013). He expresses how he navigated through this period desperate for mentorship, support, and guidance, only to find Dre experiencing his own period of depression, confusion, and uncertainty. Eminem uses the first verse as an acerbic wake-up call to Dre, calling him out for his apathy while Eminem attempted to navigate the murky waters of addiction, recovery, and self-doubt. In short, he is viciously calling out a friend for failing to uphold his end of the bargain. The second verse is generous, compassionate, and empathic. Eminem guides a delicate reflection on the etiology of Dre's own suffering. He also addresses his own myopia and self-centeredness, making note of his own failings to Dre and his own shortcomings in not addressing his friend's suffering. This is a lucid expression of subordinate masculinity. Eminem is unabashed about his need for a friend during a time of insecurity and the exorcising of personal demons. His display of empathy, responsibility, and compassion for his friend's suffering is likewise an expression of subordinate masculinity, as well as his admittance of failing in the effort to support his friend through this time due to his own self-consumption.



SEXUAL PROWESS AND INTIMACY

As alluded to in the section on Eminem's role as *The Husband*, there is undoubtedly a large portion of hip-hop culture and rap music devoted to making explicit one's own sexual conquests, virility, and seductive power toward women. Throughout Eminem's discography, there is a disproportionately small amount of work devoted to a hegemonic stance on sexuality. This is not to cast doubt on the fact that Eminem has both tracks and references on tracks to hegemonic sexuality. However, these references are relatively scarce and, when made, are often presented with a tone of jest or self-deprecation; they are many, and most are homogenous in nature. From 1980 to the early 2000's, almost all expressions of sexuality are unequivocal expressions of hegemonic masculinity. All in all, these themes are glib, myopic, and objectifying of women's roles or places in sexual intimacy.

Though not all, the majority of Eminem's contributions to the topic of sexuality fall much more on the side of self-deprecation, humor, and subordinate masculinity. It takes Eminem until his third studio album to devote a single track to sex. Again, there are references to sex throughout – *My Name Is*; *Cum on Everybody*; *Ken Kaniff (skit)*; *Kill You*; *The Real Slim Shady* – but none of these tracks or references deal with the topic with any seriousness, self-aggrandizement, or hegemonic expressions of power. Most are either humorous, satirical, or exposes around the hypocritical nature of sexual expression in American culture.

Eminem's first track that is explicitly devoted to sex and sexual prowess is *Superman*. On the surface, this looks like a classic rapper homage to his own virility and seductive powers. When examined analytically and contextually, this track is another layered expression of his own fragility as a lover, as well as his nihilism about romantic affairs. It is difficult to tell whether the awkward dialogue that opens this track was intended as such or is simply a reflection of Eminem being uncomfortable representing himself as a sex symbol. Either way, the point stands – Eminem is not fit to play the role of sexual conqueror. The track continues, likely expressing the etiology for his public sexual awkwardness. The rapper has a pervasive distrust and nihilism about whether sustained love and fidelity are possible. Early in his career, as a newly single celebrity rapper, he has opened doors to pervasive opportunities for sex. However, what he has found are a myriad of women who attempt to seduce him with lies that they believe he wants to hear. One group of these women do not know him, do not care about his daughter, and only want to latch onto his fame. Another group of lovers is working through some deep personal trauma and projecting onto Eminem as a savior – Superman – for their lives otherwise gone wrong. Ultimately, Eminem's skepticism and loathing for intimacy is expressed: these women make him want to puke.

Heat is a later track devoted to sexual attraction on Eminem's 2017 *Revival* album. No longer married or remarried to Kim Scott, and with some time and distance to reflect on his role in the failed marriage, Eminem pens this track as a middle-aged man rapping about what he is now looking for in intimacy. The track is humorous, playful, and free, articulating the desires of an individual looking for nothing more than a kindred spirit in intimacy. Eminem's quest for fidelity is over and complete, but his nihilism over these relationships has been replaced by a freedom to temporarily enjoin with another wounded lover.



The juxtaposition of hegemonic and subordinate masculinity is again on display as Eminem takes up sexuality. His contributions open up a space for a more nuanced and layered examination of sexual expression in the hip-hop community.

EMPATHY – REPRESSION & MENTAL ILLNESS

There is arguably no more important phenomenon underscoring the shift in masculine norms in rap culture than the normalization of both empathy and the vulnerability to express one's intrapsychic conflicts that were broached by Eminem's music. Repression, mental instability, and mental health are subjects that are barely touched upon in rap music until Eminem so unabashedly explores the topics. Furthermore, early explorations of intrapsychic conflict in American culture are arguably more feminine than masculine. There are far more depictions of mentally unstable and overly emotional women than men, who, if they are depicted as unstable, are almost uniformly sociopathic.

Arguably, Eminem's most immediate contribution to reforming masculine identity in hip-hop culture has come through his acceptance of the vulnerability that confessing to mental illness betrays. Eminem's contributions to this topic are vast. For Eminem's sake, mental illness, catharsis, and empathy combine throughout his career to demonstrate a compulsion to tell the forgotten stories of outsiders and underdogs (a theme ubiquitous in his career and work).

The discussion of mental health and intrapsychic vulnerability is almost ubiquitous in rap music today. Significant examples are Kanye West's 2018 album exploring bipolar disorder, Kendrick Lamar being incredibly open about suicidal ideation and depression, as well as Jay-Z's now-infamous quote on why he felt compelled to commit adultery despite knowing he deeply loved his wife (*"You can't heal what you can't reveal"*).

What is so unprecedented about Eminem's work is just how comfortable he was expressing his mental instability as soon as he stepped into the hip-hop limelight. As hegemonic as some of his early work is, the unequivocal comfort he takes in this form of subordinate masculinity is quite possibly more jarring than any sadistic lyric he penned. Eminem's ability to straddle the fence between hegemonic and subordinate masculinity when it comes to the expression of mental illness and intrapsychic vulnerability is likely struck by his sincere ease with self-injurious tendencies. Explicit and masochistic expressions of self-harm are ubiquitous in Eminem's discography, yet the most nuanced and tacit form of self-harm is found in his ability to open himself to confessional vulnerability and express empathy for the broken. The confessional tone of his most neurotic work is a public exposing of the psyche; a shattering of ego defenses that was supposed to stay hidden in the therapist's office or, in the case of the American male, be buried deeper through alcoholism, repression, aggression conversion, and further means of self-medication.

Never before in American culture was it seen as empowering for a male to express his intrapsychic conflict, emotional trauma, and willingly open himself to the pain and uncertainty of vulnerability. As mentioned, though, this tendency is now almost ubiquitous in rap music. Furthermore, empathy is self-injurious through the effort of losing oneself in the story of the other.



To be empathic, one must be open to the fundamental dissolution of one's personal ego to transcend into the perspective of the other. Eminem's efforts are to utilize neurotic self-awareness and empathy are to tell the story of psychosis, addiction, anxiety, depression, and insecurity in a way that resists the male tendency to open wounds of personal vulnerability.

THE PROTECTOR/DEFENDER

The final analysis of Eminem's effect on masculine trajectories will center on the way he took up the role of protector and defender of those he perceives as deprived of justice. The role of defender is certainly a complicated position to analyze within the traditional theories and concepts of masculine norms. To some extent, a protector is almost required to take up a hegemonic stance toward those who threaten the flock. On the other hand, the male protector is usually sacrificing his own opportunities to flourish in hegemony in order to stand with and for the rites of the subordinate, voiceless, marginalized, and weak. Eminem undoubtedly navigates both of these streams, often wantonly, throughout his career. Ultimately, Eminem is able to conduct a singular and profound unification of these otherwise juxtaposing themes in his career, in particular, in the later phase of his career.

Early in his career, Eminem takes up this role through a malicious expression of hegemonic ideals; a manner of a wanton and merciless *fuck you* to those whom he perceives as inauthentic. Inauthenticity for Eminem comes in several forms. There are several efforts made to bring proper recognition and accolades for those he believes are the true icons in the world of hip-hop. Furthermore, Eminem is malicious in his attacks of those who question the effect of his music on the fabric of American society.

Secondly, and perhaps the most ubiquitous form of his work as a defender, Eminem attempts to open the listener to the lived experience of a miscast outsider in American culture. He is by no means the first American artist to take this leap; however, he may have been the most commercially successful American artist to give voice to this "basket of deplorables," to steal a phrase from the 2016 election. The Slim Shady LP is full of humorous homages to trashy sitcoms, trailer park life, drug abuse, and rural poverty in America. Yet, beyond the humor, there are likewise heartfelt contributions to the social, economic, and emotional brokenness that is vibrant in the life of poor rural Americans.

Eminem continues this mantra in later albums, chastising those whom he perceives as too ignorant or afraid to listen to the meaning of his work and the effect it has on those who feel broken, outcast, and damaged in American culture. In many ways, these works represent a sort of apogee of the rapper's artistry, displaying his most thoughtful and yet weaponized expressions of frustration toward the culture-wide ego defense of American prosperity and well-being. Any notion that the wealth and social hygiene that came to epitomize the American suburban ideal of life can eradicate the ills of society for a community, a family, or the human psyche is viciously and mercilessly laid bare by the artist. Eminem's initial efforts here are directed clearly and in a uniform effort to shout to anyone who will listen that the broken are amongst you, they are emotionally volatile, and you will soon be hearing from them. He has opened the Pandora's box



of American suffering by standing as both the guardian of and megaphone for the marginalized and those otherwise perceived as deplorable. In the end, he goes further, placing himself before the broken and marginalized and capitalizing on his power and reputation in order to guide, protect, and lead them to a place of emotional acceptance, identity, and solidarity.

It is in this second wave of Eminem as *defender* that we are offered the full complexity of Eminem's stance toward masculine norms. At times, he is undoubtedly on offense, cultivating a merciless viciousness to American fraudulence. In others, he positions himself more as a shepherd to a lost and broken flock. His efforts are directed at identifying with the weak through opening himself to both their and his own vulnerabilities and is, thus, clearly engaging in some form of subordinate masculinity through this process. Yet, once the two streams of masculinity – hegemonic defender and subordinate guardian – are combined, the alchemy gives life to the formation of a new way of being a protector: a new way of being masculine.

CONCLUSION

Eminem's unique position in rap music – an outsider with a radical juxtaposition of masculine qualities – allowed him an opportunity to reframe the narrative of masculinity in rap music and hip-hop culture. Trajectories of masculinity in rap music and hip-hop culture have fundamentally and intractably shifted in the last twenty years, radically in the last ten years. These shifts have been so stark and drastic that it is difficult to imagine a whole host of former rappers finding success in this zeitgeist. Eminem is not the only figure to have contributed to this shift, and we do not want to overstate his contributions by pinning it on one individual. There are even solid grounds to argue that, at this present moment in hip-hop culture, Eminem may not be the single most revolutionary force in the project of shifting masculine norms within the genre. However, it is difficult to overstate just how singular, severe, and revolutionary Eminem's labor was in the seemingly impossible task of initially shifting such entrenched norms of masculinity in rap music and hip-hop culture.

There was always a question when Eminem burst onto the scene of rap music – would this open a path to change the face of rap music and open space for more white rappers? The answer to that question seems to have played out with a flaccid - meh, not really. Nonetheless, it is clear now that pundits were asking the wrong question about how this outsider would change rap music, one that stretched much deeper than race. Hindsight reveals that the inquiry pertaining to Eminem should have centered on whether a man who was comfortable with subordinate expressions of masculinity could change hip-hop and allow for a new expression of male norms within the genre. The answer to this question has been resolved unequivocally and resoundingly in the affirmative.

Most of this paper has focused on how Eminem paved a way for a new rapper and a new expression of masculinity in hip-hop culture. Nonetheless, our final argument here is that though many rappers have begun to embrace aspects of subordinate masculinity in their art, no single rapper has so fully and radically embodied these norms as Eminem. There is certainly an argument to be made here that Jay-Z, Kanye West, and Kendrick Lamar may have been more influential than Eminem in this embrace. However, even if one were to put, say, Kendrick Lamar or Jay-Z at the head table of



subordinate masculinity in the current age of hip-hop (an ironic image, indeed), he was not the first rapper to sit there, as his embrace of these norms was years behind Eminem's.

Many revolutions involve two types of characters: 1. the initial prophets screaming mad from the wilderness to a small though fervent group of followers; 2. the leaders of the movement who have the endurance and cache to keep a large flock together and shepherd them into the solidified laws of the new paradigm. The birth of Christianity out of fundamentalist Judaism roughly 2,000 years ago took *both* John the Baptist figures and Christ figures. If the shift in masculine norms in hip-hop could be compared to the revolution in early Christianity roughly 2,000 years ago, Eminem has been hip-hop's John the Baptist, burning a revolutionary path while screaming wildly in the wilderness; an outsider prophet who most perceived was insane or, worse, dangerous. Eminem is no king of hip-hop; he never had the adequate level of hegemony to pull his peers into full submission. Despite what he is beginning to feel like, Eminem is no god; his expression of subordinate masculinity is unprecedented, but it is not pure and was never enough to fully remove him from the competition and battle for hip-hop stardom. Instead of a king or a god, Eminem will always be a prophet for rap; an outsider screaming from the wilderness while reshaping the norms of masculine identity for hip-hop in the 21st century. His trailblazing has cleared space for a new way of cultivating masculine norms for a whole generation of rap, a generation that has used this space to make rap into an art form that is nuanced, candid, neurotic, empathic and socially salient.

Eminem's most recent chapter of music is a reaffirmation of his role in hip-hop – that of an outsider and prophet. It is not so much hegemonic violence when he calls out others on the album – it is a warning call. He is not a god (cannot stay out of it) and he is not a king (no despot; not seen on the throne). What Eminem became is what he hoped to be on *Monster* – the Bruce Lee of loose-leaf. Lee's vision in coming to America was to form a higher level of human consciousness by integrating Chinese Taoist philosophy into mainstream American culture. He didn't want Americans to become Taoists. He believed the combination of the American drive for excellence and power could be combined with the detachment of Taoism and, together, they could form a set of transcendent set of consciousness (Little, 1996). Eminem's attempt should be viewed as parallel to Lee's efforts. His work has never been one thing or another. It has always been the unique synergy of two juxtaposing forces that were otherwise presumed to not coexist. Perhaps, like Lee, what Eminem was striving for in this synergy is impossible, but the prophet's job is to call us to transcendence without necessarily embodying such a move.

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AUTHOR PROFILES



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INSTAGRAM VS REALITY: PERFECTIONISTIC INSTAGRAM USE AND BODY DISSATISFACTION IN YOUNG MEN

Rhea Milson



ABSTRACT

Presenting perfection on Instagram is negatively associated with body dissatisfaction in young women. However, it is unclear whether this is the case for young men. I conducted a cross-sectional, survey-based study, recruiting a non-clinical sample of men ($N = 262$), to examine relationships between perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram and body dissatisfaction. Findings revealed that perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram was positively associated with body dissatisfaction (drive for muscularity and height). Overall, these findings offer initial support for examining perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram and its utility in understanding male body dissatisfaction.

Keywords: male body image, male body dissatisfaction, body image, perfectionistic self-presentation, Instagram



INTRODUCTION

Young men are increasingly exposed to mesomorphic body ideals via Instagram (Curran et al., 2019; Dixon, 2025). Thus, young men are experiencing greater pressure to appear perfect (perfectionistic self-presentation) online, as well as offline, leading to increased body image concerns (Grugan & Wright, 2023; Patarinski et al., 2023). In the present study, I examine perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram and its association with body dissatisfaction in young men.

Body Dissatisfaction

Traditionally, research has examined women's body image and associated risks for disordered eating (Hyam et al., 2023; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2020; Trafford et al., 2023). More recently, research considers how men and women's body ideals differ. The "mesomorphic ideal" (i.e., tall, muscular, lean; Tylka, 2021), contrasts women's body ideals, via a drive for muscularity, rather than a drive for thinness (Fatt et al., 2019; Fischetti et al., 2020; Tylka, 2021). Therefore, men's body satisfaction warrants investigation of its own.

Research suggests that men score higher than women on muscularity-oriented body dissatisfaction, drive for muscularity is maintained over time (unlike drive for thinness) and male fat dissatisfaction is positively correlated with disordered eating (Karazsia et al., 2017; Mayo et al., 2014). More recently, Murnen et al. (2023) reported that drive for muscularity may represent drive for masculinity, aligning with the theory of precarious manhood (Mills et al., 2023; Vandello & Bosson, 2013), in which masculinity is difficult to gain but easy to lose. This notion also supports the threatened masculinity theory of male body dissatisfaction, in which men who endorse traditional gender norms experience an identity threat following increasing gender equality in society. Thus, men who endorse masculine norms are more likely to experience muscularity-oriented dissatisfaction (Cunningham et al., 2020; Frederick et al., 2017; Hunt et al., 2013), disordered eating (i.e., engaging with a bulking/cutting cycle; Murray et al., 2012), and muscle dysmorphia (extreme preoccupation with, and drive for, muscularity; Grugan et al., 2023; Grunewald et al., 2022). Alongside a drive for muscularity and leanness, research suggests a third component of male body image – height (Ridgeway & Tylka, 2005), as men who experience greater height dissatisfaction are more likely to conform to masculine norms (Winegard et al., 2014), taller men are more satisfied with their height (O'Gorman et al., 2019) and height dissatisfaction is positively associated with disordered eating in young men (Talbot & Mahlberg, 2023).

Overall, men's body satisfaction can be characterised by a drive for muscularity, low body fat and height, particularly for men who endorse masculine norms, and dissatisfaction can lead to increased disordered eating (Grogan, 2021; Kearney-Cooke & Steichen-Asch, 2014). To further understand the development/maintenance of eating disorders in young men, it is important to investigate factors that contribute to body dissatisfaction in non-clinical samples.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality trait, depicted by striving for flawlessness (Stoeber, 2017). Hewitt and Flett (1990) differentiated three dimensions; self-



oriented (important for one to be perfect), other-oriented (important for others to be perfect) and socially prescribed (other people believe it is important for one to be perfect). Self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionistic men are likely to experience increased drive for muscularity, low body fat and height (Davis et al., 2005; Grammas & Schwartz, 2009), increasing the risk of muscle dysmorphia and disordered eating (Patarinski et al., 2023). It appears that men who believe it is important to be perfect or believe that others think it is important for them to be perfect (i.e., embody the mesomorphic ideal) are likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies and be at an increased risk of disordered eating.

Perfectionistic Self-Presentation

Hewitt and colleagues (2003) suggest perfectionism goes beyond internally focused traits (the desire to be perfect) and propose an externally focused component, referred to as perfectionistic self-presentation (the desire to *appear* perfect). Perfectionistic self-presentation consists of three dimensions: perfectionistic self-promotion (explicitly presenting perfection), non-display of imperfection (concealing imperfect behaviours) and non-disclosure of imperfection (concealing imperfect disclosures; Hewitt et al., 2017). Thus, the focus of perfectionistic self-presentation is to understand the observable behaviours/strategies used to promote perfection and conceal imperfection, advancing the trait perfectionism literature.

Hashmi et al. (2022) found that perfectionistic self-presentation was associated with body dissatisfaction in men, with non-display of imperfection and perfectionistic self-promotion exhibiting the largest correlations. Grugan et al. (2023) further found that perfectionistic self-presentation predicted muscle dysmorphia, beyond trait perfectionism, highlighting the unique contribution of perfectionistic self-presentation. Lundqvist et al. (2024) further reported that perfectionistic self-promotion and non-display of imperfection significantly predicted body satisfaction in men, but non-disclosure of imperfection did not, concluding that gender significantly moderated the effect, as non-disclosure of imperfection did predict body satisfaction in women. It appears non-display of imperfection and perfectionistic self-promotion may be most important when examining men's body satisfaction. However, today, young men are not only presenting perfection offline (as in previous research), but also online, via social media.

Perfectionistic Self-Presentation on Instagram

The transactional model of social media and body concerns (Perloff, 2014) suggests that perfectionism, when combined with social media use, can increase body image concerns. This model posits that perfectionistic individuals increasingly use highly visual platforms, such as Instagram (as this platform promotes the notion of *appearing* perfect, aligning with perfectionistic self-presentation; Alfonso-Fuertes et al., 2023), and evaluate their appearance as inferior (in accordance with social comparison theory; Festinger, 1954). This perfectionistic Instagram use results in greater body dissatisfaction (Downey & Chang, 2007; McComb & Mills., 2022). Although this model was developed to explain the effects of social media use on women's body image, this model may also conceptualise men's body dissatisfaction. Like women, men are continually exposed to unachievable body standards on Instagram. Via content analysis, Gültzow et al. (2020) found that most sampled Instagram posts depicted muscularity and leanness, and mesomorphic-oriented content received greater engagement (i.e., likes/comments). Further research suggests that young men exposed to mesomorphic-ideal content and fitspiration content (an amalgamation of "fitness" and "inspiration", designed



to promote exercise/healthy lifestyle), report feeling less satisfied with their muscularity/height (Baron et al., 2021; Konings, 2020; Paulson, 2020; Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2020). This suggests that endorsement of masculine norms online, as well as offline, contribute to men's body dissatisfaction. Moreover, despite gender differences in body ideals, Instagram use promotes body dissatisfaction in both men and women.

Perfectionistic self-presentation and Instagram use individually contribute to body dissatisfaction in young men. However, further research is needed to specifically examine perfectionistic Instagram use and body dissatisfaction. Bolt (2019) reported that self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionistic men, who regularly use Instagram, report greater drive for muscularity. However, this study examined trait perfectionism; therefore, the role of perfectionistic self-presentation remains unclear. Milson and Madigan (2024) found that perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram predicted body satisfaction in women. However, it is unclear whether this is also the case for men.

The Present Study

This cross-sectional study aimed to examine relationships between perfectionistic self-presentation (perfectionistic self-promotion/non-display of imperfection) in the context of Instagram use, and body dissatisfaction (drive for muscularity, low body fat and height) in young men. I hypothesised that perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram would be positively associated with body dissatisfaction.

METHODS

Participants

262 male Instagram users, aged 18-34 years ($M = 23.03$, $SD = 4.68$), were recruited from the United Kingdom via opportunity sampling using Instagram/Facebook. Participants with an eating/body image disorder diagnosis were excluded, as I was interested in recruiting non-clinical samples to examine preventative factors. Regarding ethnicity, 71.3% identified as white, 8.4% identified as black, 9.2% identified as Asian, 3.1% identified as mixed two or more ethnic groups, 4.6% identified as other and 1.5% preferred not to say. Regarding sexual orientation, 73.3% identified as straight, 9.5% identified as gay, 12.6% identified as bisexual, 2.3% identified as pansexual, 1.9% identified as asexual and .4% identified as other. A priori power analysis, via GPower, using an alpha of .05 (Miller & Ulrich, 2019), a power of .80 (Abraham & Russell, 2008; Bakker et al., 2016), and a previous meta correlation of .24 (Limburg et al., 2017), estimate a required sample size of 131 participants.

Measures

Perfectionistic Self-Presentation. I contextualized the Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale (Hewitt et al., 2003) to measure perfectionistic self-promotion and non-display of imperfection on Instagram. The perfectionistic self-promotion subscale measured presentation of perfection on Instagram (e.g., "I must always appear to be perfect on Instagram.") The non-display of imperfection subscale measured concealment of imperfect behaviours on Instagram (e.g., "I will do almost anything to cover up a mistake on Instagram.") This measure consisted of 20 items, using a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). This adapted measure has shown to be reliable, with high internal consistency across subscales ($\alpha = .90-.93$) and valid, via confirmatory factor analysis (Milson et al., 2024).



Body Dissatisfaction. I used the Male Body Attitudes Scale (Tylka et al., 2005) to measure body dissatisfaction. assessing drive for muscularity (e.g., “I think I have too little muscle on my body.”), low body fat (e.g., “I think I have too much fat on my body.”) and height (e.g., “I wish I were taller.”). This measure consisted of 24 items, using a 6-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from never (1) to always (6), with high internal consistency across subscales ($\alpha = .82-.94$; Tylka et al., 2005).

Procedure

Ethical clearance for all procedures was approved by the relevant ethics committee. Informed consent was obtained for all participants and questionnaires were distributed on Qualtrics, via Instagram/Facebook.

Analytic Strategy

I screened for outliers and assessed scale internal consistency. I conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) for the contextualized Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale. To evaluate model fit, I examined a range of incremental and absolute fit indices, including the χ^2 statistic, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI), (Hu et al., 1999; MacCallum & Austin, 2000). The following criteria were indicative of acceptable model fit: RMSEA < .10, SRMR < .10, CFI > .90 (Marsh et al., 2004). To examine relationships between perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram and body dissatisfaction, I used correlation and multiple regression.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

IMB SPSS Statistics 29 was used to analyse the data. 291 participants responded to the survey. 29 participants were excluded from further analyses, due to missing/incomplete data. Multivariate and univariate outliers (i.e., standardised scores that were greater than $z = 3.29$) were screened; no outliers were detected. All scales showed acceptable Cronbach’s alphas (see Table 1). CFA for the contextualized Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale deemed the two-factor model to provide an adequate fit to the data, based on most fit indices ($\chi^2 = 443.43$, $df = 169$, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .06, CFI = .88). Additionally, all factor loadings were significant and an adequate size ($> .30$; Comrey & Lee, 2013).

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 1. I found small-medium positive correlations between both dimensions of perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram and drive for muscularity ($p < .001$) and height ($p < .001$). I also found a small positive correlation between perfectionistic self-promotion on Instagram and low body fat ($p < .05$). I did not find a significant correlation between non-display of imperfection on Instagram and low body fat ($p = .110$). In line with Cohen (1992), I regarded correlations with absolute values of .10, .30, and .50 as small, medium, and large.

**Table 1***Bivariate Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations and Cronbach's Alphas.*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perfectionistic Self-Promotion					
2. Non-Display of Imperfection	.83***				
3. Drive for Muscularity	.23***	.31***			
4. Low Body Fat	.14*	.10	.41***		
5. Height	.32***	.32***	.32***	.28***	
M	40.34	40.22	3.40	3.36	3.03
SD	13.54	12.53	1.07	1.20	1.46
Cronbach's Alpha	.90	.87	.88	.93	.71

Note. $N = 262$. *** $p < .001$. * $p < .05$.

Multiple Regression

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine how perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram predicts drive for muscularity (Model 1), low body fat (Model 2) and height (Model 3).

Multicollinearity was assessed via tolerance scores, which were greater than .1 (Nakarami, 2024). Normality was assessed via the Shapiro-Wilk Test, showing normal distribution for standardised and unstandardised residuals ($p > .05$; Yang & Berdine, 2021). Linearity was assessed via scatterplots, with no indication of u-shaped/curved patterns.

Model 1 accounted for 9.6% of the variance in drive for muscularity ($R^2 = .096$, $f(2,259) = 13.76$, $p < .001$). Non-display of imperfection significantly contributed to the model. Perfectionistic self-promotion did not significantly contribute to the model (see Table 2).

Model 2 accounted for 2.0% of the variance in low body fat ($R^2 = .020$, $f(2,259) = 2.64$, $p = .073$). Non-display of imperfection and perfectionistic self-promotion did not significantly contribute to the model (see Table 2).

Model 3 accounted for 11.0% of the variance in height ($R^2 = .110$, $f(2,259) = 16.08$, $p < .001$). Non-display of imperfection and perfectionistic self-promotion did not significantly contribute to the model (see Table 2).

**Table 2***Summary of Multiple Regression Predicting Body Dissatisfaction.*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Model 1 (Drive for Muscularity)				
Perfectionistic Self-Promotion	-.006	.008	-.074	.490
Non-Display of Imperfection	.031	.009	.368	< .001
Model 2 (Low Body Fat)				
Perfectionistic Self-Promotion	.016	.010	.182	.102
Non-Display of Imperfection	-.005	.011	-.052	.638
Model 3 (Height)				
Perfectionistic Self-Promotion	.021	.011	.191	.072
Non-Display of Imperfection	.018	.012	.156	.140

Note. $N = 262$. b = Unstandardised Coefficient. SE = Standard Error. β = Standardised Coefficient. P = Significance Value.

DISCUSSION

I examined the relationship between perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram and body dissatisfaction in young men. I found that perfectionistic self-presentation was significantly associated with body dissatisfaction, and non-display of imperfection was the most important unique predictor for drive for muscularity.

I expected that men who present themselves as perfect on Instagram would be less satisfied with their bodies, via a greater drive for muscularity. I found support for this positive association, aligning with previous work examining trait perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation offline (Hicks et al., 2022; Grugan et al., 2023; Patarinski et al., 2023). I furthered these previous findings, suggesting that perfectionistic self-presentation predicts drive for muscularity online, as well as offline. Moreover, I found that non-display of imperfection on Instagram was the most important dimension, in line with previous findings examining women's body satisfaction (Milson et al., 2024).

I also expected that men who present themselves as perfect on Instagram will report greater desire for taller stature. I found support for this positive association, supporting previous research examining trait perfectionism (Grammas et al., 2009). However, I expanded on previous work, suggesting that the contribution of perfectionism goes beyond traits and offline contexts.

Finally, I expected that men who present themselves as perfect on Instagram will report greater desire for low body fat. I found that perfectionistic self-promotion was positively associated with desire for low body fat, aligning with previous research (Grammas et al., 2009; Grugan et al., 2023; Tiggemann et al., 2020). At odds with expectations, perfectionistic self-presentation overall did not predict desire for low body fat. One explanation may be that these



effects could flow in the reverse direction, as Milson et al. (2024) suggest that women who are less satisfied with their bodies may be more likely to promote perfection on Instagram. This may also be the case for young men, i.e., men who are dissatisfied with their bodies may promote their perfection on Instagram, in pursuit of validation (via likes/comments), in line with the transactional model of social media and body concerns (Perloff, 2014). Therefore, longer-term follow-ups are needed to confirm temporal precedence. The limited sociocultural diversity in the present sample may provide another explanation. Research suggests that gay men are more likely to restrict their eating to promote leanness, whereas straight men tend to restrict to promote muscularity (Knight et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2011). As nearly three-quarters of the present sample identified as straight, this may explain why perfectionistic self-presentation was positively associated with drive for muscularity but not drive for low body fat. Future research should increase sociocultural diversity to examine this further.

IMPLICATIONS

My findings highlight that young man who present perfection on Instagram are more dissatisfied with their bodies. Perfectionistic self-presentation may be a useful target for intervention for clinicians working with young men experiencing body image/eating issues, as addressing underlying perfectionistic self-presentation can lead to greater treatment outcomes (Dalle Grave et al., 2021; Fairburn, 2008; Shafran et al., 2018). Moreover, Instagram use could be used to assess underlying perfectionistic self-presentation in body dissatisfaction, and treat these behaviours via psychoeducation, social media literacy and short-term cognitive behavioural interventions (Curran et al., 2019).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although my findings provide initial support for the importance of examining perfectionistic self-presentation on Instagram, these findings are tentative, due to the cross-sectional design. Longitudinal data is required to understand temporal precedence and examine these relationships over time (Caruana et al., 2015).

Perfectionistic men wish to present themselves as flawless (Hewitt et al., 2017), which may limit the use of self-report measures due to social desirability bias. Future research should use observations and controlled experiments.

I recruited men aged 18-34 years, as men within this age range use Instagram most frequently (Dixon, 2025). However, there may be variance in relation to body image (e.g., older men may experience greater body satisfaction than younger men; McGuinness & Taylor, 2016) and social media use (Hruska & Maresova, 2020). I found a small negative correlation between age and Height, and no correlation between age and the other body dissatisfaction and perfectionistic self-presentation dimensions. Thus, the diversity of ages in the present sample did not appear to affect findings; however, future research should examine narrower age ranges and control for age effects (Henrich et al., 2010).

CONCLUSION

In the present study, I examined perfectionistic Instagram use and found that young men who present themselves as perfect on Instagram (particularly concealing the display of imperfection) are more dissatisfied with their bodies. I, thus, find initial evidence that this may



be a useful way of conceptualising perfectionistic self-presentation to further understand male body dissatisfaction, particularly regarding drive for muscularity and height.

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"Her Weight in Gold" by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris c. 1921.

HOW THE DOWRY SYSTEM CHECKS HYPERGAMY

Shah Mirza



ABSTRACT

Dowry and bride price represent a transfer of wealth made at the time of marriage. Dowry-practising societies are typically characterised as monogamous, stratified, and as valuing private-property land ownership. In dowry-practising civilisations, hypergamy is of greater concern. This article shows how the dowry system discouraged hypergamy and helped maintain an ecosystem of balanced and equal marriages, especially within a society so often characterised by monogamous marriage and private-property ownership. Perhaps it is time to revitalise some of the core principles of the dowry system, rather than continuing to blame men for “falling behind” or “not stepping up,” and insisting that men should be the ones tasked with the financial burden of marriage.

Keywords: dowry, hypergamy, marriage, monogamy, love



In our modern world, especially in the West, marriage is an expression of romantic love, something meant to validate a couple's affection for each other. This is what our more recent ancestors called a "love marriage" and what some in the East still call it today. Newspaper articles from even 100 years ago debate openly which type of union is better: the marriage of reason or the marriage of romance?

"You marry for love, even though your choice may displease your parents. We marry to please our parents, even though the choice may displease us. You consider our way as revolting, and we think yours is asking for trouble." (Peh Der Chen, 1932)

This idea that a marriage based on romantic love is unreasonable, and frankly irrational, would strike most people today as odd, and even insulting to our cultural values. It would evoke ideas of "only transactional relationships" or "only something the rich might do". In fact, it is usually those in our society who claim to be proponents of "traditionalism" and aim to "conserve Western values" who most often perpetuate this idea that marriage is simply about love between a man and a woman. They even take it a step further and say "a woman should never have to worry about finances, and that it is a man's job to provide everything as far as finances are concerned". The pressure of the heavy financial lifting is often placed solely on the man, with women only needing to work insofar as they feel an inclination or desire to do so.

However, this version of marriage is a more recent corruption of a system that is older, more consistent, and far more reliable for establishing a new familial unit on a solid foundation, something which has become increasingly rare in our modern age. That system of marriage, the marriage of *reason*, is the marriage type that was the norm during the era of the dowry-system. Dowry-based marriage is a system that compelled families to consider pragmatic factors and concerns when negotiating and bargaining for marriage. This system emphasised a financial "proposal" and subsequent negotiations, a necessity prior to marriage, which ensured men and women of similar status and rank were most likely to marry and encouraged checks on hypergamy. The aim of this article is to demonstrate how the dowry system discouraged hypergamy and helped to maintain an ecosystem of balanced and equal marriages, especially within a society so often characterised by monogamous marriage and private-property ownership.

Before we go further, it is necessary to define our terms. The Cambridge Dictionary defines *hypergamy* as "the fact or custom of marrying someone from a higher social class or position than yourself" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). This is contrasted to *hypogamy*, which is marriage into a lower caste, class, or social group (Merriam-Webster, 2025). Another source, Collins' dictionary, describes *hypergamy* as "any marriage with a partner of higher social status" (Collins, 2025). Then we have *isogamy*, which Oxford Reference dictionary defines as individuals of similar social statuses marrying each other (Oxford University Press, 2025). Isogamy is also used in a strictly biological sense to describe the fusion of similar gametes; however, for the purposes of this article, I will be using the prior definition that refers only to marriage. Another notable term is *endogamy*, this describes a marriage where men and women from families of equal social status marry, but



can also refer to marriages between people within a group such as a clan, lineage or religion (Anderson, 2007; Britannica, 2025). For the purposes of this article, I will be using the term *endogamy* to refer to men and women marrying within their own economic class.

The term *hypergamy* is increasingly used in popular culture, inaccurately, to describe relationships of equal or higher value, not always within marriage. Though this is accepted as a definition in popular media, it is incorrect in the strict sense. Hypergamy, in an academic sense, only applies to marriage. Relationships between two individuals from a different status may be related to hypergamous impulses, but the act of hypergamy has not been consummated until the marriage is made legal and recognised by society, thereby creating a new “conjugal fund” or “conjugal estate” in which both individuals have now become one economic unit that occupies the same social position or status as a family or household.

The word *dowry* is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the money or property the wife brings her husband; the portion given with the wife” (Oxford University Press, 2025). The dowry is one type of marriage transaction, which is sometimes confused with another type of marriage transaction, called a bride price (Hebrew ‘*mohar*’), which is featured in the Old Testament. The bride price (more appropriately renamed bridewealth by anthropologists) is different from the dowry in that it is an often-uniform amount, paid by the groom’s side to the bride’s family (Goody, 1973). This amount typically forms what is called a circulating fund, which then enables the receiving family to procure another bride for their family in order to offset the loss of their daughter. This is considerably different from the dowry, which is property or wealth endowed upon the bride at marriage, and represents her pre-mortem inheritance from her birth family’s estate (Goody, 1973). The dowry remains her property, with her husband often having usufruct of it (Goody, 1973). Unlike a bride price, which is more likely to be uniform, dowry amounts vary.

The bride price is primarily associated with polygynous societies (one man married to multiple women) as opposed to the dowry, which is by and large associated with monogamy (Goody, 1973). Using the data provided by the *World Ethnographic Atlas*, a comprehensive data set created by George Peter Murdock (Goody, 1973; Anderson, 2007), which includes data on subsistence practices, kinship structures, religious beliefs and political systems focused on pre-industrial societies, we see that out of 1167 pre-industrial societies, bride price occurs in two-thirds of them, and dowry occurs in only 4 per cent. However, in terms of greater population influence, dowry has played a far more significant role than bride price because the convention of dowry has occurred mainly in Europe and Asia, where more than 70 per cent of the world’s population resides (Anderson, 2007).

The societies in which dowry is a feature tend to share certain characteristics: income stratification, class differentiation, private-property ownership, advanced agricultural tools such as the plow (which relies more on male strength), monogamy and lower divorce rates (Goody, J. 1973, Anderson, 2007, Schlegel & Eloul, 1988). By contrast, bride price - seen more recently in



sub-Saharan Africa and in ancient times in the Near East, as corroborated by the Old Testament—is typically associated with societies that hold land corporately, possess less advanced agricultural tools (where women make a larger contribution to farming), exhibit little or no income stratification, and practice polygyny, often with higher rates of divorce (Goody, 1973; Anderson, 2007; Schlegel & Eloul, 1988).

Keeping these characteristics in mind, it is then clearer to see how hypergamy is of greater concern in dowry-paying societies but not so much in bride price-paying societies. The very existence of class differences and income stratification among individuals, particularly among men, creates a scenario in which families are concerned with seeking high status grooms for their daughters. In a pre-industrial scenario, where male labour is worth more than female labor economically, it becomes necessary to endow one's daughter with a commensurate amount of assets in order to put her on a similar status with a prospective groom from a similar status background as her own family (Goody, 1973; Kaplan, 1985). This ensures that one's daughter, and consequently family, can cement their position and status in the class hierarchy. It creates a bond between families and ensures that a daughter will be taken care of, be able to bear children (who will be direct beneficiaries of both partners' wealth through inheritance) and be able to enjoy a similar lifestyle that was afforded to her by her family (Schlegel & Eloul, 1988; Balwick, 1975).

What we see in this system is a bargaining between families in the marriage market. Daughters with large dowries are able to net higher-status grooms, and negotiations often centre around what contributions each person will be making to the newly formed conjugal fund (Anderson, 2007). Offers that are too low have a high chance of being rejected, whether that be a proposal from the groom's side or a proposal from the bride's. The topic of the dowry amount, as well as the groom's income and future inheritance prospects, are weighed against each other, and a decision is made. This is followed by the creation and signing of a marriage contract which details the amounts of contribution as well as expectations. The back-and-forth negotiations between families lead to a positive assortative matching between couples where, instead of hypergamy, we see, for the most part, isogamous (economically endogamous) unions being made. The bargaining process itself puts a check on hypergamy and keeps other factors, such as beauty or love, from being the centrepiece of a union. This bargaining and careful consideration is what is historically referred to as a *marriage of reason*.

This is made clear in looking at past legal documents such as marriage contracts, wills, or even court cases. In the book, *Marriage and Love in England: 1300 – 1840*, a discussion on average dowry amounts in England is given and broken down by class. Here is a relevant excerpt:

The overall value of this portion varied enormously, both between social levels and over time. Among the upper gentry the sums involved were very considerable: Evelyn mentions portions of £3,000 and £8,000 going with brides, and Thomas Isham, a Northampton-shire gentleman, paid a total of at least £4,000 with his three daughters.” At both this level and that of the aristocracy, the sums seem to be equivalent to about three years' income from



the man's estate.' The same sort of ratio seems to have occurred at the level of wealthy yeomen, traders and the 'middling' sort. Thus, Josselin gave his three daughters portions varying between £240 and £500 apiece, the clergyman—yeoman Giles Moore gave his daughter about £300, and a northern yeoman states that he had £300 with the girl he married. With annual incomes of between £50 and £100 in the seventeenth century, these were probably again roughly equivalent to three years' income. At the husbandman level, as far as we can yet see, a sum of between £10 and £50 was considered reasonable. Between 1550-1720, in Lupton, near Kirkby Lonsdale, where most of the inhabitants were husbandmen, out of 39 portions mentioned as being given to daughters (though not specifically tied to marriage), 33 were under £20. In Earls Colne between 1550 and 1800, of thirteen portions the mode (four cases) was between £40 and £50. The rest were widely distributed. These seem smaller sums in relation to annual income — probably one or two years' on average. Likewise, though it is very difficult to find evidence, the portion of a labourer's child was probably even smaller, perhaps one to five pounds at the most. The really poor would probably have no portion. (Macfarlane, 1986)

The above excerpt is just one example among many that demonstrates the character of the dowry. We can see that the dowry amount varies by class and that certain amounts, give or take a small adjustment, are required in order to bargain for and obtain a suitable match. A failure to provide this amount would lead to the rejection of not only a 'hypergamous' proposal, but also an isogamous one. Take this excerpt from the same source quoted above:

"The situation was particularly difficult, as one diarist observed, if a poorer family married into a richer one; the poorer family might well have difficulties trying to provide an adequate portion for their daughters. This is exactly how a check on marriage would occur." (Macfarlane, 1986)

This situation highlights the cost of hypergamy. If one family desired to marry their daughter to a higher-status groom, and thereby increase the prestige of their own family, their daughter would need to be endowed with an even larger dowry than otherwise would have been the case if she was to be married to a groom with a similar class status as her own.

From this example we can see that when hypergamy did occur, it was accommodated for and made balanced by the requirement of a corresponding dowry. The same was true in the reverse scenario: if a man had little income and not much of an expected inheritance, he too would be rejected since his contribution would not be commensurate with the prospective bride's endowment. Jack Goody, in his book *Bridewealth and Dowry*, observes:

"Dowry transactions place a premium on the matching contributions of the spouses. What women and men bring, either in concrete dowry or in inheritance chances, vary, although among conjugal pairs these tend to match." (Goody, 1973)



This quote shows that the back-and-forth bargaining between prospective spouses and their representatives leads to a positive assortative matching as matches form between economic equals. In his paper, *“Romantic Love or Material Interest: Choosing Partners in Nineteenth Century Germany,”* Peter Borscheid echoes the same sentiments as Goody above. Borscheid uses data from the seventeenth century through the early twentieth century, made available by the *Law of Succession*, which required “all citizens, rich and poor alike, to have a certificate drawn up by a public notary that itemised all the possessions brought into the marriage”. Borscheid discusses his results in this excerpt:

If we diagram the net values of assets brought into the marriage by both husband and wife in the pre-Romantic period [...], the nominal pairs form a cluster about the nearest-fit axis. We can see that people married in accordance with their economic and social status, seldom beneath or above it. The marriage market functioned strictly in compliance with economic rules. People tried to sell themselves at the best possible price and buy themselves in at a bargain price. As far as possible, all men aimed at marrying wealthy women and all women rich men. Nobody wanted to marry below standard because that would have entailed more work, more poverty, and a shorter lifespan. Since nobody wished to go down the scale, nobody went up either. A partner of equal standing was chosen for marriage, especially because marrying a rich woman would have diminished the man’s dominant position as breadwinner in the house. The marriage strategies of craftsmen, businessmen, civil servants, farmers, and labourers obviously served to stabilise the social structure of the towns and villages. To marry without consideration of the financial side of the relationship was considered foolish and unrealistic. (Borscheid, 1986)

This discussion helps shed light on how the dowry checks hypergamy. It takes something which can be argued is a natural impulse within *all* humans, men and women both, to seek a hypergamous match, or at the very least bargain for the best deal while trying to spend no more than is absolutely necessary. This leads to a system where hypergamy is pitted against hypergamy and results in isogamy, since if we assume the bargainers are rational actors using reason to negotiate, they will guard against being taken advantage of in the market. This can be observed in all dowry-practising societies, whether it be ancient Athens, Renaissance Italy, colonial Brazil, or even as recently as 1970s Cyprus.

The discussion of dowry tends to lead us to the question of family involvement in match selection for the individuals getting married. For a woman to have a dowry in the first place, and for men and women to marry at a young age, involvement from the family is necessary, especially in a world where class mobility, higher paying jobs, cheap rents and birth control were not the norm, and where it would be necessary for a greater pragmatism to be employed in marriage choice as opposed to giving way to passion and fancy. Wealth accumulation was conducted in a family-centric manner, with daughters of the poorer classes being required to work, even outside of the home, to save the minimum amount for marriage (Macfarlane, 1986). If no dowry was saved, a



woman could not expect to marry. Young women would have to work in the homes of well-to-do families to save for a dowry, along with other members of her family laboring to contribute as well, sometimes even leading to a delay in the marriage of male siblings (Goody, 1973; Macfarlane, 1986). Charities were often set up by the church or wealthy aristocrats to help poor girls obtain a dowry (Macfarlane, 1986). For families higher up on the class hierarchy, considerable pressure was still felt by the amounts expected of them to be paid as a dowry if they desired to remain at the same status level, and especially if they desired to move up in status, as mentioned earlier. Here another excerpt from Macfarlane's book is relevant:

It is clear from the descriptions of wedding contracts, from court cases, from wills and from other documents that, as in Josselin's case, a girl would often receive a lump sum as her portion or part of her parents' estate. While sons would have to wait for this until the parents' death, daughters would receive their share at or before marriage. It was recognised that this would put a strain on parents. There was a contemporary saying, 'Children are careful comforts, though good, daughters when marriageable, especially.'" The situation was particularly difficult, as one diarist observed, if a poorer family married into a richer one; the poorer family might well have difficulties trying to provide an adequate portion for their daughters.' This is exactly how a check on marriage would occur. If a daughter wanted to marry young, she would have to forfeit a chance of a large portion. Her parents could not stop her marrying, but they could point out that not much capital had been accumulated and she would thus be able to bring less to the marriage. The likelihood was that she would not obtain a good 'match', unless outstanding beauty, temperament or chance aided her. If her parents had married at 25, it was likely that only in their late fifties would they have accumulated enough to marry off their daughters. To give them each a good portion at the age of 15 (the mean age at marriage in many traditional societies) would have left them deprived of a substantial part of their estate. (Macfarlane, 1986)

Therefore, as the amount of dowry went up in value alongside class status, the family's involvement in the choice of spouse increased because the stakes in the bargain went up. These higher stakes in the deal would incentivise actors to make the rational choice, rather than an emotional one. This transfer, usually public knowledge, would help cement the status and prestige of both families, enabling them to demand a dowry of similar value for other members ready to be married.

This transfer also helped to set up the new conjugal unit to enable them to marry younger, set up an enterprise, obtain a house, and procreate (Balwick, 1975). With so much on the line, families tended to exercise more influence in the mate choice of their sons and daughters who, as young people are wont to do, would be more easily persuaded by passion in mate selection. However, with the threat of disinheritance, the young men and women of the past had strong incentives to obey the wishes of their parents (Nazarri, 1991).



Love marriages, then, becoming popular only more recently, can be seen as a result of economic prosperity and the advancement of technology. If life outside of one's parents' home became more obtainable without the reliance on the parental estate, then one could have more latitude when choosing a spouse (Balwick, 1975). We can see this process unfold in recent centuries, even being documented in newspapers as entire societies grappled with the abandonment of traditional dowry-based marriage in favour of love marriages (Elam & Mirza, 2025). One such article titled "*Romance Versus Reason*," published 1906 in the Liverpool Evening Express, compares and contrasts the new love model of marriage in England against the traditional dowry model still being practised in neighbouring France:

Many couples undoubtedly marry under the glamour of love, thinking only of their immediate happiness and regardless altogether of what may follow the honeymoon or the first few years of married life. Perhaps the one drawback about our marriage system is that English parents, who are as well able to give their daughters dowries as are French parents, do not do so because they are able to marry their daughters without dowries. They forget that here is where a little reason would help the romance, by increasing the comforts of the newly-married pair and so minimising the chance of subsequent unhappiness. (Liverpool Evening Express, 1906)

Or this article from 1923 titled "*Dowries for Girls*" published in the Daily Mirror which expresses a similar sentiment:

Surely the dowry system has, as your contributor suggests, one great advantage. It enables a woman to claim that she brought something into the family. This gives her independence. Many Englishmen are proud of marrying penniless girls, and they consider the French plan "ungallant." For a portionless girl in France has much less chance of getting married than one with a dowry. This boast of Englishmen would be better justified if so many of them did not turn round after marriage and reproach their wives for having brought them no money. B. H. L." (Daily Mirror, 1923)

Another article, this time by an American writer Laura Jean Libbey, titled "*The Dot and The Dowry*" published in the Chicago Tribune in 1912, grapples with the vestiges of the dowry still present in the corners of American culture. Her article gives us a look at the transition period between marriages of reason and marriages of romance:

In a number of countries, of which the United States ranks first, love is the prime consideration leading to wedlock, while money and place take the back seat.

Yet Americans are not wholly free from the system which puts a cash consideration upon the marriage contract. Many of our young men and women are looking for title, wealth, and social position, instead of the greatest of all gifts—the gift of love.



Here we get a brief window into a time period where society is deciding whether it can afford to release the checks once placed on hypergamy. She goes on to write:

There was a time when love played little or no part in the uniting of men and women. If love came into their lives, it developed after they had married and lived and toiled together. Love then, like the century plant, took a long time to grow.

Civilisation, in my opinion, has had much to do with the elimination of the custom. Among the primitive peoples of bygone days, love was unknown. Marriages then were universally arranged.

I am emphasising this point, not so much to show that American marriage customs are wiser and better than those of other peoples, but to help and encourage girls who write telling me they have no fortunes to bring their husbands and to young men who complain they love girls who are rich. To these girls and men I want to say that our country is a democracy, which means we meet each other on a footing of equality, taking little cognisance of birth and wealth. Ninety per cent of the marriages in this country yearly are love matches.

In this country whatever a man's wealth and social position are, if he asks a girl to become his wife it is because he loves her. He is not looking for any money settlement—he is going to provide for the girl he wants to make his wife.

From this we can better understand how recent a development the love match really is. Compared to the scope of civilized human history the love match is a recent aberration, the fruits of which are plain to see; a high divorce rate, an epidemic of single mothers, a family law system which is inextricably linked with a robust welfare machine whose main purpose, it can be argued, is to serve as a wealth transfer mechanism from primarily men to primarily women through child support and no-fault divorce. As society began to turn its back on the dowry system, which built the great civilisation we are a part of, in favour of a marriage based mostly on romance as the centrepiece, with no regard for or expectation of a matching financial contribution from women, families began to cede authority to the state.

The dowry system allowed families to self-regulate reproduction without the state's constant intervention, and its focus on material contributions from both parties ensured that a new family had the tangible means to succeed. However, as romance became the prime consideration for marriage, hypergamous impulses were encouraged on one side, the women, as evidenced from the excerpt above, and the other party's hypergamous impulses, the man's, were shamed for even being a consideration. This leads to marriages which are not endogamous or isogamous, but rather fundamentally hypergamous, as only one party is expected to provide and the other is meant only to be an object of love. In *"The Function of The Dowry System in a Rapidly Modernising Society: The Case of Cyprus,"* written in 1975, almost twenty years before Cyprus abolished the dowry, Jack Balwick presciently wrote:



One can only conjecture as to the possible effect which a decline in the dowry system will have on marriage. Whereas a more individualistically oriented method of mate selection may make for more meaningful marriage relationships, such an emphasis is also likely to increase the divorce rate. The ideology behind the dowry system emphasises marriage as a contractual agreement between two people and their families. The individualistic ideology behind romantic love and personal mate selection emphasises the personal happiness of the two people involved in the marriage. This later emphasis demands more giving and sharing of oneself, which is characteristic of an affectionate or companionship marriage relationship. Since personal happiness is held as a high value, if the husband and the wife no longer find affection and companionship from their marriage relationship, they most likely question the wisdom of attempting to continue in their marriage. With an individualistic emphasis in marriage, when affection is gone, the main reason for the marriage relationship disappears. (Balwick, 1975)

Unlike Balwick at the time of this writing, we now have a much clearer view. The consequences of abandoning marriages of reason are all around us. One need only look. Now that the fruits of modernisation are no longer as abundant as they once were at its start, we are seeing the cost of living increase significantly, the days of cheap rents being only a memory, as well as seeing wages stagnating and the value of college degrees lowering. Even the value of marriage itself has been lowered, as no-fault divorce has made marriage a shell of what it once was. The cost of individualism has become more than most can afford.

Perhaps then, it is time to revitalise some of the core principles of the dowry system in order to help families accommodate these changes, rather than continuing to blame men for “falling behind” or “not stepping up” and continuing to insist that men should be the ones tasked with the financial burden of marriage. In recent times we have seen men walking away from marriage, many believing that it is not worth it financially, instead opting to remain bachelors. Resurrecting aspects of the dowry system, a “dowry ethos,” could incentivize men to marry, by investing in them when they need it most, allowing men the time they need to grow into the providers those traditional conservatives say they want men to be, while also helping young couples navigate the new economy, and also allowing parents to have a greater influence over their children and helping to incentivize them towards decisions based on pragmatism rather than passion.



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AUTHOR PROFILE



Shah Mirza earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of California, Davis in 2012, with a focus on ancient political theory and international relations. He has worked primarily within government, specialising in the Child Support Enforcement Program, where he has gained insight into the operation and impact of modern family law. His research and collaborative projects include work with academics such as Stephen Baskerville and men's issues researchers including Paul Elam and Peter Wright. Shah has contributed to public discussions on family law, welfare policy, and historical marriage practices, joining prominent commentators on YouTube and other platforms. He hosts his own YouTube channel, [This Is Shah](#), where he continues to explore and discuss these topics.

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Roughhouse Magazine

Roughhouse Magazine is a return to a better time for boy's magazines. Inspired by the "Boy's Own" magazines of the 1800s and Scout Life's older issues, we aim to form today's boys into tomorrow's men by grounding them in the real. Every issue of *Roughhouse* is beautiful, sturdy, and crafted with care, filled with stories of heroism, projects, and games.



Photo courtesy of Roughhouse Magazine: <https://roughhousemag.com/>

ROUGHHOUSE MAGAZINE: FORMATION BY IMITATION

Dominic Andres



ABSTRACT

Roughhouse Magazine is a monthly publication for boys aged 10–18, developed in response to a perceived shortage of trustworthy, engaging, and formative reading material for male readers. This brief report explains the literary influences behind the magazine, its educational purpose, and its use of imitation as a model for character formation. It describes how historical and fictional stories, science and mechanics articles, projects, and games are combined to encourage virtue, curiosity, creativity, and participation beyond digital screens. The article also reflects on the challenges of establishing the publication as a sustainable business and argues that independent print media can offer families a constructive alternative within youth culture while supporting reading habits and meaningful engagement between boys and their families.

Keywords: boys' literature, character formation, youth media, reading, Roughhouse Magazine



The Author's Formation

Most endeavours are pushed into reality by a number of motivations, all of which underlie the actual project, but which come into being at different points in its life. *Roughhouse Magazine*, the new monthly publication for boys ages 10-18, got an identity of its own on a day I do not remember, likely in one of those moments of passing thought that often assail one on a walk, or while listening to music, or even as a daydream. Its true origins, however, lie years earlier. My family is a family of readers, and a quite traditional family, and so I grew up reading a great deal of somewhat older literature for boys. I have early memories of reading the *Tintin* series of Comics by Belgian author Hergé, of paging through volumes of WWII-era British comics and stories, and of positively devouring Louis L'Amour Westerns and Alistair MacLean adventure novels.

I also grew up reading magazines. The *LEGO Club Magazine* was a constant source of excitement - I would check the mailbox each day waiting for it to come.

So, it was quite natural, really, when, some months ago, I realised it would be an excellent thing if there were some magazines that boys could look forward to, that families could trust, and that contained writing that was actually worth reading. The magazines I grew up reading, after all, were really not worth much. *Boy's Life* and *Lego Club* were things I looked forward to, but when I actually received them, I would page through to the few sections I truly enjoyed, skipping much of duller contents. They were filled mostly with bright images and banal information, and little that was of interest to an active, imaginative boy.

I approached my brother with the magazine idea, and when he, a strong skeptic of commercial ideas, said that not only would he actually pay for such a publication, but he thought many others would as well, I knew I had something.

Formation as Purpose

While my motivation in creating *Roughhouse* is not entirely unselfish, as the opportunity to make a living writing things I enjoy is a great opportunity, neither do I do this work just for myself. A magazine of this sort is something badly needed, both by boys and by their parents. In our current culture, where much of the media and literature is either filled with sexual themes and content or passive and effeminate, literature which parents can give their children without hesitation is a rare thing, and the guarantee of monthly reading material that is clean, enjoyable, and exciting is a gift I would greatly like to provide. Beyond the power to occupy children safely, however, is education. Reading is a deeply formative activity, and good formation is something badly lacking these days. Further, children, and teen and preteen boys especially, are rightly sceptical of explicitly educational content. That's why I think a turn to literature as a formative medium will be of great help to parents.



Formation by Imitation

If you are what you eat, your mind is what you read. Man, after all, is an imitative creature. We create by imitation, and we are created by it. As I've written elsewhere, art is fundamentally imitative, re-creating the natural world through reason and imagination, and producing something new that emphasises what is of importance. That emphasis on the essential elements of the world is the main way that we learn by imitation, at least in the context of literature (of course, the examples of language and moral formation from role models are also important). Hence, providing children with stories that inspire them, and with an avenue to act out that inspiration, are key to building up the next generations of men. *Roughhouse Magazine* is written to do exactly that, and this is the secondary motivation I referred to above, one which came about later on, but which now guides the entire publication process. The magazine contains stories, both historical and fictional, written to inspire a love of virtue, honour, and heroism. It follows that up with articles on science and mechanics, and with projects that allow boys to live what they've seen by building and experimenting. Finally, each issue contains a number of games to be played, from sports to card games, to provide something constructive and enjoyable they can do in the real world, providing them something other than iPad screens.

Forming the Business, and the Future

None of this is possible, as I'm sure you know, for free. Building a business has been a fascinating project for me, and there are a number of elements in this. Much of that is generic: building a website (you can visit it here, and subscribe: <https://roughhousemag.com>), finding printers, and so on. Other elements are more exciting: *Roughhouse Magazine*, if it succeeds, need not be the end of this project of formation, and I hope to eventually produce more than just periodicals. Either way, however, this work has filled me with real optimism for the future of men, and of our society and culture. There are many more good men building good things than I had initially thought. I believe the future lies in developing parallel institutions that rely less on the façade of the digital and ethereal and more on the true, the good, the beautiful and the real.

AUTHOR PROFILE



Dominic Andres is the editor and publisher of *Roughhouse Magazine*, a new publication inspired by the *Boy's Own* magazines of the 19th century. He also writes fiction and non-fiction and has been published by Altitude Press, Catholic Exchange, and others. His past work includes essays on philosophy and politics, coverage of scientific advancements, and historical narrative.

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Photo by Pavel Danilyuk: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/a-man-in-yellow-hoodie-sitting-on-black-leather-chair-eating-popcorn-7234267/>

WHEN DID HOLLYWOOD MAKE MOVIES THAT MEN ACTUALLY WANTED TO WATCH?

David Maywald



ABSTRACT:

Hollywood used to produce films that appealed to men (and to women, and to children). But it has been a quarter-century since the last big cluster of films that were made for men, around 1999. The lost decade of woke Hollywood has been a desert for positive depictions of masculinity, with superficial strong female leads and diversity-washing that has crowded out any space for healthy masculinity. The weak box office for woke movies has forced the studios to curtail their unpopular product, amidst a corporate and social retreat from DEI.

Keywords: cinema, film, Hollywood, males, men



In December 2024, I posted this question to LinkedIn and to Facebook: “What are the all-time best movies for men?” and shared a long list of suggested ideas. These posts received dozens of comments, especially suggestions of movies that men like to watch (and films that they recommend to other men). This prompted the creation of a small database of movie titles, to which I added the year of their release.

David Maywald • You
Non-Executive Director and advocate for positive social change
2mo • Edited •

What are the all-time best movies for men?

Some ideas are: Dead Poets Society; Fight Club; Seven Samurai; Saving Private Ryan; Star Wars (original trilogy); Top Gun, Life Is Beautiful; Dirty Harry; Shine; Tropic Thunder; Good Will Hunting; Black Panther; Full Metal Jacket; Rainman; Apocalypse Now; The Good, The Bad and The Ugly; Singin' in the Rain; James Bond series; Gallipoli; Memento; Patch Adams; Goodfellas; A Few Good Men; Grand Theft Auto; Shawshank Redemption; Godfather; Strictly Ballroom; Citizen Kane; The Matrix; Lord of the Rings; Office Space; Gladiator; Casablanca; L.A. Confidential; There Will Be Blood; Die Hard; Terminator; Mad Max; Rocky series; The Truman Show; Rush Hour; Scarface; Mrs Doubtfire; The Wild Bunch; American Beauty; 300; Pulp Fiction; 12 Years a Slave; Crocodile Dundee; 2001: A Space Odyssey; A Clockwork Orange; Alien; The Great Escape; Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid; The Endless Summer; Good Morning, Vietnam; Bull Durham; Hoosiers; Last of the Mohicans; The Bicycle Thief; Field of Dreams; North by Northwest; The Outsiders; Rambo; The Manchurian Candidate; In the Heat of the Night; Double Indemnity; Mar Adentro (The Sea Inside); The Maltese Falcon; Gandhi; Rebel Without a Cause...

Paul Rogers and 13 others 19 comments

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Glad you included Mrs Doubtfire. Only people who don't understand the pain of forced separation from their children regard this movie as a comedy.

Support · 5 · Reply · 3 Replies

David Maywald
3 December 2024

What are the all-time best movies for men?

Some ideas are: Dead Poets Society; Fight Club; Seven Samurai; Saving Private Ryan; Star Wars (original trilogy); Top Gun, Life Is Beautiful; Dirty Harry; Shine; Tropic Thunder; Good Will Hunting; Black Panther; Full Metal Jacket; Rainman; Apocalypse Now; The Good, The Bad and The Ugly; Singin' in the Rain; James Bond series; Gallipoli; Memento; Patch Adams; Goodfellas; A Few Good Men; Grand Theft Auto; Shawshank Redemption; Godfather; Strictly Ballroom; Citizen Kane; The Matrix; Lord of the Rings; Office Space; Gladiator; Casablanca; L.A. Confidential; There Will Be Blood; Die Hard; Terminator; Mad Max; Rocky series; The Truman Show; Rush Hour; Scarface; Mrs Doubtfire; The Wild Bunch; American Beauty; 300; Pulp Fiction; 12 Years a Slave; Crocodile Dundee; 2001: A Space Odyssey; A Clockwork Orange; Alien; The Great Escape; Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid; The Endless Summer; Good Morning, Vietnam; Bull Durham; Hoosiers; Last of the Mohicans; The Bicycle Thief; Field of Dreams; North by Northwest; The Outsiders; Rambo; The Manchurian Candidate; In the Heat of the Night; Double Indemnity; Mar Adentro (The Sea Inside); The Maltese Falcon; Gandhi; Rebel Without a Cause...

16 48 comments

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Michael Vogt
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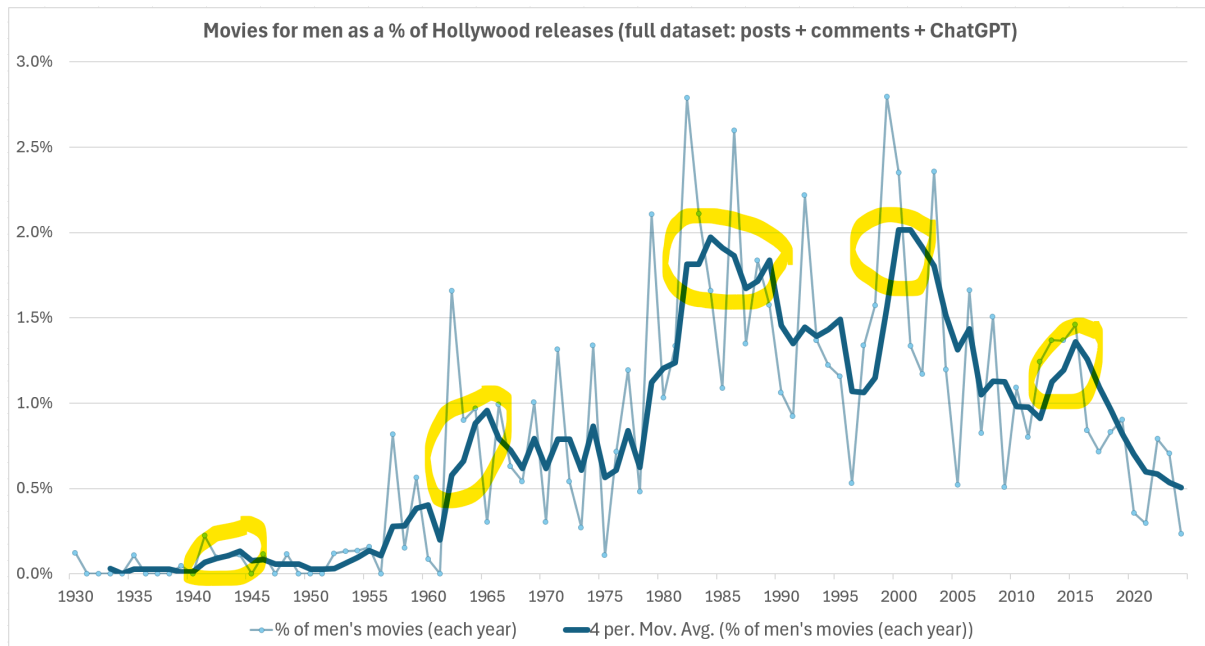
Chris Harris
Over the top
Blues brothers
Gran Torino

In addition to the suggested movies and social media comments, I used ChatGPT to scour for the best movies according to men, films that are popular with male audiences, and positive depictions of masculinity in movies. Several different prompts along these lines were used, with iterations in order to attain movie titles. There is a heavy recency bias in the generative AI results (due to much more digital information being available during the last couple of decades), with ChatGPT skewing towards movies in the early-2010s and late-1990s, while the comments and posts skewed towards the 1980s and the late-1990s.

In total, 540 movies were mentioned, with release dates from 1930 through to 2024. They have been sorted by the year of release to analyse how the prevalence of men's movies has varied over time. My subjective interpretation of the data is that there have been two epic periods for movies that appeal to men (the biggest one during the 1980s, and the second largest



just before the turn of the century), along with three other periods of important depictions of masculinity (the end of WWII, early-1960s, and the early-2010s).



The raw number of movies each year was divided by estimates of the number of Hollywood releases in that year, which fell from high levels during the 1930s/1940s, plateaued at low levels in the 1960s/1970s, and then slightly grew during subsequent decades. Annual data is quite “noisy”, going up and down from year to year. Hence, moving averages were used to identify peaks in the data (3-year, 4-year, 5-year, and 10-year averages were used, with the 4-year average presented above in bold).

For each of these five periods, here is a sample of movies released, including notable titles that are highlighted in green.

1. Winning the war effort during the early to mid-1940s. Positive depictions of Allied masculinity were important to drive motivation for English-speaking forces and their supporters at home. Examples such as *Citizen Kane*, *Casablanca*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*.

1st period from early to mid-1940s	
<i>Citizen Kane</i>	1941
<i>The Maltese Falcon</i>	1941
<i>Casablanca</i>	1942
<i>Double Indemnity</i>	1944
<i>It's a Wonderful Life</i>	1946

2. Baby Boomers coming of age during the early 1960s. Passing on Western culture, social norms, and history during the post-war boom. This era saw the first three James Bond films released, along with *Lawrence of Arabia*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Zulu*, and *The Great Escape*.



2nd period during the early-1960s	
Dr. No (first three James Bond films)	1962
The Manchurian Candidate	1962
Lawrence of Arabia	1962
The Longest Day	1962
To Kill a Mockingbird	1962
From Russia with Love	1963
The Great Escape	1963
Goldfinger	1964
Zulu	1964

3. The greatest period of movies for men, from the early to late 1980s. From adventure to inspiration to romance, this golden era of men's films had everything. Featuring Top Gun, Die Hard, Blade Runner, Terminator, Platoon, Indiana Jones, Rain Man, and Dead Poets Society.

3rd period from the early to late-1980s (the greatest era of movies for men)	
Blade Runner	1982
First Blood (Rambo)	1982
Gandhi	1982
Rocky III	1982
Octopussy	1983
Scarface	1983
Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi	1983
The Outsiders	1983
Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom	1984
Repo Man	1984
The Terminator	1984
A View to a Kill	1985
Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome	1985
Rambo: First Blood Part II	1985
Rocky IV	1985
Aliens	1986
America	1986
Crocodile Dundee	1986
Hoosiers	1986
Platoon	1986
The Mission	1986
Top Gun	1986
Full Metal Jacket	1987
Good Morning, Vietnam	1987
Over the Top	1987
Predator	1987
The Living Daylights	1987
Bull Durham	1988
Die Hard	1988
Mr. North	1988
Rain Man	1988
Rambo III	1988
The Big Blue	1988
The Chocolate War	1988
The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad!	1988
Dead Poets Society	1989
Field of Dreams	1989
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade	1989
Licence to Kill	1989
Road House	1989
When Harry Met Sally	1989
Weekend at Bernie's	1989

4. Positive masculinity and collaboration between the sexes during the late 1990s. This was generally an optimistic period of balanced perspectives. Epic movies such as The



Matrix, Fight Club, Saving Private Ryan, Gladiator, Life is Beautiful, Good Will Hunting, and The Castle.

4th period during the late-1990s (the second greatest era)	
Life Is Beautiful	1997
Good Will Hunting	1997
Tomorrow Never Dies	1997
L.A. Confidential	1997
Alien Resurrection	1997
The Castle	1997
Gattaca	1997
Saving Private Ryan	1998
Patch Adams	1998
The Truman Show	1998
Rush Hour	1998
Fight Club	1999
The World Is Not Enough	1999
The Matrix	1999
Office Space	1999
American Beauty	1999
Galaxy Quest	1999
Memento	2000
Gladiator	2000
Cast Away	2000
In the Mood for Love	2000

5. Darkening themes in the early-2010s, with a small peak in 2015 prior to the ascendancy of woke Hollywood. In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession, there are hints of zero-sum thinking in these releases. They feature Avengers, Hunger Games, The Hobbit, The Wolf of Wall Street, John Wick, The Dark Knight Rises, and Mad Max: Fury Road.

5th period during the early 2010s	
The Dark Knight Rises	2012
The Avengers	2012
The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey	2012
Django Unchained	2012
Hunger Games	2012
12 Years a Slave	2013
The Wolf of Wall Street	2013
The Equalizer	2014
John Wick	2014
Edge of Tomorrow	2014
Spectre	2015
Mad Max: Fury Road	2015
Creed	2015
The Revenant	2015

Movie reviewer *Critical Drinker* has explained in great detail why he believes that Hollywood hates men, here in conversation with Chris Williamson (Chris on left, Will Jordan on right):



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSY0SrJ8V2Y>



Critical Drinker - Why Does Hollywood Hate Men So Much?

 **Chris Williamson** 
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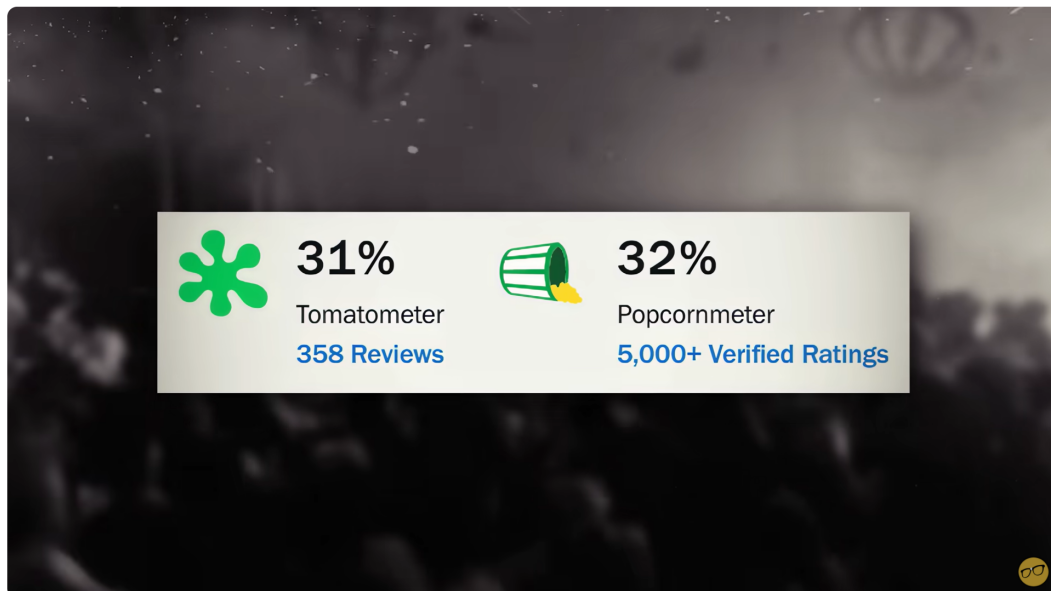
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Critical Drinker explains why Hollywood seems to have such distaste for men. Is Hollywood anti-masculinity? Why are there no male role models any more? What does the future of movie making have for men?

Influencer and film critic *Nerdrotic* has shone a huge spotlight onto identity politics and woke Hollywood, with an unflinching and entertaining style:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxBZ7jCB56U>



Top 5 Woke Hollywood DISASTERS of 2024

 **Nerdrotic** 
1.18M subscribers

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While this rudimentary analysis above has been able to locate several clusters of films that men enjoy and recommend to their friends, there is lots of scope to take this research approach much further. From hundreds of movie listings to thousands, gathering data from many more men, adding box office receipts, or segmenting the preferences of men by their age.

What are your favourite movies, and why?

The content creator *Life is a Story* points to *Platoon* as exemplifying the highest form of courage:

“*Platoon*, directed by Oliver Stone, has a special place in the Vietnam War movie canon. In *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse Now*, the main character doesn't have a moral force pulling them away from a lifestyle dictated by primal urges. In *Platoon*, Sgt. Elias becomes that positive force for Taylor. Eventually, Elias goes to war with his humourless foil, Sgt. Barnes, and the results are fascinating. Their war is over the definition of courage. Is bravery doing whatever it takes to secure victory, or is it standing up for what's right?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewpKCceclYik>



The Highest Form of Courage | What Platoon is Really About (Film Analysis)



Life Is A Story
101K subscribers



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13K



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512,401 views Jun 21, 2021 #platoon #vietnamwar #movies



AUTHOR PROFILE



David Maywald is father to a son and a daughter, and has been happily married for over a decade. Fatherhood brings added meaning to his life. He was a boy during the 1980s, a teenager during the 1990s, studied at the Australian National University, and then worked for two decades as an Investment Manager (specialising in research and analysis). He has served on boards as a Non-executive Director for almost three decades, with a governance portfolio that encompasses charities, foundations, and private businesses. David is proud to be a champion for boys and men, while also supporting girls and women. His book *The Relentless*

War on Masculinity was published on International Men's Day in 2025. International Men's Day has been held on November 19 every year since 1999.

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POLITICIZATION OF MEN'S ISSUES

Jerome Teelucksingh



ABSTRACT

For many years, men's issues in the Caribbean and across the globe have been forgotten or overlooked. The marginalization and alienation of men have contributed to premature deaths and mental health issues among men. In the 21st century, there has been a change as some progressive governments have sought to create separate institutions to address this shortcoming. The creation of these safe spaces for men often seems like tokenism because the problems facing men continue to persist. This is further complicated by men's groups that are feminist-oriented.

Keywords: male empowerment, Gender Affairs, Men's Bureau, feminist-oriented, marginalized, alienated



During the past decade, attempts have been made to assist men. In November 2024, the Office of the Prime Minister (Gender and Child Affairs), in Trinidad and Tobago (in the Caribbean), had the vision to establish a Men's Bureau (<https://www.ttt.live/mens-bureau-launched/>). This is certainly a vital platform for men's voices. It will complement the work of those who are championing the rights of males and helping create a better society. Indeed, the Bureau will certainly play a role in fostering a supportive environment for males who need help or feel marginalized. The Bureau must include connecting with boys and men in homes, schools, workplaces, communities, towns and villages.

The third and fourth of the Bureau's objectives require commentary: they are "To offer tailored programs that address mental health, employment, family life, and masculinity" and "To support national development goals by promoting gender equality and male empowerment."

These are noteworthy objectives, but how would these programs be assessed and funded? Furthermore, the diverse culture and family life of men would need special efforts to deal with issues of single fathers coping to raise children and fathers who have disabilities. In the fourth objective, the topic of male empowerment needs to be properly defined. How could men who are marginalized or alienated and ex-prisoners be returned to mainstream society?

The achievement of gender equality is a noble gesture. However, if men demand equality, they could be mocked. Men who demand their rights are often accused of being misogynistic or sexist. Some males who dare ask for respect of personal boundaries are often accused of trying to uphold patriarchy.

The creation of a Men's Bureau in any country has a crucial role to help develop and guide a generation of future men of substance and caliber. These positive male role models will demand justice and protect the weak and vulnerable. We need all hands-on deck to deal with the epidemic of violence, inequality, and other social problems.

In nearby Caribbean countries, there have been efforts to have an official representation of men. For instance, in Jamaica there is the Special Service Desk for Men, located at the offices of the Bureau of Gender Affairs. This special desk was established in 2016 and among its roles include "...parenting, health, education and the role of men in the elimination of violence against women, among others." Interestingly, no mention is made of the elimination of violence against men. The past achievements of this Special Desk include "hosting of school sensitization sessions, and community activities on domestic violence and other gender-related issues" (Heslop).

In Guyana, the Men Affairs Bureau was launched in 2011 to help males. Delivering the feature address at the launch was President of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo, who warned, "Even now, there's so much pressure on our boys and not just in school but in society. I think there's a big fear it's leading to the 'defeminization' of men.... If we don't have that



support we will succumb more and more to this process of ‘effeminization’ of men.” (Sutherland).

Progress in the Caribbean is not isolated. Nearby there is Men Engage Latin America, which has a network among twelve countries.

In the USA, there are a number of visionary and progressive groups. These include the International Council for Men and Boys based in Washington, DC. Also in the USA, there are not-for-profit groups such as the National Fatherhood Initiative that began in 1994. This group seeks to promote state or city initiatives and projects in which fathers are included.

Also making a noteworthy impact is A Coalition to Create a White House Council on Boys & Men, which addresses issues such as education, fatherlessness, emotional and physical health, and unemployment affecting males in the United States. In the United Kingdom, there are a number of men’s organizations, including the Men and Boys Coalition, that deal with issues affecting males in society. In 2024, the effectiveness of such organizations in influencing public policy is evident as Wes Streeting, the Health and Social Care Secretary in the UK, revealed plans for a men’s health strategy (Secretary of State commits to first ever men’s health strategy).

Whilst there have been successes among men’s groups in making a difference in public spaces, especially in addressing men’s issues, there are shortcomings. Firstly, in areas such as Iran and Palestine, there is no progress in dealing with men’s issues. Some of the men’s organizations are feminist-oriented. Secondly, troubling questions arise - is there an urgent need for countries to have a separate Boys’ Bureau or Special Service Desk for Boys that would focus on issues affecting boys? Or should the existing Men’s Bureau be renamed ‘Men and Boys Bureau’? And, are there sufficient financial resources in a Men’s Bureau or Men’s Department in a government agency to deal with issues affecting male teenagers?

Despite apparent shortcomings, credit must be given to the collaborations and potential of the Men’s Bureau of Trinidad and Tobago, and the work being achieved in other Caribbean countries. Organizations representing men have the potential to expand and be that catalyst to ensure governments become proactive in addressing their mental, emotional, and physical health. This self-awareness nurtured among the public, complemented with care, is important for our men to become holistic citizens capable of contributing to a better society.



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AUTHOR PROFILE



Jerome Teelucksingh is a men’s rights activist from Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean. He initiated the inaugural observances of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Men and Boys (31 January) and World Day of the Boy Child (16 May). He has published and spoken on masculinity, the men’s movement and challenges facing boys.



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