Hybrid Masculinities? A Thematic Analysis of Make-Up Advertisements for Men

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Abstract

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Nicole Romero

In contemporary society, men are exposed to a variety of conflicting narratives pertaining to masculinity (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). These narratives are prevalent in advertisements that are regularly accessible through popular and ever-expanding social media platforms (Leiss et al., 2018; Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). To better understand the nature of these narratives, this qualitative study seeks to analyze representations of masculinity and the norms that underlie them evident in contemporary men's makeup advertisements. The study consists of five key parts. First, it includes a literature review that provides an overview of scholarship on men's body modification practices, particularly as they relate to the skin and the face, highlighting the gaps in said scholarship and, by extension, the originality of my study. Second, the study presents a synthesis of the three most widely used theoretical frameworks in critical studies of men and masculinity, namely Connell's (1987,1995, 2005) framework of 'hegemonic masculinity', Bridges and Pascoe's (2014, 2018) framework of 'hybrid masculinity', and Anderson's (2012) framework of 'inclusive masculinity.' Third, I outline my method of choice which is reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021), and how I apply it to the study of 15 sample advertisements collected from YouTube and published between 2013 and 2023. Fourth, I present an analysis and discussion of my sample of men's makeup advertisements and how they both reinforce and redefine contemporary masculinity. And finally, I propose directions for future research on men's makeup advertisements in the context of current scholarly debates.

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Introduction

This thesis investigates how contemporary representations of men's makeup intersect with ongoing debates about the social construction of masculinity. The introductory remarks that follow situate the study within broader social and scholarly conversations about masculinity, identity, and embodiment as well as an overview of the study itself and how it is structured.

Context: Men's Body Modification Practices and the Crisis of Masculinity

Masculinity has become a prominent subject in both mainstream and academic discourses in the contemporary Western world, particularly over the past two decades (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). Gender roles and expectations—especially those associated with masculinity—are constantly evolving in a social context marked by rapid change (Atkinson, 2010). As a result, men are frequently required to adapt to shifting norms and rethink their gendered identities, a challenging process often characterized by considerable uncertainty.

Complicating this process are the conflicting perspectives on masculinity, as reflected in mainstream media and public debate. According to Lafrance and Hoebanx (2025), these perspectives often align with conservative and progressive ideological lines, each of which can be reductive in different ways. Conservative views typically uphold traditional male roles and treat men's traits as biologically rooted. Men are seen as naturally stoic, assertive, autonomous, and strong, which are qualities that supposedly position them for dominance in both workplace and family life. From this standpoint, deviation from conventional gender roles is often viewed with suspicion, and there is limited engagement with the struggles of gender and sexual minorities.

Progressive perspectives, by contrast, tend to reject the ideals celebrated by conservatives and instead promote a broader, more inclusive model of masculinity. They encourage men to express emotions and adopt roles historically associated with women, while also calling for the elimination of harmful behaviours linked to traditional masculinity—commonly referred to as "toxic masculinity" (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025, p. 9). These behaviours include, for example, men's violence toward women and gender minorities. However, even within progressive circles, concerns have been raised about the use of divisive language that disparages men, fails to support their transition to new roles, or adequately address the challenges they face (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025, p. 10).

The polarized perspectives on masculinity outlined above give rise to what scholars refer to as a "crisis of masculinity" (p. 12). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the current crisis of masculinity is not isolated, as similar moments of crisis have been observed previously in times of significant shifts on both individual and collective levels. These periods are typically marked by "social upheaval, cultural transformation, economic change, and political unrest" (Atkinson 2010; Kimmel, 1987a as cited in Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025, p. 12). What is more, this type of crisis tends to emerge alongside other large scale crises such as those pertaining to "climate instability, geopolitical conflict, humanitarian catastrophe, mass migration, public health, and race relations" (p. 12).

Whenever masculinity is in question in these crises, it is not only masculinity in abstract terms that is being contested, but also masculinity in embodied terms. Mishkind et al. (1987) argue that the way men present their physical strength, and appearance directly influences how masculinity is culturally understood and maintained, noting that "one of the only remaining ways

men can express and preserve traditional male characteristics may be by literally embodying them" (p. 47). As such, challenges to established understandings of masculinity often generate anxieties not only about male bodies, but also about their perceived ability to create and sustain conventional family structures (Kimmel, 1987a, as cited in Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025).

To understand how these crises are typically articulated, Atkinson (2010) identifies five interrelated themes. First, he refers to *role set ambiguity,* which denotes uncertainty surrounding men's roles and how they are to be fulfilled (Atkinson, 2010, as cited in Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025, p. 13). Second, *structural dislocation* highlights men's uncertain position within evolving economic systems. Third, *governmentality* captures the increasing societal scrutiny of men's conduct in both public and private spheres. Fourth, *representation indictment* describes media portrayals of men as undisciplined and lacking the competence required for personal success and growth. Fifth, *objectification* refers to the reduction of men to their body parts or biological attributes. Lafrance and Hoebanx (2025) point out that conservatives are more likely to take these crisis articulations seriously, albeit often with reactionary aims and effects. Conversely, progressive factions have been criticized for either failing to address them in a sustained manner or for dismissing them in favour of focusing on the struggles faced by other gender or sexual minorities.

In terms of scholarly debates, there is an established academic discipline dedicated to research on the social construction of men's gender roles and identities, aptly referred to as *Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities* (CSMM). A variety of theoretical frameworks have emerged and been debated within this field (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025, p. 3). In the 1970s, *male sex-role theory*—which examines the functions and consequences associated with traditional

masculinity—gained prominence (p. 16). This framework focuses on how social and cultural understandings of masculinity influence men's actions and self-presentation. Accordingly, it places greater emphasis on the "social and psychological aspects" of masculinity rather than its "biological" foundations (p. 16). A widely cited perspective within this framework is offered by Brannon and David (1979), who highlight the negative consequences that arise from traditional masculinity. For example, men are discouraged from showing vulnerability, struggle to interact empathetically with women, fear being perceived as homosexual, and live in a persistent state of anxiety about failing to meet normative expectations of masculinity.

In the 1980s, male sex-role theory waned in popularity as scholars began critiquing its limitations. Carrigan et al. (1985) provided a pivotal critique of existing scholarship informed by the theory. They particularly focused on its limited scope of ideas, arguing that sex role theorists tend to dwell on "the restrictions, disadvantages, and general penalties attached to being a man," (p. 564) thereby ignoring men's power and privilege and how it is embedded in social structures. Calling for CSMM scholars to move beyond sex role theory, Carrigan et al. (1985) proposed the landmark framework of hegemonic masculinity. Now associated mainly with the work of Connell (1987, 1995, 2005), the framework highlights the systemic advantages men are afforded due to their gender privilege. Lafrance and Hoebanx (2025) find that it is the most cited of all the frameworks in the CSMM field, noting that "with approximately 24,000 citations more than any of the other frameworks, there can be no denying its pervasiveness" (p. 16). Nonetheless, other frameworks have also gained considerable prominence—most notably hybrid masculinity theory (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, 2018) and inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson, 2012)—which, when used in conjunction with hegemonic masculinity theory (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005), offer valuable tools for analyzing masculinity in a time of crisis.

Building on the theoretical foundations and scholarly debates outlined above, this study turns its attention to a particularly revealing site of gender construction: men's makeup advertisements. These advertisements offer a unique lens through which to examine how contemporary masculinity is both represented and contested in mainstream culture in an age of crisis. The following section introduces the object of analysis and explains how this research contributes to broader conversations about embodiment, identity, and gender norms.

Overview: Men's Makeup Advertisements and the Social Construction of Masculinity

Given current scholarly debates on men's body modification practices and the crisis of masculinity, this study examines cosmetics advertisements—with particular attention to representations of men's makeup—which can be seen to crystallize the competing discourses of masculinity today. Advertisements are of interest to scholars because they often serve purposes beyond simply promoting products (Leiss et al., 2018). They are especially relevant in contemporary contexts, as individuals who use popular social media platforms are frequently exposed to commercial advertising online on an ongoing basis (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). Considering the expansion of men's grooming practices (Barber, 2017; Byrne & Milestone, 2023; Connell, 1987) and how it coincides with competing discourses of masculinity (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025), I am interested in understanding the norms of masculinity embedded in cosmetics advertisements targeted at men. In doing so, I aim to contribute to existing literature on representations of masculinity in men's makeup advertising by asking the following questions: (1) How do makeup advertisements targeted at men represent masculinity? and (2) How do these representations resist or reinforce conventional norms of gender?

In the first chapter of my thesis, I present a review of research on the body, skin, and the face in order to demonstrate the unique aspects of my study and identify gaps in existing scholarship. I begin by exploring the origins and key concepts of the academic field of body studies, where the implications and meanings of embodied practices are central. I then turn to relevant contributions from skin studies, including those that focus specifically on the surface of the face and how it both communicates identity and is shaped by social norms and cultural expectations (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2018; Featherstone, 2010; Pearl, 2019). Finally, I examine literature that addresses the relationship between contemporary male body projects and masculinity.

The second chapter includes a discussion of the three theoretical frameworks that I employ to interpret representations of men's makeup. The first framework is Connell's (1987, 1995, 2005) framework of 'hegemonic masculinity,' which highlights the type of masculinity that results in the legitimization of men's dominance over marginalized groups. Second, Bridges & Pascoe's (2014, 2018) 'hybrid masculinity' framework focuses on the practices assumed by heterosexual men that are typically associated with marginalized groups and masculinities. Third, Anderson's (2012) framework of 'inclusive masculinity' examines how the increasing acceptance of marginalized masculinities—particularly displays of heterofemininity among men—allows for men to adopt practices that resist dominant gender norms. None of the existing scholarship on men's makeup applies all three of these frameworks, underscoring that this study fills an appreciable gap in the literature, particularly given the undeniable scarcity of research on this topic.

The third chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study. I utilized Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in the collected data. I begin by describing the significance of the research object and the research site—YouTube—where the sample data was obtained. Next, I outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sample and explain which aspects of the data I deemed most relevant to answering my research questions. Thereafter, in line with Braun and Clarke's (2019) emphasis on research design, I present the approach to coding themes, the study's epistemological position, and the nature of the themes I interpreted. Finally, I explain how the six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006) qualitative method were implemented and describe the process by which I analyzed the data.

The fourth chapter presents the relevant findings obtained from the sample, divided into the most prevalent thematic categories. A total of five themes were discerned which include: (1) "Technical Management"; (2) "Competency Building"; (3) "Normative Reinforcement"; (4) "Vital Transformation"; and (5) "Gender Subversion." A description of each thematic category is provided and substantiated by specific examples drawn from the sample advertisements in order to contextualize and validate the relevance of the thematic category.

In the fifth chapter, I interpret the findings through the prism of each of the theoretical frameworks showcased in the study. Various aspects of the findings are analyzed in terms of how they align with each framework, with attention to the sonic, textual, and visual images presented in the advertisements. Following this, I include a section that highlights the thematic contradictions that are found in the findings. These contradictions elucidate some of the

complexities and tensions among the issues associated with the crisis of masculinity that are present in the sample of advertisements selected.

Lastly, the sixth and concluding chapter is structured in three sections. The first section provides a summary of the study at hand including the literature review, theoretical frameworks, methods, findings, and analysis. Second, recommendations for future research in this area are outlined, including a conceptual innovation that might expand understandings of social dynamics surrounding the sample advertisements. Third, concluding remarks that reinforce the central implications of the study are presented.

By focusing on men's makeup advertisements, this study explores a relatively understudied but socially significant site where competing ideals of masculinity are visually produced and negotiated in embodied terms. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing scholarly efforts to better understand how gender is performed, commercialized, and contested in contemporary media. The analysis that follows draws on a multifaceted theoretical foundation to shed light on how advertising culture both reflects and shapes the lived realities of men today. Taken together, the chapters of this thesis aim to offer a timely and theoretically grounded account of masculinity in transformation.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

To establish the originality of my contribution to the existing literature, I begin by reviewing studies that pose questions similar to mine. Synthesizing their findings will allow me to more clearly define what sets my research apart and distinguish it from prior work. This literature review focuses on relevant sociocultural research on body and skin modification practices, specifically among men. It also lays the groundwork for understanding how masculinity and other contemporary social norms are promoted in cosmetics advertisements targeted at Western male consumers.

I begin with a brief historical overview of the scholarly formation known as body studies. Drawing on five field-defining texts, I outline core concepts such as Grosz's (1994) mind-body 'lateral associations', Blackman's (2008) ideas of 'potentiality, process and practice,' Crossley's (2006) theory of 'reflexive embodiment' and his notion of 'body techniques,' (2007) as well as Shilling's (2007) concept of 'body pedagogics.' Each of these frameworks offers tools for thinking about the implications of acting on one's own body. The individual and collective processes involved in such embodied practices—and the meanings these actions acquire in social and cultural contexts—are central to what this project seeks to investigate.

The literature review that follows also describes the contributions of the subfield of skin studies (Lafrance, 2018a), including the importance of facial modification (Pearl, 2019), as outlined in nine key texts. Here skin is commonly understood as an ongoing project through which social location and culturally specific values and norms are inscribed and communicated

(Ahmed & Stacey, 2001; Dotson & Lafrance, 2024). The face, similarly, is considered a modifiable surface that both shapes and is shaped by social interactions and relationships (Pearl, 2019). Notable concepts emerging from this field include 'thinking through the skin,' the 'epidermal schema,' and 'skin work'— each of which underscores the social and symbolic significance of how skin is presented and perceived (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001; Borgerson & Schroeder, 2018; Lafrance & Carey, 2018b).

Finally, this literature review includes an overview of the scholarship on what has come to be known as "men's body projects," with particular attention to how these intersect with the commercial grooming industry (Barber, 2017, p. 23). A growing body of scholarship shows that men are regularly encouraged to work on or enhance their appearance as a way of expressing both their gendered identities and subjective aspirations. This trend is particularly visible in the context of the crisis of masculinity and the rise of 'metrosexual' identities that emerged in the wake of social changes beginning in the 1960s, leading to increased engagement in body work (Scheibling & Lafrance, 2019; Shugart, 2018). The twelve articles and book chapters collected for this part of the review illuminate key debates on contemporary masculinities and the factors motivating men's consumption of grooming products and cosmetics (Scheibling & Lafrance, 2019). However, it is important to note that this literature rarely addresses men's use of makeup directly; instead, it tends to focus more broadly on grooming practices, demonstrating that studies like mine are needed to more fully understand how men experience and negotiate masculinity and gender norms—specifically in relation to makeup use.

1.2 A Brief Background of Body Studies

The academic field of body studies engages in discussions of what makes the body meaningful, both socially and culturally. According to sociologists Chris Schilling (2007) and Lisa Blackman (2008), body studies emerged and was first recognized as a field of study in the 1980s. Initially, critical scholarship on the body developed across several disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, with sociology playing a key role (Shilling, 2007). Schilling (2007) explains that the growing sociological interest in the body reflects broader social and cultural changes, including the rise of neoliberal individualism, collective narcissism and hyperconsumerism. More specifically, within neoliberal frameworks, caring for and improving the body is increasingly positioned as a personal responsibility (Shilling, 2007). Narcissism, in this context, refers to a growing preoccupation with the self and, by extension, the body—thereby intensifying the cultural focus on bodily maintenance. This preoccupation is in turn, reinforced by hyperconsumerism, which not only shapes how individuals perceive their bodies but also how they act upon them. As Schilling (2007) notes, "appearance, body shape and physical control [have] become increasingly central to people's sense of self-identity"—a dynamic that helps explain the proliferation of products promising bodily enhancement in response to the pressures of responsibilization and optimization (p. 7).

Shilling (2007) points to other social and cultural phenomena that arose during the 1980s such as the feminist, gay, and disability rights movements, all of which resulted in novel attention to bodies. Also, race-related issues such as racial discrimination and profiling, emphasized how the body is connected to individual as well as collective power and social relations. The emerging medical crises of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the so-called obesity crisis,

and spikes in lung cancer also encouraged scholars to pay attention to bodies. Additionally, increased awareness of environmental decline led to more attention being paid to the relationships between human bodies and ecological bodies. Lastly, new technological advances that affect the body, such as medical transplants and invitro fertilization, brought more attention to the subject as well.

An influential concept emerging from the field of body studies is 'reflexive embodiment', which highlights "the capacity and tendency to perceive, emote about, reflect and act upon one's own body" and, more specifically, "to practices of body modification and maintenance" (Crossley, 2006, p.1). This concept illustrates the dual nature of the body as both subject and object, whereby individuals perceive their bodies as something they have, but also as something that can act or be acted on. Crossley (2006) emphasizes the importance of reflexive embodiment in both individual and collective contexts. In an individual context, bodies are always changing whether individuals intentionally engage in actions to do so or not. For instance, aging is a biological process that inevitably produces bodily changes. The author highlights the importance of body maintenance as bodies, "do not stay the same if we choose not to maintain them and our maintenance work must accommodate their dispositions and tendencies" (Crossley, 2006, p. 3). This underscores how maintenance of the body is not simply a matter of personal choice, but a necessary and ongoing negotiation with the body's natural transformations.

Crossley (2006) and others in body studies emphasize that embodied practices on the individual level are intrinsically connected to those on a collective level. Here society itself is viewed as an "embodied phenomenon" whereas individuals are seen as representations of "the collective body" shaped by social and cultural norms (p. 3). For instance, as Crossley (2006)

points out, “the discourses and interventions associated with public health are an obvious example” (p.3), as they are initially directed at the collective body but eventually affect the behaviours and routines of individual bodies (p. 3). This illustrates how personal practices are closely linked to broader social structures.

Body studies emerged in response to and as a critique of the prevailing concepts of *mind-body dualism*—also known as *Cartesian dualism*—in Western epistemology (Blackman, 2008; Crossley, 2007; Grosz, 1994). This epistemological concept, originating in the philosophy of René Descartes, sees the mind and body as separate, whereby the mind is rationally controlled and is the site where thought takes place, as compared to the body, where instincts play out and physical processes occur (Grosz, 994). Grosz (1994) notes that this view of the mind and body, which persists to this day, conceives of the two entities as hierarchical or, put differently, as vertical dichotomies. As a result, one ‘term’ is viewed as dominant or privileged— the mind—and the other is subordinate, namely the body (Gross, 1994, p. 3). The dominant or “primary term defines itself by expelling its other and in this process establishes its own boundaries and borders to create an identity for itself” (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). In other words, Grosz (1994) demonstrates that the mind-body relationship is mutually constitutive, as the mind is deemed superior only through the rejection of the body. Similarly, mind-body dualism tends to frame the body as what Grosz (1994) calls “brute givenness,” which suggests that the body has animalistic qualities, is devoid of agency, and is static and unchanging (p. 4).

Blackman (2008) and Grosz (1994) similarly argue that mind-body dualism is related to other dualist formations, which they call “lateral associations” (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). Some examples of these associations include “reason and passion, sense and sensibility,” and “self and other”

(Grosz, 1994, p. 3). These associations also shape conceptions of identity categories such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. For example, a dualist-informed gender category tends to associate men with mind, intellect, reason, and "transcendence" (Grosz, 1994, p. 16), whereas women are associated more with the body, with being emotional, and are linked to nature. Since women are viewed as more tied to the body, and because the body is considered inferior within a dualist epistemology, women are consequently seen as subordinate to men.

Rejecting mind-body dualism, Blackman (2008) argues that the body should not be considered merely a substance or entity but rather as constituted by "potentiality, process and practice" (p. 5). "Potentiality" refers to the body's openness to transformation, "process" points to how the body is always becoming or changing based on surrounding influences, and "practice" refers to the actions undertaken by the body and how they are attributed meaning (p. 5). Blackman (2008) also underscores how bodies and the distinctions seen to define them, such as healthy bodies and sick bodies, become normalized in contemporary societies. As a result, existing "conceptions of normality and abnormality" are shaped by power dynamics and social inequalities in various cultures, influencing the way body and identity are understood and experienced (p. 12).

The notions of potentiality, process and practice have become central objects of analysis for Blackman (2008) and other body studies scholars as they aid in the understanding of how an individual's body is constituted in relation to other humans, non-humans, and their social circumstances. Similarly, how bodies are shaped in and through context, changing across time and space, is also of interest to critical scholars of the body (Blackman, 2008, p. 6). Together, these insights underscore a key premise of body studies: that bodies are not static or self-contained, but dynamic sites where identity, power, and meaning are continuously negotiated.

To more fully understand how bodies are shaped by context, Crossley (2007) suggests that Marcel Mauss' (1979) concept of *body techniques* is useful to understanding the "embodied experience of the world" (p. 82). Mauss (1979) argues that these techniques derive from socially and culturally constructed *embodied practices*, such as the way people eat or walk, which varies across time and space (p. 85). Shilling (2007) proposes a similar concept, called *body pedagogics*, which points to how the body is trained by norms, values, and power relations (p. 13). These interrelated concepts point to the general perspective shared by body studies scholars regarding body practices, which notably moves beyond a mind/body dualism and highlights the dynamic combination of social interaction, biological capabilities, and embodied knowledge of social expectations (Blackman, 2008).

Body scholars have argued that sociology has tended to overlook the body and embodiment as central objects of study (Blackman, 2008; Shilling, 2007). As Crossley (2007) notes: "it has been pushed into the background in order to enable a foregrounding of issues which, historically at least, have assumed a greater importance" (p. 84). As a result, body scholars remain committed to prioritizing an approach that highlights what the body does and how it comes to be meaningful in social and cultural contexts. Also, as Blackman (2008) notes, "the focus shifts to what bodies can *do,* what bodies could *become,* what practices enable and coordinate the *doing* of particular kinds of bodies" (Blackman, 2008, p. 1). What is more, critical scholars in the field place a strong emphasis on how the human body is part of a broader assemblage of material things and the natural world. Thus, critical body scholars are not interested in thinking about the body's difference and distinctiveness as a self-contained substance or entity, but rather how it is connected to an array of other human and non-human actors and networks (Blackman, 2008; Crossley, 2007).

To summarize, I highlighted how the field of body studies emerged during the 1980s in a neoliberal context, where individuals are increasingly held responsible for working on their bodies (Lafrance et al., 2015; Shilling, 2007). Following this, the prominent concept of 'reflexive embodiment' that describes humans' ability to experience the body through both reflection and action is highlighted (Crossley, 2006). I then discussed the influence of the epistemological concept of 'mind-body dualism,' which posits that the terms of mind and body are distinct and dichotomous, with mind as superior to the body (Blackman, 2008; Crossley, 2007; Grosz, 1994). I then showed that, rejecting traditional dualistic thought, body studies scholars such as Blackman (2008), Crossley (2007), and Shilling (2007) view the two entities of mind and body as mutually constituted as evident in concepts such as 'potentiality, process, and practice,' 'body techniques,' and 'body pedagogics.' Overall, the perspectives brought forth by critical body scholars emphasize the salient role of the body in impacting meaning, practice and lived experience as well as its entanglement in both human and non-human assemblages.

1.3 The Significance of Skin Studies and the Face

Skin studies is an academic subfield of body studies that examines the social and cultural influences that impact the embodied experience and management of skin (Lafrance, 2018). Even as the largest organ of the body, the skin's significance has not been extensively studied by scholars until relatively recently (Lafrance & Carey, 2018). This subfield, which emerged around two decades ago, involves various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Like body studies, skin studies are informed by other subfields in relevant disciplines including critical race studies, gender and sexuality studies, postcolonial studies, and sensory studies (p. 3). More specifically, according to Dotson & Lafrance (2024), sociological studies focusing on the skin

tend to rely on similar "epistemological principles" deriving from body studies, including the notion that the skin, like the body, is a project that must be continuously worked on (p. 34). Similarly, the skin is presumed to be affected by embodied practices and meanings that emerge when individuals act on their bodies (Crossley, 2006). There is, moreover, emphasis on the surface of the face and how individuals actively work on it (Crossley, 2006), as well as on how consumer culture and social norms influence the skin (Borgerson & Schroeder 2018; Featherstone, 2010).

Ahmed and Stacey (2001) contend that scholars should focus on the skin as an evolving entity. In their work, skin is considered both an object of study and a starting point for reimagining modes of thought—an approach they call "thinking through the skin" (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001, p. 1). Rooted in feminist theory, which emphasizes the dual positioning of bodies as both subject and object, this perspective asks, "how skin becomes, rather than simply is, meaningful" (p. 1). Ahmed and Stacey's (2001) work thus aligns with the interests of body studies scholars in what the body *does*, inviting attention to the significance of transformations in the skin and the social forces that shape them (Blackman, 2008). Crucially, they also underscore the connection between skin and embodiment, showing how both can take on new forms of meaning—both literally and metaphorically.

Skin both anchors the body's sensory organs and serves as a site on and across which normative ideals in consumer culture are developed and promoted (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2018). Borgerson and Schroeder (2018) note that, intentionally or not, the skin is a part of the body whose external appearance acts as a signifier of relationships as well as identity-based differences such as race, class, and gender. In Western societies, it is more common for skin to

be regarded as something that distinguishes oneself from others, whereas in non-Western societies skin can be seen as something that is shared and identifies individuals belonging to a particular cultural collective (Howes, 2018). The face, more specifically, is a significant surface of the skin as an individual's personality and self are inscribed in it and visually reflected by it (Featherstone, 2010).

Borgerson and Schroeder (2018) argue that marketing and branding imagery in consumer culture uses the skin to illustrate how consumers' own bodily surfaces can be employed to project desirable identities through the use of advertised products or services. They further contend that skin is expected to serve functions that go beyond its role as a mere physical surface; as they put it, "the skin is called upon to do things" (p. 105). More specifically, skin acts as an aspirational surface of inscription, enabling individuals to use it to portray certain aspects of their desired identities. This idea is often subtly conveyed in various forms of consumer imagery, including —but not limited to—product packaging, billboards, websites, advertisements, and social media content (p. 105). The process through which the skin is commodified and treated primarily as an object that consumers can alter is referred to as "representational fetishization" (p. 119).

Borgerson and Schroeder (2018) draw on psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon's (1967) concept of the *epidermal schema*— defined as "a process that works to reduce human being and identity to skin" and that draws attention to differences based on skin color (Gordon, 1995, 2015, as cited in Borgerson & Schroeder, 2018, p. 105). This concept emphasizes "ontological distinctions," such as skin color, which act as markers of identity through which individuals are primarily perceived by others (p. 105). It illustrates how racialization and power

relations operate, particularly in Western contexts where lighter skin is often attributed greater social value. As a result, the fetishization of skin in consumer culture imagery can be especially harmful to individuals whose skin does not conform to dominant visual standards, contributing to the marginalization and discrimination of people with darker skin tones (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2018, p. 105).

Some scholars have also focused on the specific meanings attributed to certain parts of the skin, such as the surface of the face (Featherston, 2010; Pearl, 2019; Synnott, 2002; Featherstone, 2010). It is commonly believed that the face reflects an individual's inner being, as it is often claimed that "the face (and the body) mirror the soul and that beauty and goodness are one, and are reflected in the face" (Synnott, 2002, p. 92). For example, Pearl (2019) highlights that this assumption has existed across Western history dating back to the development of the ancient science of physiognomy, which is based precisely on "the notion that the body and its surfaces reflect the interior" (p. 45). Therefore, the face is a significant surface of the skin as it is commonly argued that one's personality and self are visually reflected through it (Featherstone, 2010).

Pearl (2019) emphasizes "the centrality of the actual face," and how it shapes identity and impacts social interactions (p. 4). Any alterations made to the face, such as those associated with cosmetic surgery or facial transplantation, can be viewed as an attempt to externally project how one feels, or would like to feel (Pearl, 2019). Modifications to the face are viewed as "an act of publicity," as changes made to this surface are quickly and easily observed by others, which can ultimately alter individuals' perceptions of themselves and how others see them (p. 4). Facial

modifications are yet another example of how the body and the skin are fluid and ever-changing entities, echoing the key claims of scholars in body and skin studies.

Lafrance and Carey (2018b) conducted a study examining the impacts of facial acne and the coping mechanisms individuals adopt in response. Acne can be particularly distressing when it appears on the face—a highly visible and difficult area of the body to conceal—which can significantly affect body image and, in turn, impair "psychosocial functioning and quality of life" (p. 58). To manage these challenges, individuals engage in "self-presentation strategies" aimed at altering the appearance of their skin to both themselves and others (p. 60). In this context, Lafrance and Carey (2018b) introduce the concept of "skin work," referring to the various practices individuals use to manage and modify their skin's appearance (p. 57). They identify three primary forms of skin work—"concealing, medicating, and grooming"—each shaped by, and shaping, identity categories such as gender and sexuality (p. 57). "Concealment" involves covering blemishes using cosmetics, clothing, or by avoiding unflattering lighting (p. 61). "Medicating" refers to the use of topical treatments or oral medications intended to treat acne (p. 72). "Grooming" includes both the physical and emotional labour involved in maintaining cleanliness and managing appearance, such as washing the face or popping pimples (p. 73). These practices exemplify Crossley's (2006) notion of 'reflexive embodiment,' as individuals actively engage with their bodies, revealing "how our bodies are both connected to and separate from ourselves" (Lafrance & Carey, 2018b, p. 65).

In this section, I have highlighted the multidisciplinary subfield of skin studies that originated in the early 2000's (Lafrance, 2018a). This subfield is closely related to body studies due to similar epistemological assumptions that construe the skin and body as projects that

require maintenance, are capable of being reflected on and intervened in, and are inscribed by dominant social norms and cultural processes (Borgerson & Schroeder 2018; Crossley, 2006; Featherstone, 2010). In addition, the notion of 'thinking through the skin' aligns with the overarching focus, in both body studies and skin studies, on what bodies can do and how external influences shape and are shaped by them (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001). I also showed how the skin or 'epidermal schema,' particularly that of the face, acts as a marker that distinguishes individuals while also appearing to communicate their identity, aspirations, and embodied experiences (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2018; Pearl, 2019). Finally, I discussed Lafrance and Carey's (2018b) notion of 'skin work', which highlights the ways individuals manage and care for their skin, as well as how these forms of management and care can be understood through Crossley's (2006) conception of 'reflexive embodiment.'

1.4 Contemporary Male Body Projects: Masculinity and Grooming

Research on beauty, skincare, and grooming practices has tended to focus more on women's experiences and expectations than on those of men (Barber, 2017; Byrne & Milestone, 2023). This is largely because caring for one's skin—and, by extension, one's appearance—is commonly regarded as a "feminising practice" in Western societies (Kenalemang-Palm, 2023, p. 1). That said, men's bodies are now increasingly displayed in the media, prompting scholars to examine how idealized male forms are positioned as objects both to be gazed at and aspired to (Frank, 2014; Gill & McLean, 2005; Scheibling & Lafrance, 2019). The emergence of this phenomenon is seen as being driven by various social forces, including "the gay movement, feminism, the style press or consumerism" (Gill & McLean, 2005, p. 39). As a result, men now participate in a range of body modification practices—such as exercising, buying clothing, using

cosmetic products, and undergoing tattooing, piercing, or cosmetic surgery—in ways that express individuality while also aligning with dominant masculine ideals (Gill & McLean, 2005; Hall et al., 2012).

Alongside the growing number of skincare and cosmetics products aimed specifically at men, there is an ever-expanding body of literature that explores men's relationships to grooming practices and the connections between these practices, men's gendered identities, and increased social opportunity (Barber, 2017). As Barber (2017) demonstrates, men's relationships to cosmetics and grooming products changed significantly during and after World War II. For instance, during the war, men were expected to embody "the image of the neat military hero," and after the war, to resemble a "well-coiffed corporate man" (p. 36). This shift reflected the increasing number of male workers in client-facing roles, with corporate management encouraging them to maintain a polished appearance as a marker of professional success. Such images were promoted as central to masculine achievement and were made to seem attainable through the use of specific grooming products such as "pomade and other waxes and creams" (p. 36). Although the types of skincare and grooming products used by men have evolved in recent decades, Barber (2017) argues that to effectively attract more male consumers, men must be taught how to use these tools and products by beauty industry service workers. As such, there is an emphasis on heterosexual men's interactions with "beauty service workers" who demonstrate product use (p. 4).

Scholars appear to agree that, within the context of neoliberalism, men's use of skincare products has steadily increased (Byrne & Milestone, 2023; Elias et al., 2017). Men who use products that have been traditionally associated with use by women is growing. Research

conducted by Byrne & Milestone (2023) led to two main findings. First, age is a determining factor for whether facial skincare or grooming products are used, as younger men tend to be more inclined to do so. Second, men feel uncomfortable disclosing that they engage in grooming practices. As a result, the authors argue that grooming is a form of "invisible consumption" among men (p. 148). Grooming can remain "invisible" because skincare, such as moisturizer, are not obvious to others. Grooming is commonly viewed as an investment in improving oneself and delaying the process of aging. Also, it is found that men often "perform" (p. 152) masculinity, as men who use skincare or cosmetics feel they need to use such products to maintain a particular masculine identity to present to others, which is an aspect similarly echoed in skin studies research (Pearl, 2019).

Embodied experiences of grooming are often influenced by social categories such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation (Barber, 2017). As a result, marketing tactics used for men's grooming products involve maintaining the idea that it is not emasculating to use these products or to groom oneself regularly, as it is argued that "selling men beauty products and services means selling them on the idea that their consumer habits make them men and preserve rather than jeopardize their sexual and class locations" (p. 2). Nonetheless, there are men who do not engage in grooming for fear that it is emasculating and costly (p. 2). Therefore, men with professional careers that allow them to financially afford such lifestyles tend to be more targeted in the marketplace given that they can afford to treat their bodies as a "classed gender body project" (p. 3).

Advertisements featuring grooming products for men have been of particular interest to scholars (Kenalemang-Palm, 2023; Scheibling, & Lafrance, 2019; Sturrock & Pioch, 1998).

Various studies begin by outlining the *crisis of masculinity,* which occurred in response to social changes starting in the 1960s that challenged traditional understandings of what it means to be a man (Kimmel, 1987b as cited in Scheibling, & Lafrance, 2019). In this crisis there are two opposing discourses, one that is more progressive and embraces the metrosexual trend, which promotes body work, and another that is more traditional and discourages men from abandoning conventional norms of masculinity. As Scheibling & Lafrance (2019) demonstrate, masculinities in the twenty first century are multifaceted, and men often attempt to align themselves with "hybrid" or "flexible masculinity" (p.225). These types of masculinities allow for the inclusion of elements from both traditional norms of masculinity as well as more novel conceptions that were once viewed as more feminine. Nevertheless, while such masculinities are seemingly progressive, ongoing forms of gender inequality and negative stereotyping should not be ignored.

A notable product of the crisis of masculinity is that of *metrosexuality* (Shugart, 2008, This concept refers to the rise of men interested in grooming and fashion (Scheibling, & Lafrance, 2019). There has been an increase in men partaking in "self-presentation practices that have given rise to the popularity of the 'metrosexual' identity" (Hall, 2012, p.209). Men are increasingly preoccupied with their appearance and are spending their time and money to purchase grooming products, makeup, and clothing accessories. However, Shugart (2008) argues that metrosexuality is not simply an insignificant trend that arose and eventually lost popularity as it may appear to many. Rather, metrosexuality continues to hold relevance in society as men continue to align themselves with it, thereby normalizing the sale of grooming products to men.

The notions of *aesthetic labour* and *aesthetic entrepreneurship* presented by Kenalemang-Palm (2023) highlight how individuals are influenced by implicit norms and values

in cosmetics advertising, which promote continuous self-improvement (p. 2). For example, in her analysis of advertisements featuring older celebrities and how they reshape expectations around aging, Kenalemang-Palm (2022) found that older individuals are encouraged to engage in "new forms of bodily discipline and self-surveillance" as part of resisting the negative connotations of aging through beauty products (p. 2123). She observed that the consumption of such products was commonly motivated by the desire to minimize signs of aging, increase attractiveness to the opposite sex, achieve health benefits, and experience pleasure and excitement (Sturrock & Pioch, 1998).

Media imagery and the ideals of attractiveness it promotes can significantly shape how men perceive their own appearance and gender identity (Frank, 2014). Roubal and Cirklová (2020), for example, introduce the concept of *erotic capital,* which emphasizes not only physical and sexual attractiveness but also one's ability to present oneself effectively (p. 19). Investing in one's appearance can enhance overall attractiveness and sexual appeal, contributing to greater self-esteem and offering potential advantages such as higher social status and success in romantic relationships. In this context, the growth of the male grooming industry reflects contemporary men's increasing engagement in body projects as a way of addressing anxieties associated with a perceived crisis of masculinity.

In this section, I have discussed the rise in scholarly attention to how men's bodies are portrayed in the media and the various body modification practices in which they engage to present their identity and align with norms of masculinity (Frank, 2014; Gill & McLean, 2005; Hall et al., 2012). Specifically, there is a small but growing literature exploring how men's grooming practices influence the development of their identities and enhance their social

opportunities (Barber, 2017; Byrne & Milestone, 2023). Following World War II, men's engagement with cosmetics and grooming evolved as certain images of idealized male identities were increasingly advertised (Barber, 2017). Men's use of skincare products has also grown in the context of neoliberalism, with grooming products that align with 'invisibility' being preferred (Barber, 2017). Lastly, I discuss the increased popularity of men's interest in grooming since the 'crisis of masculinity' beginning in the 1960s, illustrated through the notions of 'metrosexuality,' 'aesthetic labour,' 'aesthetic entrepreneurship,' and 'erotic capital' (Shugart, 2008; Kenalemang-Palm, 2023; Roubal & Cirklová, 2020).

1.5 Conclusion

In sum, the twenty-seven works reviewed shed valuable light on foundational and emerging themes in body and skin studies, with particular attention to male body work and makeup use. Rooted in the interdisciplinary field of body studies—which examines how bodies are shaped by and shape social relations—this literature has evolved from early dualist paradigms to a focus on embodied experience and interconnection with social and material systems. The subfield of skin studies builds on this by examining how skin, especially facial skin, serves as a site of identity formation, social interaction, and cultural inscription. Scholars have also turned their attention to contemporary male grooming practices in response to broader shifts, such as the 'crisis of masculinity' and the rise of 'metrosexuality.' While research consistently shows that men engage in appearance-related practices to enhance attractiveness and status, there remains limited work on men's makeup use specifically—particularly regarding the role of cosmetics advertising in shaping norms of masculinity. This gap in the literature

motivates the present study's focus on how men's makeup advertising communicates, reinforces, or challenges dominant masculine ideals.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The aim of the following review of three theoretical frameworks is to outline some of the key conceptual approaches to understanding the social construction of masculinities within Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities (CSMM). I will begin by outlining Connell's (1987) framework of *hegemonic masculinity*. There are studies related to body and skin modification practices—including those referenced in my literature review—that have utilised this framework and which outline the type of masculinity that legitimises men's dominance over subordinate masculinities and women in society (Barber, 2016; Byrne & Milestone, 2023; Elias & Gill 2017; Frank, 2014; Gill et al., 2005; Hall & Seymour Smith, 2012; Lafrance & Carey, 2018; Roubal & Cirklová, 2020; Scheibling & Lafrance, 2019).

Nevertheless, many scholars have critiqued this framework, with a few notably developing their own theoretical frameworks to address crucial elements that they argue Connell's (1987, 1995, 2005) framework fails to encompass. My study will engage with two of the frameworks that draw upon and ultimately revise Connell's (1987, 1995, 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity. First, Bridges and Pascoe's (2014, 2018) *hybrid masculinity theory* is applicable in the contemporary metrosexual age, as it highlights the ways men who are part of dominant groups incorporate practices traditionally associated with men from marginalized groups (Barber, 2016; Byrne & Milestone, 2023; Frank, 2014; Hall & Seymour Smith, 2012; Roubal & Cirklová, 2020; Scheibling & Lafrance, 2019). Second, Anderson's *inclusive masculinity theory* (IMT) (2012) contends that as homophobia declines, more inclusive or previously marginalized forms of masculinity emerge, allowing for men to engage in behaviours

that were previously seen as deviant or taboo. In contrast to the hegemonic and hybrid masculinity frameworks, only one piece of scholarship reviewed for my project makes use of the framework of inclusive masculinity theory (Byrne & Milestone, 2023).

Reading online makeup advertisements through the lens of these three theories, I will be able to investigate the extent to which conventional norms of masculinity are resisted or reinforced. While other researchers often focus on a single framework to assess whether men's use of makeup confirms or challenges dominant models, my study engages all three, enabling a more complex understanding of how masculinity is represented in my sample. As a result, the data will be analyzed in a more expansive and nuanced way by incorporating elements from each framework, rather than relying solely on the widely used concept of hegemonic masculinity.

2.2 Hegemonic Masculinity

According to Connell (1987), masculinity and femininity are constituted by what she refers to as "a single structural fact," whereby men dominate women across Western societies (p. 1). This structural fact, or power dynamic, underpins the hierarchically ascendant form of masculinity, which she refers to as *hegemonic* (p. 1). Connell's framework emphasizes the dynamics of masculinity that legitimize men's dominance over women and other men, usually from socially subordinate groups. To formulate the theory, Connell (1987) incorporated Gramsci's (1971) notion of *hegemony* that illustrates how those in dominant or ascendant positions in society maintain power through ideological influence such as "religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth" (p. 184). A few of the most important features of hegemonic masculinity are that it promotes heterosexuality, the institution of marriage, and power over others. She also contends

that *emphasized femininity* (p. 24) exists to support hegemonic masculinity and points to the behaviours women are encouraged to take on, including "compliance, nurturance and empathy as womanly virtues" (p. 183). Therefore, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is "inherently relational" as it exists only in relation to femininity and reinforces men's dominance as well as women's focus on supporting men's needs (Connell, 1995, p. 68).

Connell (1987, 1995, 2005) argues that multiple types of masculinities exist, meaning that gender identities and relations are dynamic and ever-changing. Rather than being considered a universal set of personality traits consistent across space and time, hegemonic masculinity is considered to be a particular kind of "position" within the gender hierarchy (p. 76). Connell's (1995) approach emphasizes gender "relations"—rather than "roles"—focusing specifically on how various masculinities are situated in relation to one another and, by extension, how they support or challenge hegemonic masculinity in the context of "the current Western gender order" (p. 77).

To support the abovementioned argument, Connell (1995) outlines a model of four key forms of masculinity which illustrates the hierarchical relationship between dominant and subordinate groups of men (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). The first form of masculinity in this model is the *hegemonic* or culturally prevailing ideal of men's gender practices which both create and reinforce patriarchal values (p.76). This dominant form is achieved through various kinds of influence, often exemplified by the powerful or wealthy in society. For instance, hegemonic masculinity is associated with *institutional power* through its connection to authority figures or the accumulation of wealth (p. 77). Nonetheless, popular cultural figures such as "film actors, or even fantasy figures, such as film characters" often embody such ideals and thus also further promote it (p. 77). That said, Connell (1995) is emphatic about the fact that the current

configuration of hegemonic masculinity is not permanent. While it may be "accepted" in one context, it may not be in another, especially if patriarchal power dynamics change (p.77). Considering the possibility of changing patriarchal conditions, Connell (1995) admits there may be groups of men or women who succeed in challenging the form hegemonic masculinity takes, potentially allowing for alternative masculinities to replace it. This is one of the main premises that the following two frameworks utilized in my project build upon.

The second form of masculinity in Connell's (1995) model is that of *subordinate* masculinity, which is opposed to hegemonic masculinities in the hierarchy of gender relations (p.76). Subordinate masculinities underscore the unequal gender and power relations between various groups of men as some may benefit from hegemony, while others—such as those in oppressed positions—do not. Connell (1995) provides the example of how heterosexual men in Western society retain a position of dominance over homosexual men who consequently face "political and cultural exclusion" (p. 78). Besides the subordination of gay masculinities, there are also heterosexual men who are excluded for not fully adhering to the normative hegemonic ideal and are targeted through "a rich vocabulary of abuse" in daily life especially by other men (p. 79).

The third form of masculinity, according to Connell (1995), is referred to as *complicit* (p. 79). This category accounts for the many men who do not fully embody hegemonic masculinity but who nonetheless participate in it and benefit from what Connell (1995) calls "the patriarchal dividend" (p. 79). This dividend refers to the unearned privileges men receive in patriarchal societies simply by virtue of their gender. Thus, even men who are not overtly oppressive still benefit from the hegemonic system of gender relations through their social positioning within it.

The fourth form of masculinity Connell (1995) outlines is *marginalized,* which highlights how racial, ethnic, and class dynamics shape masculinities (p.80). Connell (1995) argues that the marginalization of various masculinities is closely linked to the authority connected to hegemonic masculinity; that is, "marginalization is always relative to the *authorization* of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group" (p.80). As a result, masculinities that do not align with socially accepted ideals of hegemonic or authorized masculinity are positioned as marginalized. Overall, Connell's (1995) understanding of the forms and relations between hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginalized masculinities demonstrate that gender dynamics have a fluid and dynamic nature.

The widespread use of the hegemonic masculinity framework to explore the implications of men's dominant positions of power in society has drawn both praise and criticism among scholars (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001; Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). For instance, Demetriou (2001) presents an extensive critique of Connell's (1987) original conception of hegemonic masculinity. The author argues here that the framework focuses excessively on the dominant form of masculinity and fails to recognize the influence that subordinate or marginalized identities have on hegemonic masculinities. To address this conceptual problem, Demetriou (2001) combines "Gramsci's concept of historic bloc and Bhabha's notion of hybridity" to formulate the notion of the "hegemonic bloc" as an alternative (p. 337). This notion highlights how men's practices serve to sustain patriarchal dominance in ways that are always in a "constant process of negotiation, translation, hybridization, and reconfiguration" (p. 355).

Demetriou (2001) highlights two forms of hegemony—"external" and "internal"—that Connell (1995) did not examine systematically (p. 341). External hegemony points to the domination of men over women, and internal hegemony refers to hierarchal dynamics among men whereby one form of masculinity dominates other subordinate forms (p.341). Demetriou (2001) also points to a "dialectical pragmatism," which underscores how hegemonic masculinities allow for the appropriation of elements associated with subordinate identities without changing the conditions that give rise to inequality (p.346). For instance, Demetriou (2001) highlights how gay masculinities have become more culturally prominent in Western societies, which is a phenomenon referred to as "gay visibility," and has allowed for heterosexual males to appropriate some practices or style elements previously associated mainly with homosexual males while leaving patriarchal gender relations largely unchanged (p.350).

Connell's (1995) model of hegemonic masculinity has been the subject of extensive critique within the field of CSMM. Many scholars argue that the original framework implies that women are locked into subordinate roles and condemned to passivity. Others raise concerns about its limited attention to how masculinities vary across cultures and social contexts. In response to these critiques, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) revisit and revise the theory, clarifying key elements and discarding others.

The first reformulation they propose involves developing "a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy," one that better accounts for the complexities of power relations across gender categories (p. 848). Their second reformulation emphasizes the need to account for how hegemonic masculinity manifests differently across geographic contexts. This involves a greater focus on "local, regional, and global masculinities," which recognizes that hegemonic forms are

shaped by unique cultural and social forces depending on place and context (p. 850). A third area of reformulation addresses concerns about the lack of attention to the agency of subordinated groups. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue for a stronger link between "embodiment and hegemony" acknowledging that subordinated bodies—including those of women—play an active and influential role in shaping dominant forms of masculinity (p. 851). As they note, "bodies are involved more actively, intimately, and more intricately in social processes than theory has usually allowed" (p. 851). Finally, the fourth area of reformulation emphasizes the "dynamics of masculinity," underscoring that hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed category but a practice that is continually challenged and renegotiated (p. 852). They stress that as social conditions shift, previously dominant versions of masculinity will "inevitably be contested" by subordinated groups (p. 853). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also acknowledge the "possibility of democratizing gender relations" (p. 853) and advancing greater equality, particularly alongside women, echoing proposals by scholars such as Demetriou (2001).

Two notable critiques of the hegemonic masculinity theoretical framework are that it is a fixed classification of masculinities and that it leads to the reduction of masculinity to a negative form or type (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, as cited in Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) insist that conceptual problems such as these arise not from the framework itself but rather from how it has been applied (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). But Lafrance & Hoebanx (2025), among others, question whether it is possible for the model of hegemonic masculinity to be successfully applied without resorting to a more or less fixed typology of masculinities.

Lafrance & Hoebanx (2025) also identify two issues regarding the widespread application of the hegemonic masculinity framework. First, even when the framework or model of multiple masculinities is properly employed, there is a tendency to reduce men to how they are positioned in relation to power and privilege. Second, in the instances when the framework is applied incorrectly, it is common for men to be construed in a negative manner, with little hope of redemption, and associated with stereotypically toxic behaviours. The authors argue that future analyses of contemporary masculinity should attempt to move away from relying predominantly on hegemonic masculinity theories as they to reduce men to either the 'oppressors' or the 'oppressed' while obscuring their lived experiences.

To summarize, I outlined Connell's (1987) influential framework of *hegemonic masculinity* and how it accounts for the ways in which some men dominate both women and other men. I also presented Connell's (1995) landmark model of multiple masculinities—including *hegemonic, subordinated, complicit,* and *marginalized* forms—which allows for a deeper understanding of how gender dynamics operate. I discussed how critical scholars such as Demetriou (2001) critique the concept of hegemonic masculinity for insufficiently addressing how privileged men incorporate practices often associated with subordinate masculinities. I also showed how Demetriou (2001) introduces the notion of the *hegemonic bloc* to illustrate how masculine practices are constantly negotiated in relation to hegemony. I then examined Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) efforts to reaffirm and revise the framework, emphasizing its continued relevance despite critiques. Lastly, with respect to the framework's application, Lafrance and Hoebanx (2025) point to problems associated with its overuse in CSMM scholarship, arguing that this often leads to reductive interpretations of men's lives. They

contend that future research should engage more fully with alternative frameworks to avoid such reductionism.

2.3 Hybrid Masculinity

Scholarly research on men's contemporary "behaviors, appearances, opinions, and more" has grown significantly in recent years (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 246). These characteristics are widely seen as evolving in response to broader "structural change and feminist critique and reform" (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018, p. 269). Emerging masculine styles or stereotypes—such as the "metrosexual," "hipster," and "bro"—exemplify this shift (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018, p. 254). To analyze the implications of these changes, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) propose the concept of *hybrid masculinity,* which describes how relatively conventional men adopt elements traditionally associated with marginalized groups (p. 246). This concept builds on Demetriou's (2001) theory of the hegemonic bloc and its emphasis on hybridity, offering a critical alternative to Connell's (1987) hegemonic masculinity framework, which, as Bridges and Pascoe (2018) argue, has "analytic limitations" (p. 259). Although hybrid masculinity has not been universally adopted, the authors suggest it offers a valuable lens for examining the evolving landscape of masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 246).

Bridges and Pascoe (2014) further note that studies related to hybrid masculinities have predominantly addressed the practices and behaviours of "young, White, heterosexual-identified men" (p. 246). Specifically, the way these men emulate the practices of subordinate masculinities is emphasized, for, as they put it, "men are increasingly incorporating elements of various 'Others' into their identity projects" (p. 246). For instance, men have increasingly adopted aesthetics influenced by "gay," "Black," and "feminine" groups, prompting the authors to

question whether social inequalities involving gender, sexuality, and race are challenged or reproduced through this process of adoption (p. 247). The authors thus seek to determine the extent to which hybrid masculinities are pervasive, focusing in particular on whether they represent real shifts in social inequalities.

Following a review of current masculinities research, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) contend that hybrid masculinities—despite their sometimes progressive appearance—function to both maintain and conceal "contemporary systems of gendered, raced, and sexual inequalities" (p. 247). They highlight three key consequences of hybrid masculinity: *discursive distancing, strategic borrowing*, and *fortifying boundaries.* The first, *discursive distancing,* refers to how men use hybrid practices to distinguish themselves from dominant forms of masculinity, particularly white heterosexual masculinity (p. 250). However, they argue that although these men attempt to distance themselves from reinforcing social inequality, they ultimately "align themselves with it," continuing to benefit from the privileges associated with hegemonic masculinity (p. 250). For instance, men involved in awareness campaigns such as "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" seek to bring attention to women's issues like domestic violence (p. 250). This march, which encourages men to wear women's clothing such as high heels, often leads to jokes about cross-dressing, walking in heels, and same-sex desire—thereby reasserting hegemonic masculine norms even in their apparent critique. Similarly, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) highlight Barber's (2008) study of white, heterosexual, middle-class men who engage in beauty work formerly coded as "feminine" (as cited in Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p. 251). While these men participate in practices associated with femininity, they "avoid feminization" by rationalizing their behaviour as appropriate for their social class position (p. 251).

The second consequence, *strategic borrowing*, refers to how men in privileged social positions selectively incorporate elements from subordinate groups to signal symbolic affiliation (p. 252). For example, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) draw on Demetriou's (2001) discussion of heterosexual men integrating aspects of gay culture into their gender performance. They argue that such incorporation ultimately reaffirms the deviant status of these groups, further reinforcing "systems of power and dominance" (p. 253). This borrowing is also often racialized: elements from racially marked or culturally specific groups are appropriated by privileged men—typically young, white, and middle- or upper-class—to "boost their masculine capital" (p. 253). Crucially, this is done without genuine engagement with the lived experiences of those whose practices are appropriated, leaving structures of inequality intact.

The third consequence of hybrid masculinity, *fortifying boundaries,* refers to the ways in which men appear to challenge traditional "social and symbolic boundaries (gendered, raced, sexual, etc.)" while in fact reinforcing them (pp. 254–255). For instance, norms around fatherhood may appear to have shifted in recent decades, with men becoming more involved in childcare. However, as the authors point out, patterns of gender inequality remain largely unchanged within traditional families, where women still perform the bulk of domestic labour (Heath, 2003, as cited in Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

A few years after introducing the concept of hybrid masculinity, Bridges and Pascoe (2018) revisit and critique their own formulation, responding to criticisms from other scholars. They acknowledge that the theory may overlook the persistence of hegemonic structures and, in doing so, risks reproducing them. They reiterate the "elastic properties" of hegemonic masculinity, which enable it to absorb aspects of subordinate masculinities without altering

underlying power relations (p. 259). They also stress that the three consequences of hybrid masculinity illustrate how "shifts in the ways those systems are perpetuated" can be subtle and difficult to detect (p. 269). Moreover, they emphasize the need for a revised framework that better accounts for the "elasticity of gender and sexual inequality" in order to assess the potential for meaningful change (p. 269). However, they stop short of proposing a concrete alternative.

In summary, this section explores Bridges and Pascoe's (2014, 2018) formulation of *hybrid masculinity*, a concept that examines how men appropriate practices associated with marginalized masculinities. Drawing on Connell's (1987) theory of *hegemonic masculinity* and Demetriou's (2001) notion of the *hegemonic bloc,* Bridges and Pascoe (2014) focus on young, heterosexual, middle-class men and their performances of gender. They identify three key consequences—*discursive distancing, strategic borrowing, and fortifying boundaries*—each of which ultimately contributes to the reproduction of inequality. Although the authors later call for a more nuanced account of the adaptability of gender hierarchies, they do not specify how such a revised framework should be developed (Bridges & Pascoe, 2018).

2.4 Inclusive Masculinity

Following the recognition that Connell's (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity was not always adequate for interpreting certain empirical findings, Anderson (2012) developed *inclusive masculinity theory* (IMT) to address its limitations. Importantly, IMT was not only a theoretical response to hegemonic masculinity but also emerged from Anderson's (2012) research on masculinity among university male athletes. His findings—particularly regarding homosexuality and feminized behaviours—could not be fully explained by Connell's (1987) framework. In this research, cheerleading teams composed of both homosexual and heterosexual men exhibited

varying levels of acceptance toward feminized behaviours. Based on these observations, Anderson (2012) categorized the masculinities he observed as either *orthodox* or *inclusive* (p. 93). Orthodox masculinity adhered more closely to traditional norms of manhood, while inclusive masculinity was more accepting of behaviours associated with what he terms *heterofemininity* (p.99).

Drawing on these findings, Anderson (2012) argues that Connell's (1987) framework cannot account for contexts where "two oppositional masculinities, each with equal influence" might coexist (p. 93). The coexistence of orthodox and inclusive masculinities among the cheerleaders challenges the presumption—central to Connell's (1987) theory—that masculinity always operates through hierarchical domination. Moreover, Anderson's (2012) research revealed that the gay men in his sample did not clearly experience subordination, further calling into question the applicability of a framework that relies on a binary between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. His findings suggest that Connell's (1987) model does not accommodate the possibility of multiple masculinities existing simultaneously without one dominating the other.

To support this argument, Anderson (2012) draws on additional studies of male athletes and fraternity members at both university and high school levels. These studies identified a range of masculine archetypes—such as "jocks, emos, scholars, [and] artists"—coexisting within the same social environments (p. 95). While orthodox masculinity remained more widely accepted in some groups, overt expressions of "homophobia, misogyny, and masculine bravado" traditionally associated with it were not universally embraced (p. 95). Anderson (2012) emphasizes that these findings demonstrate the need for a theoretical framework—like IMT—

that can account for the emergence of more inclusive and less hierarchical expressions of masculinity.

In the course of his research on inclusive masculinity, Anderson (2012) introduced the concept of *homohysteria*, defined as a cultural "fear of being socially perceived as gay" (Anderson & McCormack, 2018, p. 548). Homohysteria tends to emerge in groups where negative attitudes toward homosexuality are widespread and where gender expression is closely tied to assumptions about sexual orientation. According to *inclusive masculinity theory* (IMT), as homohysteria declines in "Anglo-American culture," new forms of masculinity that are more open to marginalized expressions begin to emerge (p. 97). This shift enables men to engage in behaviours that were previously stigmatized as deviant from hegemonic norms. As Anderson (2012) notes, "as cultural homohysteria significantly declines, a hegemonic form of conservative masculinity will lose its dominance, and softer masculinities will exist without the use of social stigma to police them" (p. 96).

Anderson (2012) emphasizes that even in cultures with reduced levels of homohysteria, heterosexual men typically continue to occupy a hegemonic position within gender relations. As such, men can "still assume one another as heterosexual, while still being inclusive" (p. 98). Although many men may retain internalized homophobic beliefs, the key cultural shift lies in the growing recognition of "the social unacceptability of the expression of those beliefs" (p. 98). Anderson (2012) also argues that it is *homohysteria*, rather than homophobia itself, that pressures men to perform orthodox masculinity in order to affirm their heterosexuality. In cultures characterized by inclusive masculinity, this pressure diminishes, as men are no longer required to externally "prove their heterosexuality" through such performances (p. 98). In other words, even

if homophobic beliefs persist, the social need to perform rigid masculinity to avoid suspicion of being gay has weakened, and this—according to Anderson (2012)—marks a significant cultural shift toward more inclusive forms of masculinity.

Anderson (2012) also draws attention to the concept of *metrosexuality,* introduced by Simpson (1994), which refers to heterosexual men—typically from upper classes—who emphasize grooming, fashion, and physical appearance, traits traditionally associated with femininity or subordinate identities (as cited in Anderson, 2012, p. 99). He suggests that metrosexuality provides a useful framework for understanding the context in which inclusive masculinity emerges, as it reflects fluidity, challenges orthodox masculinity, and signals a decline in homohysteria. Crucially, according to Anderson (2012), the emergence of metrosexual identities has broadly "permitted men of all classes and backgrounds to more freely associate with femininity, with or without identifying as metrosexual" (p. 100).

A few years after introducing *inclusive masculinity theory* (IMT), Anderson and McCormack (2018) set out to refine and update their original formulation in response to various critiques. They reaffirm that the concept of *homohysteria*—the "fear of being socially perceived as gay"—remains central to understanding IMT, as it highlights the "social conditions" under which men police each other's behaviours (p. 548). Some scholars have questioned whether homophobia has declined enough to support the claim that homohysteria has substantially diminished. In response, Anderson and McCormack (2018) emphasize that IMT focuses on *overt* homophobia, which they argue is demonstrably declining, citing statistics and referencing "a new body of research" on the topic (pp. 549, 551). Still, they acknowledge that the decline in

homohysteria is partial and specify that it primarily reflects greater "inclusivity of gay men and same-sex sexual desire more broadly," which remains limited in scope (pp. 549, 551).

Additionally, Anderson and McCormack (2018) recognize that IMT can be strengthened through the incorporation of an intersectional perspective that considers how masculinity is shaped by "location, age, religion, race or other factors" (p. 554). They do not dispute critiques that the theory insufficiently addresses women's experiences or how masculinities continue to reproduce patriarchy. However, they suggest that future research examining how "homohysteria intersects with sexism, and how heterosexual women's lives have changed with inclusive masculinities" may offer a productive way to address this gap (p. 555). A more refined version of the theory, they argue, can enhance our understanding of broader societal shifts in masculine expression—particularly with respect to changes in gender hierarchies, attitudes toward inequality, and power relations.

In sum, Anderson (2012, 2014) developed *inclusive masculinity theory* (IMT) after finding Connell's (1987) hegemonic masculinity framework inadequate for explaining male athletes who exhibited either *orthodox* or *inclusive* masculinities. IMT argues that as *homohysteria*—the fear of being perceived as gay—declines, men become more open to behaviors linked to marginalized masculinities. Unlike Connell's (1987) model, IMT allows for the coexistence of multiple dominant masculinities within a group. It places particular emphasis on sexual orientation and uses Simpson's (1994) idea of *metrosexuality* to illustrate its fluidity. Of the theories reviewed, it is the most focused on sexuality. Anderson and McCormack (2018) later proposed incorporating intersectionality to address IMT's limited attention to structural inequality.

2.5 Conclusion

Connell's (1987) theory of *hegemonic masculinity* is one of the most widely used frameworks for understanding how masculinity is socially constructed (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). It identifies legitimizing practices that reinforce men's dominance over subordinate masculinities and femininities, providing a foundation for analyzing men's cosmetics advertisements. Connell's later model (1995) outlines four relational forms—hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization—but has been critiqued for overlooking the influence of marginalized identities (Demetriou, 2001). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) revised the framework to affirm its relevance, while Lafrance and Hoebanx (2025) caution that its overuse can reduce men to fixed, power-bound roles. Bridges and Pascoe's (2014, 2018) *hybrid masculinity* expands on this by showing how young, heterosexual, middle-class men selectively adopt traits from marginalized groups in ways that often maintain existing hierarchies. They later acknowledge the need to refine the framework to better account for the fluidity of gender inequality. Similarly, Anderson's (2012) *inclusive masculinity theory* challenges hegemonic models by showing that opposing masculinities can coexist when *homohysteria*—fear of being perceived as gay—declines. This shift allows for greater gender expression, relevant to how men engage with beauty practices in advertising. Anderson and McCormack (2018) further revise the theory, calling for greater attention to intersectional factors like race, gender, and class.

To conclude, the three theoretical frameworks discussed in this review illustrate how masculinities are constructed and their various consequences in contemporary Western societies. As noted earlier, none of the existing research I reviewed in the previous chapter engages all

three frameworks simultaneously. In response to calls for broader theoretical approaches—beyond hegemonic masculinity theory—such as those made by Lafrance and Hoebanx (2025), I incorporate both hybrid and inclusive masculinity theories alongside hegemonic masculinity. The combined application of these frameworks underscores the present study's original contribution to scholarship on similar topics.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) has been widely adopted across academic fields, particularly in Psychology and Sociology. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify and interpret patterns in data. In their widely cited 2006 article, Braun and Clarke emphasize the method's flexibility, which has contributed to its popularity among qualitative researchers. One of the central goals of their approach is to make it adaptable to a range of theoretical frameworks and analytic strategies. They argue that reflexivity, self-awareness, and transparency about one's theoretical, epistemological, and methodological positions are essential. To distinguish their approach from other forms of thematic analysis, they later renamed it "reflexive TA" to highlight its distinct features (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). Exercising reflexivity requires researchers to critically examine their personal assumptions and values, as these factors may influence the analysis and interpretation of research findings.

Reflexive thematic analysis is the method I used to examine the data for this study, which explores the relationship between cosmetics advertisements and representations of masculinity. I begin by discussing the significance of advertisements as an object of study in relation to my research questions and reflect on the benefits and limitations of using YouTube as a primary research site (Sui et al., 2022). I then describe the video sample, which consists of men's makeup advertisements, followed by an overview of my research design, theoretical and epistemological orientation, and the six phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach.

3.2 Research Questions and Objects

3.2.1 *The Influence of Advertisements*

Taking into consideration the issues emerging from existing literature on men's body projects and makeup use, the research questions guiding this study seek to understand how makeup advertisements aimed at men represent masculinity, and how such representations resist or reinforce dominant gender norms. Many scholars have analyzed advertisements as culturally significant objects whose functions extend beyond selling products (Leiss et al., 2018). The way advertisements reach consumers in North America has drastically changed since the nineteenth century (McAllister & Galarza, 2023). In recent decades, they have increasingly permeated daily life and contemporary culture, especially through digital social media platforms that make them instantly accessible to billions worldwide. Moreover, modern advertisements promoted via digital media over the past decade have become deeply intertwined with identity formation, aspirational economies, and popular cultural processes (McAllister & Galarza, 2023, p. 38).

For instance, advertisements implicitly suggest that consumers will gain various social benefits through the consumption of particular branded products. As McAllister and Galarza (2023) observe, "buying, using, and displaying brands, ads imply, will gain you peer respect, romantic success, masterful parenting skills, elite status, control over the environment, and so on" (p. 38). They also note that early advertisements dating back to the early 1900s were primarily informational but later became more aspirational, often promoting desired values to consumers: "values that were considered to be held only by the wealthy of society—fashion, convenience, leisure—became promoted through advertising as advertising promised to deliver these values to everyone through the consumption of brands" (p. 38). Thus, advertisements aim

to appeal to consumers' desires to attain aspirational lifestyles and benefit from enhanced social status.

The gender norms and expectations projected in advertisements can significantly influence how individuals shape their gender identities and behaviours (Goffman, 1979). As Gornick (1979) observes, advertisements often serve "the social purpose of convincing us that this is how men and women are, or want to be, or should be—not only in relation to themselves but in relation to each other" (p. vii). In this way, advertisements exert a powerful ideological influence on how gender is performed by both men and women. Goffman (1979) similarly argues that constructions of gender are shaped by the depictions of masculinity and femininity that people encounter in everyday life, including through advertisements. As he explains, individuals have "a capacity to learn to provide and to read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures, and this capacity they have by virtue of being persons, not females or male" (p. 8). That is, people internalize and reproduce gendered behaviours not solely because of their sex but because they are social beings attuned to dominant norms. Advertising, therefore, plays a key role in reinforcing and circulating these norms.

3.2.2 *Research Site: YouTube*

YouTube is a present-day social media platform that promotes products and businesses through video advertisements (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018). The platform, which enables video-sharing, was introduced in 2005. In 2006, the platform implemented various tools that businesses could use to market their products, including displaying advertisements on the margins of a video screen and having video advertisements that play at the beginning or middle

of videos, some of which are "skippable" and some of which are not (p. 2). Many companies have shifted to promoting advertisements through digital platforms rather than through more traditional media outlets to more effectively target online users (West & McAllister, 2023). Sui et al. (2022) note that social media platforms are especially advantageous to researchers as there is an abundance of free and publicly accessible data. A significant part of that data includes "engagement metrics" or "data that quantifiably represent the interactions that viewers and users have with creators on the YouTube platform," such as the number of views, likes and dislikes, or comments (Sui et al., 2022, p. 8).

There are, however, limitations associated with the use of YouTube as a research site. For instance, publicly available information about the demographics of users who watch videos on the platform is limited (Sui et al., 2022). Likewise, although the number of views can be observed anecdotally, it is not a reliable indicator of overall popularity. YouTube does not provide tools for tracking how views accumulate over time, and "videos with an earlier post-date have more time, and thus more potential, to accrue views" (Sui et al., 2022, p. 9). Ultimately, the absence of detailed information about viewer characteristics, along with restricted access to meaningful viewership data, underscores some of the key constraints associated with research on YouTube.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria of the Sample

3.3.1 *Inclusion Criteria*

The advertisements included in my sample were selected according to the following inclusion criteria. First, all advertisements had to be published on the publicly accessible platform YouTube. I chose to select all videos from the same platform not only to ensure the

coherence of my sample, but also because YouTube content is readily and reliably accessible. In addition, the platform offers free access and does not require users to sign in to view content, meaning that the data falls within the public domain and does not require ethics clearance. YouTube also provides standardized information for each video—such as view counts and publication dates—which was straightforward to collect. Limiting the sample to a single platform ensured consistency in the type of data gathered across all objects. Moreover, unlike certain other social media sites where content may be removed after a set period, videos on YouTube often remain accessible for extended periods, as indicated by older publication dates.

Second, only advertisements published within the last 15 years were included. Existing literature demonstrates that men were increasingly targeted by cosmetics companies over the course of this period (Barber, 2017; Byrne & Milestone, 2023; Elias et al., 2017; Frank, 2014; Kenalemang-Palm, 2023; Scheibling, & Lafrance, 2019). For instance, Scheibling and Lafrance (2019) note that there has been increased discussion of metrosexuality and the grooming habits associated with it both in popular culture and academia over the last decade and a half.

Third, advertisements created and posted by mainstream or commercially recognizable cosmetics company primarily from North America, Europe, and Australia were selected. Recognizable brand name cosmetics companies were selected to be included in the sample as they have wide-ranging cultural reach and are likely to be a sound indicator of both the corporate and cultural trends of central interest to this study.

Fourth, only advertisements featuring cosmetics products intended for daily facial use by men were included, since this study aims to gain a greater understanding of what cosmetics companies convey about the construction of masculinity and how it is experienced in everyday

contexts. The study's focus on everyday life is particularly significant in relation to how men understand and are encouraged to take on specifically gendered practices.

Fifth, I selected advertisements that appeared to target a primarily heterosexual male audience. This focus reflects the fact that heterosexual men continue to constitute the majority group addressed in mainstream advertising. Concentrating on this demographic made it possible to examine overarching trends in the construction of masculinity, rather than niche representations that may be more relevant to gender and sexual minority groups. It is important to note, however, that although these advertisements appear to be directed at heterosexual men, they may still hold relevance or appeal for other groups of men as well.

3.3.2 *Exclusion Criteria*

First, the exclusion criteria for the sample included the removal of any advertisements containing audio or text-based content in languages other than English. This decision was made to ensure both linguistic and analytical consistency across the sample. Since the study itself is conducted in English, working with English-language content reduces the risk of misinterpretation and facilitates a more precise thematic analysis. Ensuring that all data could be interpreted without the need for translation was especially important given the study's focus on identifying patterns in language, tone, and messaging within the advertisements.

Second, advertisements produced by alternative or lesser-known cosmetics companies were excluded. Such companies typically cater to niche markets and attract a more limited consumer base already familiar with their brand and products. As a result, they are less likely to reflect dominant cultural norms. As previously noted, this study focuses on advertisements

produced by major cosmetics brands with broad cultural reach and impact, in order to better understand the forms of masculinity most widely promoted in mainstream culture.

Third, advertisements that appear to be selling theatrically oriented or special effects makeup were not selected. These types of advertisements were excluded as they are least likely to highlight the way dominant norms of masculinity are currently configured. Also, as explained above, my study intends to focus on heterosexual men's incorporation of makeup into their daily routines to understand the often imperceptible ways dominant norms of masculinity are constructed. The emphasis on everyday life practices meant that theatrically oriented or special effects make up advertisements were incompatible with the aims of the study.

3.4 Description of Sample

As evident in Table 1, the sample used in this research consists of 15 men's makeup advertisement videos published on YouTube between 2013 and 2023. The oldest video is by Mac Cosmetics (2013) and the most recent video is by War Paint For Men (2023). The shortest advertisement is 0:20 seconds and the longest is 4:58 minutes, with the average duration time being 1:52 minutes. Advertisements were taken from seven well established cosmetics companies including Chanel (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b), Charlotte Tilbury Beauty (2017, 2019), Fenty Beauty By Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022), Laura Mercier (2019), Mac Cosmetics (2013), Rimmel London AU (Australia) (2018), and War Paint For Men (2018, 2021, 2023). The companies listed above have between 2.19 thousand to 2.71 million subscribers on the YouTube platform, with Rimmel London AU (2018)having the least number of subscribers and Chanel (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b), having the most. Given that I intend to focus on mainstream

cosmetics companies' advertisements, subscription data was useful in terms of indicating which companies were popular, specifically on the YouTube platform.

Table 1. Sample of Makeup for Men YouTube Advertisements

Number	Publication Date	Cosmetics Company	Video Title	Video Length	Number of Views (As of April 3, 2025)	Country	Company Subscribers Count
1	August 19, 2013	Mac Cosmetics	Artists Up Close: Prep + Prime for Men with Neil Young | Mac Cosmetics	4:55	70,460	United States	653 K
2	July 7, 2017	Charlotte Tilbury Beauty	The Best Men's Grooming Products | Charlotte Tilbury	1:21	84,804	United Kingdom	871 K
3	August 22, 2018	Rimmel London AU	Rimmel for Men Brow & Beard Collection	0:31	3, 468	Australia	2.19 K
4	October 2, 2018	War Paint For Men	War Paint Men's Makeup. Man's World.	0:59	26,575	United Kingdom	4.13 K
5	August 18, 2018	Fenty Beauty By Rihanna	Makeup For Men | Fenty Beauty	4:56	1,081,983	Not listed (United States)	1.09 M
6	May 5, 2019	Fenty Beauty By Rihanna	Makeup For Men | Fenty Beauty	4:15	724,603	Not listed (United States)	1.09 M
7	September 16, 2019	Charlotte Tilbury Beauty	Natural Makeup for Men - How to Apply Foundation Flawlessly | Charlotte Tilbury	1:11	215, 362	United Kingdom	871 K

8	August 12, 2019	Laura Mercier	Natural Makeup for Men Feat. New Tinted Moisturizer | Laura Mercier	0:34	4,522	United States	26.3 K
9	August 27, 2019	Chanel	How to Get a Smart & Fast Look with Boy de Chanel - Chanel Beauty Tutorials	0:36	61,548	France	2.71 M
10	August 28, 2019	Chanel	How to Get a Natural Look with a Beard with Boy de Chanel – Chanel Beauty Tutorials	0:30	34,105	France	2.71 M
11	August 7, 2020	Chanel	Create a Natural to Intense Look with BOY de Chanel — Chanel Makeup	0:50	204,331	France	2.71 M
12	August 8, 2020	Chanel	Boy de Chanel. A Natural Look in a Few Steps – Chanel Makeup	0:20	44,744	France	2.71 M
13	June 16, 2021	War Paint For Men	Men's Concealer Pen – A Simple Application Guide	1:19	19,137	United Kingdom	4.13 K
14	January 12, 2022	Fenty Beauty By Rihanna	Makeup For Men | Fenty Beauty	4:58	205, 550	Not listed (United States)	1.09 M
15	July 11, 2023	War Paint For Men	War Paint For Men | Don't Hold Back	0:47	2,417	United Kingdom	4.13 K

The sample is composed of two categories of advertisements. The first category includes five advertisements from brands promoting men's exclusive makeup lines presented in a conventional marketing format—that is, they rely on standard promotional techniques and primarily showcase the products in use. These videos tend to emphasize the benefits or appearance of the products but do not offer detailed guidance on their application. The second category includes ten advertisements that appear to be designed to educate consumers on how to incorporate specific makeup products into their daily routines. These products are not explicitly labeled for men, yet the videos model their use in ways that suggest broad accessibility. None of the advertisements in either category explicitly state that they are targeting heterosexual men, though their emphasis on inconspicuous makeup appropriate for daily wear suggests that they are aimed at men who might otherwise be wary of being associated with cosmetics use.

3.5 Research Design

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize the importance of selecting an appropriate form of thematic analysis in relation to one's overall research questions. As previously noted, the authors now "prefer the term reflexive TA" because it better represents the distinct nature of their approach, emphasizing researchers' active role and the flexibility of the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). To ensure methodological transparency, they stress that researchers must clearly specify the version of thematic analysis being used and articulate how it will be applied. This includes providing clarity around several key elements: a description of the data set, the use of either an inductive or deductive analytic approach, a focus on either semantic or latent themes, and a forthright declaration of the study's epistemological position. Braun and Clarke (2006)

argue that these choices should be made prior to theme development, in order to ensure that the analytic claims are both coherent and meaningfully aligned with the research questions.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline what they consider to be a *theme,* which is defined as a significant pattern of meaning across the collected data (p. 82). Ideally, themes are coded when there is a noticeable prevalence in the size or number of similar "data items" (p. 82). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that there are no strict rules for theme selection, and researchers do not necessarily need to rely on quantifiable thresholds for a theme to be valid. For example, themes may be chosen based on their relevance to the research questions. Some researchers may also select themes that offer insight into the data set as a whole, allowing them to produce what the authors call a "rich description" of it (p. 83). While this approach may not always capture the full complexity of the data, it remains valuable for researchers working in under-researched areas. Alternatively, researchers may choose to focus on one specific aspect of the data set and analyze it in depth.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe two main analytic approaches to thematic analysis: *inductive* and *theoretical or deductive* (p. 83). An inductive approach involves deriving themes directly from the data—a "bottom-up" process—without the influence of preexisting theories or frameworks (p. 83). In this approach, all patterns observed in the data are coded, regardless of their relevance to the research questions. While this can generate a broad overview, it may yield themes that are less pertinent to the study's specific aims.

In contrast, a theoretical or deductive approach is guided by established theories and frameworks, constituting a "top-down" process (p. 83). Here, researchers begin with a clear analytical focus and examine the data for elements that relate directly to the research questions.

Although this strategy may result in a less comprehensive description of the data overall it enables a more targeted and conceptually grounded analysis.

For this study, I adopt a deductive approach in order to focus specifically on how masculinity is represented in makeup advertisements, and whether these representations reinforce or challenge dominant gender norms. Focusing on what Braun and Clarke (2006) call *latent themes*, my analysis is informed by three theoretical frameworks: hegemonic masculinity, hybrid masculinity, and inclusive masculinity (p.83). These frameworks served as interpretive lenses for identifying relevant themes in the data, which were subsequently refined and expanded during the analysis phase.

Furthermore, the study adopts a constructionist epistemological perspective to inform the interpretation of its themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Constructionism emphasizes that individuals' meanings and experiences arise through social processes rather than being fixed or static phenomena (Burr, 1995, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). The theoretical frameworks employed in this research similarly recognize that traits associated with masculinity are shaped by social contexts. Braun and Clarke (2006) also highlight the connection between a constructionist perspective and a focus on latent themes: "thematic analysis that focuses on 'latent' themes tends to be more constructionist," further supporting the appropriateness of both the selected interpretive approach and the underlying epistemological position (p. 85).

Finally, Braun and Clarke (2006) outline the distinction between *semantic* and *latent themes.* Semantic themes capture the "explicit or surface meaning" present in the data (p. 84). In other words, they focus solely on what is textually or verbally stated, without delving into underlying meanings or interpretations. By contrast, *latent themes* explore deeper or more

"*underlying* ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations—and ideologies" (p.84). In this way, the data is subjected to increased interpretation by the researcher to identify meanings that are not immediately obvious. This study focuses on the latent themes that arise in the data, as I seek to interpret the often inconspicuous messaging regarding masculinity and power dynamics present in makeup advertisements aimed at male consumers.

3.6 The Six Phases of Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which involves six phases, was used to identify and analyze consistent themes in the study's data. The first phase, "familiarizing yourself with your data," requires researchers to become closely acquainted with the material by actively reading and noting initial meanings to enable comprehensive analysis (p. 87). Following data collection, I watched each of the videos two to three times and recorded my initial observations regarding *expressive domains* such as sound, text, and images (Lafrance & Burns, 2017). Also, to determine consumer reach and impact on YouTube, I noted each company's subscriber count on the platform. Second, researchers are called to engage in the process of "generating initial codes," which involves labelling significant elements of the data, particularly those relevant to the research questions (p. 88). I applied a deductive approach to coding, prioritizing elements that aligned with my research focus. Third, the phase of "searching for themes" involves organizing and combining the codes identified in the previous step into broader, coherent themes (p. 89). As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), I created a visual map of the themes to assist in refining them and in distinguishing between overarching themes and sub-themes. Fourth, the phase of "reviewing themes" requires researchers to revisit and assess the relevance of the emerging themes to ensure they remain aligned with the research

questions (p. 91). Fifth, the phase of "defining and naming themes" involves assigning clear, informative labels to themes that capture the "essence of what each theme is about" (p. 92). Sixth, "producing the report" entails presenting the themes in a way that supports and advances the overall analysis and findings (p. 93).

3.7 Conclusion

This study employs Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2021) reflexive thematic analysis to examine how advertisements targeted at men portray masculinity and whether these portrayals reinforce or resist dominant gender norms. Advertisements were selected for their cultural influence and role in reproducing gender norms (Leiss, 2018; Goffman, 1979), with YouTube chosen as the research site for its accessibility and ability to support a coherent sample. The sample consists of 15 advertisements (N=15) for men's makeup products, published between 2013 and 2023 by seven widely recognized cosmetics companies, with videos averaging under two minutes in length. Inclusion criteria required that videos be accessible on YouTube, published within the last 15 years, created by mainstream brands, feature products for men's daily use, and target a primarily heterosexual male audience. Videos in languages other than English, from niche brands, or featuring special effects makeup were excluded. Altogether, two genres of advertisements were identified including: five product-focused ads (N=5) featuring items explicitly marketed to men without usage instructions, and ten instructional-style ads (N=10) that model product application in greater detail.

Advertisement videos were not transcribed in their entirety due to the presence of mainly background music in many of them. However, for advertisements containing spoken words, the "Show transcript" feature available in the video description box on YouTube was utilized.

Transcripts were copied from YouTube into separate documents and used to verify the accuracy of the wording. Following Braun and Clarke's (2019) call for methodological transparency, this study adopts a constructionist epistemology and a deductive approach to coding, guided by theoretical frameworks of hegemonic, hybrid, and inclusive masculinity. Thematic analysis focuses on latent meanings in the data, emphasizing how subtle messaging in advertisements contributes to the construction of contemporary masculine norms.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.1 Introduction

Five themes concerning representations of masculinity in makeup advertisements emerged from the data analysis including: (1) "Technical Management"; (2) "Competency Building"; (3) "Normative Reinforcement"; (4) "Vital Transformation"; and (5) "Gender Subversion." Below, I will describe each of these themes and provide examples.

4.2 Theme #1: Technical Management

The most common types of makeup marketed in the sample's advertisements are those that are inconspicuous. The importance of invisibility is conveyed in various ways throughout the data, including the repeated use of the term "invisible," which appears three times (N=3) in the Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisement. For example, makeup artist Neil Young states, "the idea is that it looks invisible" (2:56). Inconspicuousness is also emphasized through the description of the light and weightless texture of the product, with terms such as "light" (Fenty Beauty, 2019, 2:21; Mac Cosmetics, 2013, 2:07), "light tint" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 1:46) , "lightweight" (Fenty Beauty, 2022, 0:48; Mac Cosmetics, 2013, 0:35), and "light coverage" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:45) being mentioned in six instances (N=6) in the data. Neil Young also highlights the light texture of the cosmetic foundation that is blended over the face, stating: "This is a great texture, it's kind of a light emulsion, like a creamy texture" (Mac Cosmetics, 2013, 2:04). Similarly, Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018) makeup artist Hector Espinal explains to viewers that men should aim to use a light layer of foundation makeup on the skin, claiming that "the whole purpose here is that you sheer out the foundation as much as possible creating like a light tint"

(1:42). More conspicuous makeup products, specifically those that are heavier and thicker in nature, were not commonly recommended or advertised in the sample.

The importance of men's makeup being inconspicuous or invisible is also emphasized through the ongoing use of the word 'natural.' There are, in fact, fourteen (N=14) mentions of this word throughout the sample. Here, invisibility is often framed as a natural phenomenon, with an emphasis on inconspicuousness conveyed through the notion that what is natural should also be invisible—as exemplified in the following Mac Cosmetics advertisement: "just work it all over the skin and that will give him a nice, really like natural matte. You don't want it to be flat, it needs to be natural" (Mac Cosmetics, 2013, 4:08). In this way, matte makeup looks are represented as being closer to nature than those with a shiny finish. For example, in two advertisements by Chanel (2020a; 2020b), this is conveyed by the claim that a man's lip balm should not be highly visible to others: "the balm should not be seen, only the results" (0:31; 0:14). Similarly, there are four mentions (N=4) of "evenness," which also point to the importance of invisibility. For instance, in the War Paint for Men (2021) advertisement, men are instructed to blend the product into the face, ensuring it is evenly distributed on the skin to achieve an undetectable finish: "Just start to blend the product out 'til it's nice and even and it's not noticeable" (0:42). Interestingly, however, one of the advertisements by Chanel (2020a) appears to contradict these instructions and instead encourages a more noticeable makeup look. This thematic departure will be further discussed in theme #5—"gender subversion."

The advertisements construct flawlessness as a form of invisibility, as demonstrated through the emphasis on applying makeup products to correct the skin of the face. In one advertisement by the Charlotte Tilbury Beauty (2019) company, the term "flawless" is used nine times (N=9)

and is included on the label of the advertised foundation product called "airbrush flawless foundation" (0:12). This term is also used five times (N=5) throughout the advertisement. For instance, consumers are advised to blend their foundation in a specific direction to achieve the flawless ideal through the text displayed next to the model's face as the technique is being demonstrated: "blend outwards for a flawless finish" (Charlotte Tilbury Beauty, 2019, 0:25). Closely connected to the invocations of flawlessness are the claims that the advertised makeup products are enduring and can remain in place for long periods of time so that a man's use of makeup is not revealed. In fact, the advertisements are explicit about attempting to manage fear and anxiety that male customers may have regarding their makeup use being exposed. For example, in a Fenty Beauty by Rhianna (2019) advertisement, men are told: "so I know oftentimes you know when you guys wear makeup the biggest fear is, oh my god it's going to transfer, or we're going to sweat it off, so remember the concealer is long lasting, the bronzer is actually transfer resistant" (3:18).

If the advertisements emphasize the importance of concealing makeup use, they also underscore the need for the tools used to apply it to remain undetectable. Makeup artist Espinal, in an advertisement by Fenty Beauty (2018), highlights the unique aspects of a makeup foundation stick, noting that its compact and magnetic packaging allows for convenience and, above all, discretion, as it can be easily hidden in places such as one's bag. He states: "the magnetic thing is so great especially like if you could be on the run, or you don't want people to know that you have, you know, some makeup in your bag" (1:00). Similarly, in the instructional video by War Paint For Men (2021), the company's concealer product is advertised as being compact enough to be concealed by a man's clothing: "Now we're gonna talk about the Concealer Pen—an amazing universal product that fits in your pocket" (War Paint For Men,

2021, 0:04). These advertisements suggest that men may prefer to keep their use of makeup private, emphasizing the discreet design of certain products that can be easily hidden in pockets or bags. At the same time, they implicitly acknowledge the persistent stigma surrounding men's makeup use and attempt to ease potential feelings of insecurity associated with it.

Fourteen advertisements (N=14) addressed the application of makeup by using one's fingers. Specifically, thirteen advertisements stated that using fingertips is useful way to apply makeup for achieving a natural and invisible finish: "you really want to start off with your fingers; it's the best tool to make anything look super natural" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 1:32). In this way, the use of fingers is represented as a way to make makeup tools themselves disappear, reassuring men that they can use makeup without tools that may feel feminine to them. Nevertheless, 12 advertisements (N=12) in the sample featured at least one type of makeup application tool—such as brushes or sponges—typically shown as helping to ensure a discreet and natural-looking finish: "What I love about this brush is it's just so easy to use, I don't feel like I'm applying too much, so just slowly swirl around your powder and just lightly brush it all on the t-zone" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 3:48). These tools are not presented as vain or extravagant accessories, but as practical, efficient instruments essential for subtle enhancement. In doing so, the advertisements help to assuage potential concerns men may have about appearing to fuss over their appearance, framing these tools as functional rather than fussy.

4.3 Theme #2: Competency Building

The messaging that characterizes many of the advertisements, particularly those that are more instructional in nature, appears to be directed to male consumers who may be resistant to using makeup. This reflects a broader tendency in the sample, whereby the management of

men's anxiety is prioritized. That anxiety is addressed not only through strategies of concealing makeup use, but also by helping men build capacity. Simplicity is emphasized, as many of the instructional advertisements seek to teach men how to apply makeup in at least three to six steps. For example, Neil Young explains: "I want to take you through some male grooming, and what I'm going to do is take you through some really simple steps" (Mac Cosmetics, 2013, 0:12). This example demonstrates how makeup looks can be achieved through a simple process, with a minimal number of steps, making it less intimidating to male viewers. Once again, the emphasis on the simplicity of the process reassures men that they are not required to fuss over their appearance in order to achieve results, thereby avoiding behaviour often viewed as feminine.

As in the Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisement, the War Paint For Men's (2021) *Men's Concealer Pen—a Simple Application Guide*, consists of a three-step demonstration of how to apply concealer. The video features a male spokesperson dressed in a neutral-coloured casual t-shirt discussing the steps associated with applying the company's concealer pen product. Shortly thereafter, a male model with a beard and short hair is shown using the product as described in each step. There are brief textual instructions that appear on the righthand side of the advertisement during the discussion of each step, presented in capitalized white font with a black background. There are also subtitles appearing at the bottom of the video providing clear textual instructions that mirror what the spokesperson is saying.

The first step involves activating the concealer pen to release the product: "Step 1. pump the pen to release the product" (War Paint For Men, 2021, 0:24). This preliminary action must be completed before the actual application of the makeup and is a step represented in several of the sample's advertisements. For example, in Laura Mercier's (2019) advertisement, the first step

involves preparing the skin with skincare products before applying tinted moisturizer: “Step 1: prep skin with skincare” (0:07). Applying concealer is the second step in the War Paint For Men (2021) advertisement: “Step 2. apply the concealer to any areas you would like to cover” (0:33). The third step involves blending the concealer into the skin using either a finger or a makeup sponge: “Step 3. blend out the product using your finger or sponge to give you an even finish” (0:44). Users are also reassured that if they feel they have over-blended, they can “just reapply some more product and redo the process again” (0:46). These instructions underscore the simplicity of makeup use and help to ease concerns that men may have as they attempt it for the first time. Ultimately, the messaging presented in these advertisements does not take men’s familiarity with makeup for granted; rather, it is built around the assumption that many men are applying it for the first time.

The emphasis on men’s ability to build competence in makeup use is reflected in the repeated use of terms like “easy” (N=9) and “quick” (N=3). As one advertisement explains, “So the Concealer Pen is one of our favourite products, and it’s one of our bestsellers. That’s cause it’s really easy to use, and if you’re a first-time user, I definitely suggest starting with this” (War Paint For Men, 2021, 0:49). Similarly, in the Chanel (2020a) advertisement, the company highlights the ease and speed of application: “Comfortable and easy to use, leaving skin matte. Quick and easy to apply thanks to its stick format” (0:15).

Beards were an ongoing source of concern in many of the sample advertisements. In fact, there were five mentions of the ways in which men’s beards, or facial hair, can complicate makeup application. In an advertisement by Chanel (2019b), there is a specific demonstration of how to apply makeup with a beard, outlined in five steps: “natural look with a beard in 5 steps”

(Chanel, 2019b, 0:01). The male model in this advertisement wears a simple, solid-colour long-sleeve sweater and has a short beard and hairstyle. Two of the steps in the process explicitly address issues related to facial hair. For instance, men are advised to avoid blending foundation into areas of the face with beard: "3. Apply starting with forehead, then moving to the cheeks and nose, avoiding facial hair for a natural look" (0:09). Additionally, the use of a brush tool at the end of the eyebrow pencil is recommended to blend excess makeup around the beard: "4. Use Boy de Chanel eyebrow pencil to blend the appearance of any foundation in facial hair" (0:15). Therefore, a man's beard is articulated as a part of the face that requires special attention when applying makeup. The inclusion of beard-specific instructions and tools reinforces that these products are not only compatible with facial hair but are designed specifically for men, to the exclusion of women.

4.4 Theme #3: Normative Reinforcement

A key pattern in the sample is the attempt to normalize men's makeup use while simultaneously reinforcing dominant norms of masculinity by avoiding feminine and LGBTQ+ aesthetics. Many of the male models portrayed in the sample advertisements have muscular builds, short hair, beards, and are either shirtless or wearing casual t-shirts in neutral colours. These traits mark what are generally considered to be the biological differences between males and females while also aligning with traditional masculine aesthetics. The strong masculine markers on display appear designed to compel viewers to register the maleness of the body, therefore, it is unsurprising that bodies characterized by these traits are the most prevalent in the sample. Additionally, in two advertisements by Chanel (2020a, 2020b), a deep and unmistakably masculine voiceover is used to describe the makeup products throughout.

War Paint For Men's (2018, 2021, 2023) advertisements are a particularly strong example of the normative reinforcement theme. In the *War Paint Men's Makeup. Man's World* (2018) advertisement, a white man in business attire is shown driving a luxury car and parking in front of a large house. Once inside, he showers and applies makeup before changing into a more casual outfit consisting of a t-shirt, luxury watch, jeans, and boots. The camera lingers on his shirtless upper body during the makeup application, with repeated shots of his tattoos and muscular torso emphasizing his ruggedness. The depiction of his grooming routine, combined with his seemingly affluent lifestyle, reinforces the idealized stereotype of the successful, hardworking man. Similarly, in the *War Paint For Men | Don't Hold Back* (2023) advertisement, various male models are shown with a "hard look"—that is, cold and often hostile facial expressions—and attire ranging from business to casual wear (Nixon, 1996, as cited in Scheibling & Lafrance, 2019, p. 230). They are depicted applying makeup in domestic settings such as bathrooms and living rooms, while the modern industrial backdrops—characterized by neutral and darker tones—evoke productivity and avoid associations with 'feminine' colours.

Moreover, in the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) instructional advertisements featuring makeup artist Hector Espinal, male specific terms such as "gentlemen," (Fenty Beauty, 2022, 4:45) "guys," (Fenty Beauty, 2019, 3:21) and "fellas" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:34) are used in eleven (N=11) instances. The use of these terms emphasizes that the customers being targeted are men, once again to the exclusion of women. For instance, in the following citation male specific terms are invoked two times (N=2) in one sentence: "gentlemen I really hope you feel and look sexy, and I hope your skin looking nice and fresh, and I hope you definitely learned some tips and tricks and I'll be looking out for you fellas out there until next time" (Fenty Beauty, 2022, 4:46). The advertisements also draw a clear distinction between professional

models and average male consumers: “well, as a model, I’m assuming they do put a lot of things on you, so like powders, foundations, and concealers. For the fellas out there that don’t wear anything or are just coming out of the gym, I’m gonna be showing you some tips and tricks (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:29). In this example, the model is being addressed in ways that will be relatable to average male consumers—particularly “fellas” or those who frequent the gym—and that are mindful of their makeup competency.

Makeup artist Neil Young highlights key differences between men’s and women’s makeup in the Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisement, noting: “now, when you’re looking at men’s eyes, the tone around the eye is really important—you don’t conceal an eye area in the same way you would a woman’s eye” (Mac Cosmetics, 2013, 3:07). Labels on products by brands such as Chanel (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b), Rimmel London AU (2018), and War Paint For Men (2018, 2021, 2022) also reinforce gender distinctions, explicitly using terms like ‘boy’ or ‘men’ to signal that the products are for male consumers. In doing so, these product lines reframe makeup—traditionally associated with women—as aligned with dominant norms of masculinity.

It is uncommon for the male models in the sample advertisements to speak; only five (N=5) of the men who had makeup applied to them did so. However, in the advertisements where there is a makeup artist providing a demonstration of how to apply makeup, four (N=4) of the models engaged with and responded to questions asked by the artists. Nevertheless, the models spoke minimally—often with a deep voice—reinforcing the stereotype of men being economical with language and demonstrating emotional control. While the models allow themselves to be made up by the artists, they do not demonstrate much in the way of enthusiasm, as enthusiasm in this context could be seen to compromise their credibility as men. In this way,

makeup is represented as a means to achieve a particular objective for men, rather than something in which they actively take pleasure or invest themselves.

Some of the male models in the advertisements appear to go out of their way to masculinize their approach to applying makeup. As one model remarks, "well, on set I usually use a lot of foundation, a little bit of powder—not too much—and a splash of pizza grease really helps. You should try it sometime, Domino's also" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:16). He delivers the line in a deep voice with a relaxed expression, playfully downplaying his use of makeup and likening it to something as mundane—and masculine—as pizza grease. In doing so, he suggests that makeup is simply one of many tools available to enhance one's appearance. This effort to normalize makeup use while maintaining a masculine self-presentation is echoed in other advertisements as well. In one instance, a male model is asked if he has ever worn foundation. He replies, "I have not, I was never shown how and never dove in and thought it was right for men" (Fenty Beauty, 2022, 0:40). His hesitation underscores the uncertainty some men feel about whether makeup use aligns with masculine norms. The makeup artist responds that this is a "common problem," affirming its acceptability and guiding him through the application process (Fenty Beauty, 2022, 0:45).

The music playing in the background of some of the sample advertisements further reinforces dominant norms of masculinity. For example, the War Paint For Men's (2018) advertisement, *War Paint Men's Makeup. Man's World,* contains no text or dialogue—only the musical track "It's a Man's Man's Man's World" by James Brown. Both the title and the lyrics of this song allude to traditional ideals of men as dominant, physically capable, and responsible for social innovation: "You see man made the cars, To take us over the road, Man made the train,

To carry the heavy load, Man made the electric light" (0:37). Similarly, in the Rimmel London AU's advertisement (2018), there is an upbeat hip-hop style song with lyrics which suggest that using makeup products can signal men's evolution and maturity: "Mother lover you gon' love this graduated from a rebel to a revolutionary in my area they love this, I'mma wreck it like I'm revving the engine" (0:04). The last part of this lyrics also appears to underscore men's capacity to act as forcefully as a motor or a machine.

4.5 Theme #4: Vital Transformation

Advertisements by Charlotte Tilbury (2017, 2019) and War Paint For Men (2023) often feature energetic, lyric-free pop and electronic music, which conveys vitality and youthfulness. This emphasis on vital energy and youth is reinforced visually through the presentation of the male models' bodies and skin. In several ads (Charlotte Tilbury, 2017, 2019; War Paint For Men, 2018, 2023), the models appear topless, with the camera showing not only their faces but also their muscular upper bodies. These bodies—associated with health, strength, and masculinity—signal an idealized male form. The exposure of both facial and bodily skin suggests not only physical openness but also a receptiveness to transformation, framed here as a virile pursuit.

The emphasis on vitality, youthfulness, and physical well-being is reinforced by the repeated use of terms like "healthy" (N=6) (Mac Cosmetics, 2013, 4:19), "fresh" (N=10) (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:50), and "glow" (N=6) (Charlotte Tilbury, 2017, 0:04). The word "healthy" appears six times (N=6) across the sample, and glowing skin is consistently framed as a sign of good health and strength. As the Mac Cosmetics (2013) makeup artist explains: "Sheen is really good—it means healthy skin; no one is completely matte. When you look at someone's skin [and] it looks really healthy, there's always a nice natural sheen to it" (4:18). Charlotte Tilbury Beauty (2017)

similarly links radiance to health, promoting one product as offering "the healthiest, happiest glowing skin of your life" (0:31). Interestingly, this messaging contrasts with the matte-skin ideal discussed in theme #1—"technical management."

Freshness is also associated with youthfulness, especially in the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna advertisements (2018, 2019, 2022). In one ad, the makeup artist says, "for the fellas out there that are not into modelling and just want to look fresh and young and beautiful, match sticks are your best bet" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:46). The model responds, "Got to stay fresh," highlighting the discipline and ongoing effort required to maintain a youthful appearance (0:52). Similarly, in Rimmel London AU's (2018) *Rimmel for Men Brow & Beard Collection* advertisement, emphasis is also placed on taming the apparent nature of the male body. Throughout the advertisement, there are pairs of terms written in bold white colored font. The terms identify parts of the male body alongside adjectives that allude to body discipline and transformation, including: "socks/sharp" (0:07), "brows/fixed"(0:10), "hair/tidy" (0:13) , "beard/filled" (0:16), "buttons/maxed" (0:19), "brows/tamed" (0:23). These pairs of terms suggest that male body parts are unruly and must be optimized to be successful. The emphasis on optimization manifests itself in other advertisements as well, such as the one by Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018): "I don't want you to feel like you have too much going on, it's just a better version of yourself" (2:54). Increased optimization of the face and body also calls for cleanliness, which is highlighted by makeup artist Hector Espinal when blending foundation into a model's skin, "creating a light tint, this is just to really make the skin look nice and clean" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 1:47). Espinal reinforces how cleanliness is connected to overall well-being and a feeling of transformation. That said, underscoring the importance of cleanliness is also connected to disciplining parts of the body and its processes by keeping them hygienic. The emphasis on cleanliness here also

appears to contradict the notion of pizza grease highlighted in theme #3—"normative reinforcement."

The sample advertisements point to the parts of a man's face that are commonly targeted for enhancement, including acne-prone skin, patches of redness, wrinkles and areas under the eyes, nose, and forehead. As one Fenty Beauty (2018) ad puts it: "So most important [is] you really want to go around the nose area, this is the one area that really gets red, the center of the forehead, oftentimes we have some nice little lines here, so you want to smooth those out" (1:57). This is similarly reinforced in War Paint for Men's advertisement (2021): "The concealer pen is a real product you can use for pretty much anything in terms of coverage used for acne scarring, blemishing, redness, pretty much anything you want" (0:11). Here certain areas of the face, particularly their imperfections, are represented as indicators of poor health habits and aging. For example, in a Charlotte Tilbury (2017) advertisement, a connection is made between dark undereye circles and lack of sleep. As the male model applies concealer beneath his eyes, the voiceover states: "You can cheat instant sleep and get rid of all your blemishes in just two clicks with my amazing retoucher pen" (0:46). This technique creates the illusion of being well rested, boosting confidence and enhancing overall appearance. The focus here is not solely on optimization through improvement, but also on bypassing natural bodily processes—such as fatigue—in order to project an idealized image.

4.6 Theme# 5: Gender Subversion

Despite there being a host of traditional masculine elements presented in the sample advertisements, there are nonetheless subtle inclusions of some feminine and LGBTQ+ aesthetics in eight (N=8) of them. For example, the makeup artists' appearances in the

instructional advertisements do not align with stereotypical characteristics of heterosexual males. The makeup artists in both the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) and Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisements generally use hand gestures and vocal tones that tend to be softer and more feminine than that of the models, whose virile masculinity is consistently reinforced. The models demonstrate knowledge and expertise about makeup that do not align with conventional expectations of men, specifically heterosexual men. In addition, Hector Espinal—the makeup artist featured in Fenty Beauty by Rihanna's (2018, 2019, 2022) instructional advertisements—is heavily made up in comparison to the models on whom he is applying makeup. His facial hair is groomed in a way similar to that of many of the men in the other advertisements; however, he wears prominent jewelry, which the models do not. This distinction sets him apart from the traditional masculine norms embodied by the other men in the advertisements.

Even though the makeup advertisements in the sample appear to be primarily targeted at heterosexual men, they still include models who seem comfortable experimenting with makeup. In three of the selected advertisements by Chanel (2019a, 2020a, 2020b), the male models appear more androgynous or display more feminine traits. For example, the models do not have facial hair, the focus is on their facial skin rather than their bodies, and each wears a navy-blue shirt or sweater that fully covers the upper body. Toward the end of the *Create a Natural to Intense Look with Boy de Chanel — Chanel Makeup* (Chanel, 2020a) advertisement, models apply blue eyeliner while bold, blue capitalized text appears next to their faces: "go bolder," (0:37) "do dare," (0:39) and "don't be shy" (0:42). One model then applies visible black nail polish to his fingernails—a look often associated with nontraditional masculine, queer, or feminine aesthetics.

At times, the background settings and voiceovers in the advertisements also subtly challenge traditional masculinity, clearly aiming for broader appeal. For example, each of the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) advertisements takes place in a studio-like setting commonly associated with the fashion industry. In one 2018 advertisement, a clothing rack, stage light, and a table filled with makeup products appear behind the model and makeup artist, evoking a professional photoshoot or backstage environment. Similarly, in the Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisement, the model and makeup artist are seated in a studio featuring traditionally feminine tones—pink, yellow, purple, and white—which contrast with the plain white or dark color schemes used in more conventionally masculine ads. There is also a notable contrast in voiceovers: while the Charlotte Tilbury Beauty (2017) advertisement features a female voice, the Chanel (2020a, 2020b) advertisements use a deep male voice to describe the products.

Racial diversity is also prominently featured throughout the sample. Eleven (N=11) out of the fifteen advertisements include models or makeup artists from racially diverse backgrounds. For instance, the *Rimmel for Men Brow & Beard Collection* advertisement features Black, South Asian, and white models, each with different facial hair styles (Rimmel London, 2018). The Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) advertisements include a Hispanic makeup artist and models with medium to dark skin tones. Some companies also explicitly reference the inclusivity of their products. In one example, the narrator states, “this is a cream to powder formula, and it comes in twenty shades” (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:55). Similarly, a Fenty Beauty (2022) product is described as universal: “So the brow mvp wax sculpting pencil is actually my go-to—feels like you have nothing on, and any skin tone can wear it” (3:57).

In terms of age representation, most of the men and models in the sample appear to be young, with muscular builds, dark hair, and smooth skin. However, War Paint For Men (2023)'s *War Paint For Men | Don't Hold Back* advertisement features an older male model, distinguishing it from the rest of the sample. The advertisement's title itself suggests a call for men to push past their usual limits and embrace new facial care practices. The older model has white hair and a beard and is dressed in professional attire, including a dress shirt and blazer. In contrast, the other two male models in the same ad appear younger, with darker hair, casual clothing, and shirtless appearances.

Finally, some companies market ungendered or gender-neutral makeup products. Brands like Charlotte Tilbury Beauty (2017, 2019), Mac Cosmetics (2013), Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022), and Laura Mercier (2019) feature products without gender-specific messaging. Notably, Charlotte Tilbury Beauty (2017) promotes a skin tint labeled as unisex: "New! Unisex Healthy Glow" (0:04). This gender-neutral positioning is reinforced when the female voiceover explains that the product "is literally a skin miracle worker and is loved by men and women" (0:15). Similarly, War Paint For Men's (2018) *Men's Makeup. Man's World* advertisement draws a parallel between tattoos and makeup, showing a tattooed man applying cosmetics. By comparing tattoo ink to makeup, the company suggests that cosmetic use, like tattooing, need not be gender exclusive. Thus, there is a clear attempt to normalize makeup use across genders.

4.7 Conclusion

I identified five overarching themes that emerge from the sample advertisements. The representations in theme #1—"technical management"—suggest that invisibility, flawlessness,

and evenness are natural phenomena for which men should strive. There is an emphasis on makeup products and tools being effective and easy to apply discreetly. These representations demonstrate an attempt to manage men's concerns and anxieties around being 'exposed' as makeup users. Theme #2—"competency building"—includes advertisements that provide practical instructions on how to apply makeup that appear to be directed at inexperienced male consumers. Frequent emphasis is placed on the simplicity associated with men's makeup application, which demonstrates the connection with the previous theme, which similarly seeks to reassure and manage men's insecurity around using makeup.

The advertisements in theme #3—"normative reinforcement"—attempt to normalize makeup and grooming practices for heterosexual men to recruit male consumers who are not yet comfortable with non-traditional masculine practices and expressions. Here, there is an avoidance of feminine and LGBTQ+ aesthetics to ensure that heterosexual men are not deterred from attempting to purchase and apply makeup products. Through the masculine markers of the male body, background settings, and the repeated invocation of terms used to address men, the advertisements emphasize that they are male specific. Also, the limited enthusiasm and minimal conversation coming from the male models, as well as the musical choices all serve to differentiate men's and women's makeup. Theme #4—"vital transformation"—involves representations that emphasize how using makeup to transform one's facial appearance is connected to men leading an optimal lifestyle. Here healthy skin is linked to shinier makeup looks, which contradicts the more matte ideal outlined in theme #1—"technical management." The male body is also represented as something to be disciplined, tamed, and cleaned.

Lastly, theme #5—"gender subversion"—involves representations that diverge from traditional heterosexual masculine norms and encourage men to take risks to expand their grooming routines. One of the makeup artists in the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) showcases a makeup artist with a decidedly non-heterosexual presentation (in stereotypical terms, that is). The male models in these advertisements appear to include some who have androgynous features and are more experienced and comfortable with makeup use. Typically, these advertisements include backgrounds with bright colours, which may be associated with more stereotypically feminine or LGBTQ+ aesthetics. There is also the inclusion of male models of different races and ages, as well as ungendered products, which differs from those that are male specific and aligned with theme #3—"normative reinforcement."

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This research was undertaken with the objective of answering the following questions: How do makeup advertisements targeted at men represent masculinity and how do these representations resist or reinforce conventional norms of gender? The aim of this chapter is to interpret my findings through the lens of the three theoretical frameworks presented earlier: hegemonic masculinity theory, hybrid masculinity theory, and inclusive masculinity theory, all of which provide approaches to understanding the social construction of masculinities. Importantly, not all the findings can be clearly aligned with one framework or another. Accordingly, the chapter will end with a consideration of how some of the advertisements analyzed in the study construct masculinity in contradictory terms, followed by a brief reflection on the implications of these contradictions.

5.2 Hegemonic Masculinity

To begin, I present a brief review of the key features of Connell's (1987, 1995, 2005) framework of *hegemonic masculinity* to ensure that the discussion of findings is as clear and impactful as possible. According to Connell (1987), there is an existing power dynamic in patriarchal societies, which positions men and masculinity as dominant over women and femininity. What emerges is identified by Connell (1987) as *hegemonic masculinity*: a hierarchically organized form of masculinity that is idealized and maintained through ideological influences such as materials produced by the contemporary mass media. In the context of this hierarchy, femininity and other forms of masculinity are marginalized or subordinated. Indeed,

hegemonic masculinity is considered to be "inherently relational" as its existence is constituted in and through its relationship to femininity and other masculinities (Connell, 1987, p.68). The ideology of hegemonic masculinity is associated with heterosexuality, marriage, whiteness, and social ascendancy and is legitimized through the marginalization and subordination of femininity and other masculinities.

Representations of hegemonic masculinity were the most frequent in the sample. For instance, within theme #1—"technical management"—there is an emphasis on teaching men techniques that would enable them to conceal their application of makeup by underscoring its texture, invisibility, and evenness. The emphasis on concealment serves to both highlight and reinforce the boundary between men and women's makeup practices, while reassuring men that they are not adopting feminine aesthetics. Four (N=4) out of the fifteen advertisements emphasize the light texture of makeup, and seven (N=7) of the fifteen advertisements promote a natural makeup look or finish, which points to persistent insistence throughout the sample on men's makeup not being visible. Similarly, the flawlessness (N=9) and evenness (N=4) of the skin are promoted as being achievable through the use of specific makeup products.

The emphasis on concealment—which is conveyed through the repetition of terms like *lightness*, *invisibility*, *evenness*, and *flawlessness*—is reminiscent of Byrne and Milestone's (2023) notion of *invisible consumption,* whereby the act of using skincare or grooming products is hidden and done privately to avoid negative social stigma or diminishment of a man's perceived masculinity (p. 148). Byrne and Milestone's (2023) observation is made especially clear in a Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018) advertisement, where the makeup artist highlights how the compact packaging of the brand's foundation stick can be easily hidden in bags or

clothing if men wish to conceal their use of the product. The product's concealability is likely to appeal to heterosexual men, as it is uncommon for them to be seen applying makeup or engaging in extensive grooming practices, given the strong association of these practices with femininity (Kenalemang-Palm, 2023). The use of terms like *light*, *natural*, *flawless*, and *even* can make makeup seem less intimidating to male consumers who are inexperienced, nervous about applying it, or wary of being discovered. These terms also suggest that a man's heterosexual masculinity will not be compromised by using makeup products, since their effects will be invisible to others. The repeated invocations of men looking "natural" can also be interpreted as reinforcing the idea that men are close to nature (Frank, 2014, p. 289) or are rugged creatures who have not been domesticated by and through cosmetics (Kenalemang-Palm, 2023). In other words, men's 'nature' will not be compromised by makeup wear.

Many of the representations in the sample indicate that men's fear regarding makeup use is a motivating factor that necessitates management techniques. The management techniques in question, which ostensibly ensure invisibility, are represented as capable of overriding the body's natural processes when properly applied. For example, one advertisement by Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2019) acknowledges that many men's greatest "fear" (3:22) is that their makeup will transfer and become noticeable throughout the day, particularly as a result of sweating, which the advertisements also construct as inherently manly (Waitt & Stanes, 2015). Here, sweat is constructed throughout the sample as a risk to men, as it can reveal their use of makeup and, by extension, undermine their masculinity by linking it to grooming practices usually associated with women. Similarly, in the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018) advertisement, traditionally masculine pursuits—such as going to the gym or "just coming out of the gym" (0:37)—are referenced repeatedly, emphasizing the preoccupation with sweat and the fact that it can reveal

men's otherwise secret makeup wearing habits. These references to men going to the gym can also be seen as another way of reinforcing masculine stereotypes of men being interested in "sports culture" or athleticism to attain strong muscular bodies (Waitt & Stanes, 2015, p.33). Therefore, sweat is represented in these advertisements in a number of ways: as something to be feared, as a revealer of secrets, and as a natural part of men's bodies and athleticism due to their highly "physical" nature (p. 36). Sweat is also represented as that which can be surmounted by proper technical management, such as by using the products being advertised. Ultimately, representations like these reinforce conventional norms of masculinity that emphasize the connection between men's physicality, muscularity, and activity.

As previously mentioned, the advertisements often appear concerned to reassure men that makeup use does not blur the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, both by emphasizing the invisibility of the makeup itself and the tools used to conceal it. For example, in the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018) advertisement discussed above, the makeup artist highlights the magnetic component on the side of the foundation stick, which allows multiple products to be linked together, suggesting it can be discreetly carried in a man's bag. The reference to being "on the run" (1:02) further reinforces the traditional association between masculinity and physical activity while also pointing to the presumed anxiety around the visibility of makeup products and the effort to assuage that anxiety by emphasizing how such products can be seamlessly integrated into a man's daily routine while remaining hidden from view. Men, therefore, are not expected to own a separate makeup bag or openly display their use of cosmetics as women commonly do (Dellinger, K. & Williams, 1997). Similarly, War Paint For Men's (2021) "concealer pen" (0:04) is advertised as pocket-sized, a notable design choice given that men do not typically carry purses or makeup bags. These compact formats allow the tools to be tucked away discreetly if

desired. The cosmetic tools themselves are not framed as vain or decorative but as pragmatic instruments—primarily used to conceal makeup on the skin. In this way, the advertisements work to manage potential discomfort by presenting makeup as both functional and masculine: it can be hidden, and its tools serve practical, goal-oriented purposes rather than being mere aesthetic accessories.

Ten (N=10) out of the fifteen advertisements are instructional and outline specific steps on how to apply makeup. Here, again, theme #2—"competency building"—reinforces norms of heterosexual masculinity by assuming that men are not competent when it comes to makeup application. As Barber (2016) contends, men are more likely to purchase grooming tools and products if they are specifically taught how to use them. My findings support Barber's (2016) assertion while also suggesting that the emphasis on teaching in the advertisements is another way of shoring up the distinction between men and women: men need to build capacity while women already have it. Therefore, constructing men as incompetent when it comes to makeup and presuming that they need to be taught how to apply, is yet another way of reinforcing the normative distinction between men and women—or between masculinity and femininity.

Take, for example, War Paint For Men's (2021) *Men's Concealer Pen – A Simple Application Guide*, which presents three steps for male consumers to follow. Like other instructional advertisements, this one emphasizes that only a minimal number of steps are required for successful makeup application. The emphasis on simplicity, as stated in the title, relates not only to competency but also to the idea that men need not devote much time or attention to their appearance in order to achieve results. In this way, the advertisements aim to make makeup application appear straightforward while reassuring men that they are not being

asked to fuss over their appearance in ways that women are both invited and expected to do. More specifically, the minimal steps reassure men in two ways: first, that they are capable, given the limited steps to follow; and second, that applying makeup need not involve a significant investment of time. Devoting such attention to managing one's appearance is commonly viewed as a predominantly feminine practice, as argued by Lafrance (2018), who writes: "Unlike men, women have been expected to care for their skins through elaborate and expensive cleansing routines, lotion applications, body hair removal and, in an increasing number of cases, botox injections and facelifts" (p. 7). Thus, the representations in the sample appear to target heterosexual men who have not traditionally been expected to put as much time and effort into their appearance due to norms of hegemonic masculinity: fussing is for women, not for men.

Theme #3—"normative reinforcement"—highlights how the advertisements construct a clear distinction between men's and women's makeup, framing them as serving different purposes and adhering to different appearance standards. This distinction is reinforced by the frequent prioritization of a specific male body type in these advertisements—men with traits such as muscular builds, shirtless upper bodies, tattoos, short hair, and beards or other forms of facial hair. In this way, viewers are encouraged to register the maleness of the body through its association with these traits, with some advertisements specifically referring to them. For example, the Chanel (2019b) advertisement demonstrates how to apply makeup on a man with a beard as the text that appears on the screen states, "natural look with a beard in 5 Steps" (0:01). Not only does this advertisement reinforce the beard as a specific signifier of masculinity, but it also demonstrates that the beard is part of the face, of which one must be conscious when applying makeup as it is something that can interfere with a natural looking outcome or finish. In fact, the beard is often presented as a potential obstacle to concealment that requires specific

forms of technical management. What is more, in two advertisements by Chanel (2020a, 2020b), there is a noticeable male voiceover that explains the makeup products throughout the advertisement. The voiceover consists of a low, stereotypically masculine vocal tone: it is deep, conveys strength and toughness, and is clearly distinct from a soft feminine voice.

As with the Chanel (2020a, 2020b) advertisements, the War Paint For Men (2018, 2021, 2023) campaigns feature background images and male models that closely align with the body ideals associated with hegemonic masculinity. For instance, the *War Paint Men's Makeup. Man's World* (2018) advertisement is presented with a black and white colour scheme associated with nostalgia for a past era associated with conventional manhood. The man in the video has a muscular build with several tattoos that are visible both when he is wearing clothing and appears shirtless. These representations project a man who is strong and hardworking. He appears to be successful as he is first shown driving a luxury car while wearing business attire with a luxury watch and later enters a large house. Similarly, in the *War Paint For Men | Don't Hold Back* (2023) advertisement, there are various male models whose faces are characterized by a "hard look" wearing similar business wear and casual attire (Nixon, 1996 as cited in Scheibling & Lafrance, 2019, p.230). This advertisement showcases the men in neutral-colored modern industrial backgrounds, which can be viewed as another way of emphasizing men's connection to productivity.

Masculine terms such as "gentlemen," (Fenty Beauty, 2022, 4:45) "guys," (Fenty Beauty, 2019, 3:21) and "fellas," (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:34) are stated eleven (N=11) times throughout the sample, particularly in advertisements by Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) and Mac Cosmetics (2013). Similarly, the labels on the makeup products by Chanel (2019a, 2019b,

2020a, 2020b), Rimmel London AU (2018), and War Paint For Men (2018, 2021, 2023) explicitly indicate that they are male-specific products. The repeated invocation of terms referring to men and masculinity mark these products as exclusively intended for men and, by extension, not for women.

Another strategy these advertisements use to reinforce the distinction between women's and men's makeup is the restrained enthusiasm displayed by the men portrayed. The newly made-up men's emotional responses to their enhanced appearances are carefully managed, with minimal dialogue amongst the male models serving to avoid conveying excessive excitement about the make-up, which may lead to them being perceived as feminine. By demonstrating nonchalance, emotional control, and limited self-expression, the advertisements communicate that applying makeup is something men do because they want to improve their appearance to be more competitive in the world—another normative feature associated with masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005)—rather than because they wish to indulge their vanity or beautify their bodies.

One male model in a Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018) advertisement attempts to distance himself from being perceived as a frequent and knowledgeable user of makeup by sharing that he applies foundation, setting powder, and as noted above, a small amount of pizza grease—such as from the fast-food chain "Domino's" (0:26)—as part of his routine makeup look. Here, men's makeup is compared to pizza grease, a substance generally regarded as anathema to the carefully calibrated chemical preparations that characterize makeup and, by virtue of its greasiness, often associated with messiness or uncleanliness. The juxtaposition of men's makeup with pizza grease is suggestive of least two things at the same time: first, it suggests that it is acceptable for

men to be greasy and unclean (Waitt & Stanes, 2015); and second, it demonstrates that men's relationship to make-up is casual and pragmatic, meaning that—far from being invested in using make-up *per se*—men will happily use whatever works. It is also worth noting that the fact that the model mentions the popular pizza company 'Domino's' implies that he doesn't cook the pizza he is referring to; it is, instead, a fast-food item that he purchased. This is yet another device that the advertisements use to distance men from traditional norms of femininity, such as proficiency in the kitchen (Szabo, 2014).

The musical choices in the advertisements reinforce messages associated with traditional hegemonic masculinity. For instance, James Brown's *It's a Man's Man's Man's World* song plays in the background of War Paint For Men's (2018) advertisement *War Paint Men's Makeup. Man's World*. The song's title explicitly references a patriarchal society that positions men as powerful and dominant. Moreover, its lyrics present symbolic masculine imagery portraying men as strong and independent ("to carry the heavy load," 0:52), responsible and mobile ("to take us over the road," 0:43), and successful and innovative ("man made the cars," 0:37 ; "man made the electric light," 0:58). In this way, the song underscores men's strength, independence, responsibility, and mobility through lyrical metaphors of industrial productivity and mechanical innovation. This musical choice—in both its form and content—frames men and men's makeup as extensions of traditional masculine norms.

Theme #4—"vital transformation"—is articulated in the data in a variety of ways. One of the key representational strategies is to foreground the importance of radiant skin while connecting it to good health and youthfulness, all of which align with norms of hegemonic masculinity, given their emphasis on strength and power. There is a total of 24 (N=24) mentions

of the terms “healthy” (Mac Cosmetics, 2013, 4:19), “fresh” (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:50), and “glow” (Charlotte Tilbury, 2017, 0:04) throughout the sample. For example, in the Charlotte Tilbury (2017) advertisement, a tinted moisturizer is promoted as being able to help men achieve the “healthiest happiest glowing skin,” thereby illustrating how one’s facial appearance is indicative of positive lifestyle habits aimed at promoting vitality (0:36). Moreover, the disciplining of the body—particularly the face—is evident in its connection to the optimization of men’s appearance and to idealized attributes such as youthfulness, strength, and attractiveness. In Rimmel London Au’s (2018) advertisement, for example, there are terms in short phrases that represent the need for men to be groomed and to transform themselves into being “sharp” (0:07), “fixed” (0:10), “tidy” (0:13), “maxed” (0:19), and “tamed” (0:23). These phrases frame taking care of one’s appearance as a way of optimizing a man and his body, thereby communicating power, control, confidence, and status. Ultimately, the representational strategies described here align with Connell’s (1987,1995, 2005) hegemonic masculinity framework and, in doing so, appear to reinforce conventional norms of gender.

5.3 Hybrid Masculinity

In response to Connell’s (1987) framework of hegemonic masculinity as well as the increased scholarly focus on men’s evolving relationships to their bodies and appearances, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) developed the concept of *hybrid masculinities*. This framework focuses on how some men—often heterosexual, white, and young—incorporate practices of identity that are commonly associated with subordinated masculinities or femininities including “gay,” “Black,” and otherwise “feminine” groups (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014, p.247). The practices adopted by these men appear to be progressive and aim—at least ostensibly—to

challenge existing gender norms. However, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) argue that, despite their seemingly progressive appearance, these masculinities ultimately sustain gender, racial, and sexual inequality because they do not challenge or disrupt traditional forms of male power and privilege.

Hybrid masculinity was the second most common representation in the sample following hegemonic masculinity. Representations of hybrid masculinity were mainly concentrated in theme #5—"gender subversion." For example, the four advertisements by Chanel (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b) differ from the rest of the sample advertisements due to the inclusion of more androgynous elements in most of their advertisements. For instance, the male models presented in three of the four advertisements did not have a beard or facial hair (Chanel, 2019a, 2020a, 2020b). In this way, they appear to have softer and less stereotypically masculine looks. Similarly, the models wore sweaters and did not show much skin—avoiding the naked muscular male torsos seen in many of the advertisements—besides that of the face. They also included the use of more visible makeup including blue eyeliner and dark nail polish in the *Create a Natural to Intense Look with Boy de Chanel — Chanel Makeup* advertisement, both of which are traditionally associated with feminine, LGBTQ+ or alternative masculine aesthetics (Chanel, 2020a). Various terms are also used to motivate men to experiment with more visible makeup in this advertisement, such "bolder" (0:37) and "dare" (0:39). These terms appear to be challenging men to be more flexible with their masculinity and, by extension, to move beyond traditional gender norms. This reframing of visible makeup as compatible with masculinity stands in stark contrast to how it was represented in and through the other themes derived from the data. In other words, the reframing can be viewed as a way of subverting traditional distinctions between masculinity and femininity as outlined by the hybrid masculinity framework.

Sugimoto and Nagasawa (2017) note that the company Chanel is considered "a leading luxury goods brand supporting three key businesses: fashion; watches and fine jewelry; fragrance and beauty" (p. 296). Therefore, this brand's advertisements contrast with those by other companies in the sample, as Chanel is widely considered an upscale or designer company strongly associated with the fashion industry (Sugimoto & Nagasawa, 2017). As shown in Table 2, the price point of the products promoted in this company's advertisements is the highest of the sample. For example, the price of a foundation product is $92 Canadian dollars, whereas a similar foundation product by War Paint for Men is $45 Canadian dollars. This elevated price point is likely inaccessible for the average male consumer, particularly one who is not yet entirely committed to wearing makeup. Therefore, given the inclusion of more androgynous imagery and the company's association with luxury goods and higher price points, it is evident that this company is targeting a more specialized or niche market. This market likely includes men who are already involved with the fashion industry or who are comfortable wearing makeup, including more visible makeup finishes. However, even as there is a prominent portrayal of more androgynous male models and makeup looks, the advertisements nonetheless continue to encourage all men to wear makeup by reframing alternative masculine aesthetics as opportunities for being bold and daring.

Table 2. Prices of Products in Sample Advertisements

Number	Company	Prices of Full Sized products CAD (As of April 25, 2025)	Foundation/Tinted Moisturizer (Face)	Concealer	Eyebrow Pencil/Wax/Gel
1	Chanel		$92.00	-Not sold anymore	$56.00
2	Charlotte Tilbury Beauty		$62.50 $66.50	$44.50	$35.50
3	Fenty Beauty By Rihanna		$52.00	$40.50	$27.00
4	Laura Mercier		$68.00	$45.00	-Not shown in sample ad
5	Mac Cosmetics		-Not sold anymore	$52.00	$32.00
6	Rimmel London AU		-	-	$6.99 -Not sold anymore -Price of similar Unisex product Amazon.ca
7	War Paint For Men		$45.00 $49.00	$38.00	-Not shown in sample ads

The use of energetic pop and electronic music in advertisements such as those by Charlotte Tilbury (2017, 2019) and War Paint for Men (2023) appears to connect makeup use to vitality and youthfulness. While these qualities can be associated with hegemonic masculinity, they are not exclusive to it, as they can also be related to non-traditional masculinities and femininities. The lyrics in Rimmel London AU's advertisement (2018) "Rimmel for Men Brow & Beard Collection" serve as a good example of some of the key tenets of hybrid masculinity. That is, the hip-hop song included in the advertisement contains assertive lyrics that evoke mechanical metaphors similar to those in theme #3—"normative reinforcement": "I'mma wreck it like I'm revving the engine" (0:10). However, the lyrics from this song also allude to a more progressive type of masculinity, particularly by means of the phrase "graduated from a rebel to a revolutionary" (0:06). There is an overt challenge to existing traditional gender norms, implying that said challenge can be met through the use of makeup products. On the levels of word, image, and sound, then, the advertisements discussed here align with the framework of hybrid masculinity, both resisting and reinforcing traditional norms of gender.

5.4 Inclusive Masculinity

Similar to Bridges and Pascoe (2014, 2018), Anderson (2012) developed the framework of *inclusive masculinity* in response to Connell's (1987,1995, 2005) hegemonic masculinity theory. This framework suggests that as certain cultures experience a decrease in overt *homohysteria*—where men fear being seen as homosexual--non-traditional forms of masculinities emerge (Anderson & McCormack, 2018, p.548). Inclusive masculinity contrasts with what the authors refer to as "orthodox" masculinities, which conform to traditional norms of gender (Anderson, 2012, p.93). Anderson (2012) also highlights the notion of *metrosexuality,*

which refers to heterosexual men who focus on grooming and clothing appearance (Simpson, 1994 as cited in Anderson 2012, p.99). The widespread embrace of this notion in society at large has allowed for an increasing number of men to adopt traits associated with femininity or marginalized masculinities.

The frequency of inclusive masculinity representations was similar to that of hybrid masculinities as there are elements in the sample that disrupt conventional expectations of heterosexual men, particularly within theme #5—"gender subversion." For example, the makeup artists in the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) and Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisements present mannerisms and use vocal tones which are associated with more stereotypically feminine or LGBTQ+ aesthetics. Even as the advertisements intend to target mainly heterosexual men, the subtle inclusion of these aesthetics allows for a wider audience appeal. However, it also appears to signal to heterosexual men that they can still be perceived as heterosexual even if they use makeup, and the social credibility of their masculine identity can be preserved.

The sample advertisements appear to subtly resist traditional masculinity in two notable ways: through their background settings and their color schemes. For instance, the background setting of the Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) advertisements appears to be a photography studio, which is an environment with which models are familiar. The advertisements from this company also include light pink and black colour schemes behind the text that is displayed, thus combining both traditional feminine and masculine associated aesthetics. The setting of the Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisement is not unlike that of the Fenty Beauty by Rhianna (2018, 2019, 2022) advertisements: the pink, purple and yellow colours are

brighter but still reminiscent of what most would consider a stereotypically feminine colour scheme. These backgrounds stand in stark contrast with the advertisements mentioned in the discussion of the themes associated with hegemonic masculinity, with their modernized industrial backgrounds and darker neutral colors. What is more, there is a feminine voiceover in a Charlotte Tilbury Beauty (2017) advertisement, even as the advertisement title *The Best Men's Grooming Products* indicates that the advertisement is intended for a male audience. The inclusion of a woman's voice also conveys that women are accepting of men's use of makeup and that makeup use may be useful to attract women. This representation, in particular, demonstrates how the distinction between men and women's makeup use is blurred, which can be viewed as a form of resistance to hegemonic masculinity and, by extension, as more in keeping with inclusive masculinity.

Finally, the variety of models with different skin tones, and the emphasis on products with large shade range availability, appear to promote racial inclusivity. There is also a display of age inclusivity in one instance, as conventional ideals of masculinity often construct young men as stronger and more desirable than older men. Therefore, the inclusion of an older and successful looking man in War Paint For Men (2023)'s *War Pant For Men | Don't Hold Back* advertisement demonstrates that makeup is not confined to any specific age group. Furthermore, the promotion of unisex or ungendered products such as the tinted moisturizer labeled "unisex healthy glow" (0:04) shown in an advertisement by Charlotte Tilbury Beauty (2017) demonstrates how some makeup companies are shifting towards being more gender neutral, placing a greater emphasis on expressing oneself the way one desires rather than conforming to gender norms. This allows companies to highlight the practical benefits and functions of the product themselves, which can resonate with a wider audience. This once again emphasizes

resistance to representations aligned with hegemonic masculinity, which—as shown above—often seek to sharply distinguish men's makeup use from that of women.

5.5 Thematic Contradictions

Some thematic contradictions arise from the findings. For instance, there is a contradiction in the recommended finishes of makeup that are advertised. In theme #1—"technical management"—the preference for a matte, or non-shiny, finish is frequently emphasized as a way to achieve a natural or undetectable look, as illustrated in the Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisement, which describes "a nice, really natural matte" (4:12). This preference for a matte look is connected to avoiding makeup that appears detectable, overly feminine, or artificial. However, as highlighted in Theme #4—"Vital Transformation"—skin that is viewed as healthy is also described as having some sheen or shine, even in the same Mac Cosmetics (2013) advertisement, which states that "sheen is really good, it means healthy skin; no one is completely matte" (4:18). Thus, mentions of achieving a matte makeup look can be interpreted as an "effort to control nature," or the naturally shiny features of a man's skin (Frank, 2014, p. 282). Simultaneously, however, other advertisements suggest that it is not necessary to completely transform or tame a man's natural skin appearance (Frank, 2014, p. 282), and that shiny complexions are not necessarily incompatible with masculinity. These two recommendations for how makeup should appear on the skin similarly emphasize the importance of men achieving a natural and invisible look, though they differ on how to define nature and invisibility, as well as differing on how these should be achieved. There is, in other words, no single definition of what constitutes so-called natural manly skin.

Additionally, in theme #3—"normative reinforcement"—there is an example of a male model featured in a Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018) advertisement who attempts to trivialize his overall use of makeup. I am referring to the model described above, who specifically mentions that he uses certain makeup products along with "a splash of pizza grease" on his skin from the fast-food restaurant "Domino's" (Fenty Beauty, 2018, 0:21, 0:27). As mentioned above, pizza grease is connected to messiness and uncleanliness. The use of pizza grease rejects traditional feminine beauty standards that are associated with cleanliness and extensive routines to achieve a polished look (Waitt & Stanes, 2015). The use of grease thus stands in contrast with theme #4—"vital transformation"—which links cleanliness to overall health and appearance. The model's statement illustrates that the application of makeup—and even the use of unconventional substances such as pizza grease—can contribute to constructing a masculine appearance associated with an optimal and disciplined lifestyle. Such portrayals underscore the extent to which individuals seek to modify or obscure natural bodily processes in pursuit of a culturally idealized appearance.

Lastly, there is a contradiction between theme #1—"technical management"—and theme #5— "gender subversion." With respect to the theme of technical management, there is a strong emphasis on natural and undetectable makeup that does not disrupt conventional norms of men's facial appearance by companies such as Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022), Mac Cosmetics (2013), and War Paint for Men (2013). Conversely, an advertisement by Chanel (2020a) specifically promotes a bold and more noticeable makeup look, which can be viewed as more inclusive of non-hegemonic masculinities. Also, the makeup artists in the instructional videos by Fenty Beauty by Rihanna (2018, 2019, 2022) and Mac Cosmetics (2013) appear to be more heavily made up than the models to whom they are applying makeup. Therefore, the

representations described in theme #1—"technical management"—appear to converge with traditional masculine ideals, while the advertisements in theme #5—"gender subversion"—diverge from traditional hegemonic masculinity and promote more diverse appearances. Makeup is, it seems, a site of contestation where masculinity is concerned, at once attempting to maintain traditional norms of masculinity while also subverting them.

Conclusion

The objective of this research is to contribute to the limited scholarship on advertisements for men's makeup and cosmetics use. The following questions guided this endeavour: How do makeup advertisements targeting men represent masculinity and how do these representations resist or reinforce conventional norms of gender? To answer these questions, I reviewed related scholarship emerging from the fields of body and skin studies, which focus on modification practices, including those by men Additionally, I applied three theoretical frameworks that explain the social construction of masculinities: *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005), *hybrid masculinity theory* (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, 2018), and *inclusive masculinity theory* (Anderson, 2012).

This research employed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2021) qualitative method of reflexive thematic analysis to analyze the data and illuminate how cosmetics advertisements shape masculine ideals. Advertisements were selected as the object of analysis, as they reach a broad range of consumers through various platforms including social media (McAllister & Galarza, 2023) and often convey messages about social values and gender (Goffman, 1979; Leiss et al., 2018). To access the sample of 15 advertisement videos, I utilized the social media platform YouTube which hosts a wide range of publicly available videos (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018).

Furthermore, the six phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021) were followed in this study. Informed by a constructionist epistemological position with a focus on latent patterns, a total of five themes were derived deductively from the data for analysis and interpretation. The advertisements that align with theme #1—"technical management"—underscore the prioritization of an inconspicuous makeup look for men. Theme

#2—"competency building"—highlights the various steps and guidelines to proper makeup application, reflecting cosmetics companies' presumption that male consumers lack adequate knowledge of makeup application. Theme #3—"normative reinforcement"—reveals how traditional norms of masculinity continue to prevail in men's makeup advertisements. Theme #4—"vital transformation"—centers on the reinforcement of aesthetic transformation of the male body. Finally, theme #5—"gender subversion"—highlights aspects of advertisements that challenge conventional masculine norms by including feminine and LGBTQ+ aesthetics.

The findings and themes were interpreted through the three theoretical frameworks of *hegemonic masculinity*, *hybrid masculinity*, and *inclusive masculinity.* The highest number of representations and thematic categories in the sample aligned with notions of hegemonic masculinity, as evidenced by the preponderance of themes including "technical management," "competency building," "normative reinforcement," and "vital transformation." However, notable departures from hegemonic masculinity appear, particularly in theme #5—"gender subversion." Additionally, the framework of hybrid masculinity corresponds with representations found in theme #3—"normative reinforcement"—and theme #5—"gender subversion." Moreover, the third framework, that of inclusive masculinity, contained representations that were concentrated within theme #5—"gender subversion."

I discerned three thematic contradictions in the findings. First, although different makeup finishes are recommended—ranging from matte to those with a more visible shine—there remains a consistent emphasis on men's makeup appearing invisible or natural on the skin. Second, some advertisements promote a less structured and messier makeup application routine, while others advocate for cleanliness and a disciplined, healthy lifestyle. Despite these differing approaches,

both portrayals ultimately aim to convey an optimal lifestyle and demonstrate how individuals strive to manage and improve biological processes that might otherwise signal the opposite. Third, while most advertisements recommend natural-looking makeup for men, some feature makeup artists and models wearing more visibly noticeable makeup. Thus, the advertisements both converge with, and diverge from, traditional hegemonic masculine norms.

Broader Reflections and Contributions

This study makes three key contributions to the existing literature. First, it integrates the three of the most prominent theoretical frameworks from critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM) to interpret representations of masculinity in the sample. This topic remains underexplored in the literature I reviewed, and to date, no studies have employed the combined use of the three frameworks, as I have done on men's makeup advertisements and cosmetics use. Rather, as Lafrance & Hoebanx (2025) observe, scholars in this field more commonly engage with a single framework—most frequently that of hegemonic masculinity. Second, I analyze men's makeup advertisements published on YouTube over the last fifteen years. There is a paucity of research that analyzes men's makeup advertisements, particularly those accessible to consumers on social media platforms such as YouTube. Third, this study offers a unique perspective for analyzing representations of masculinity by incorporating scholarship from body and skin studies. The body and skin, particularly that of the face, function as crucial sites for the articulation and performance of masculinity; however, these dimensions remain underexamined within CSMM research.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Theoretical Approach

There are several advantages and disadvantages to combining the frameworks of *hegemonic masculinity*, *hybrid masculinity*, and *inclusive masculinity.* Given the diverse and sometimes contradictory messages present in the advertisements analyzed, it is unlikely that a single framework can fully capture the complexity of these representations. For example, the widely cited framework of hegemonic masculinity emphasizes forms of masculinity that reinforce male dominance over marginalized groups, including subordinate men and women (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005; Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). While this framework effectively highlights the hierarchical structure of gender relations, it does not account for the incorporation of practices or traits traditionally associated with subordinate masculinities—an aspect addressed more directly by the hybrid and inclusive masculinity frameworks. Thus, the inclusion of hybrid and inclusive masculinity offers a valuable and complementary perspective for examining how subordinate masculine traits may coexist with, or even subtly disrupt, dominant hegemonic ideals.

One disadvantage of this research design, and of the theoretical frameworks selected as interpretive tools, is that the analysis is constrained to assessing how the representations align—or do not align—with the frameworks. As a result, only a limited range of questions and relational dynamics can be explored. Additionally, while the selected frameworks aid in interpreting certain social dynamics present in the representations, they also exclude others, as their primary focus on masculinity can marginalize or overlook broader social and cultural phenomena. Connell (1987) acknowledges that "hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and subordinated masculinities" (p. 24); however, these frameworks do not prioritize the dynamics or social issues associated with femininities or LGBTQ+ groups. Consequently, employing frameworks that are

narrowly centered on masculinity may give the impression that masculinities operate in isolation from the wider "gender order," which is a misleading representation of gender relations (Connell, 1987, p. 22). Nonetheless, this issue highlights specific areas within the frameworks that warrant further refinement and presents opportunities for future studies to enhance their comprehensiveness.

Limitations

I have identified two main limitations of this study. First, due to the qualitative nature of the research design, only a small sample of advertisements was analyzed. Therefore, the findings derived from this sample are not representative of all men's makeup advertisements, including those circulating on other social media platforms or from lesser known companies that were not considered in this research. Second, because the analysis is centered exclusively on the advertisements and the nature of their representations, the study does not explore who the advertisements reach, how they are interpreted by viewers, or what effects they may produce. Similarly, collecting data on YouTube as the primary research site limited the ability to collect demographic information about viewers. Access to data such as gender, age, and ethnicity could have offered insight into whether the advertisements effectively reach the intended target audience of heterosexual men or whether they primarily attract viewers from marginalized groups. Furthermore, this study cannot determine whether the advertisements influenced male consumers' behaviors, such as motivating the purchase of cosmetic products. Nonetheless, these questions point to the value of investigating how consumers actually engage with and respond to such content. However, such an inquiry falls outside the scope of the present research, which is focused on analyzing representational content rather than audience reception or impact.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several suggestions for advancing research in this area have emerged from the findings of this study. For instance, future research could incorporate advertisements produced by lesser-known or emerging cosmetics companies, including those based in regions outside of Western contexts. During the sampling process, I encountered a number of relevant advertisements that were ultimately excluded from this study as they were either produced by niche cosmetics companies or originated from countries outside of North America, Europe, and Australia. The inclusion of these types of advertisements would enhance global relevance and diversity of the research. Additionally, I recommend that future qualitative studies adopt a more expansive research design by involving male participants who have viewed the advertisements and can reflect on their perceptions of the gender norms being represented. This could include an exploration of whether exposure to the advertisements influences their views on men's makeup, and whether they would consider purchasing or integrating cosmetic products into their grooming routines. Attention to participant demographics—such as age, sexual orientation, and level of makeup proficiency—would allow researchers to better understand how various groups of men interpret the messaging. Furthermore, integrating quantitative data on the volume and types of products sold to male consumers would offer insight into the overall effectiveness of the advertisements in reaching and persuading their intended demographic. It would also be valuable to explore why certain products outperform others, thereby highlighting which advertising strategies are most effective in challenging or reshaping traditional gender norms.

Furthermore, a useful conceptual resource for deepening the understanding of the dynamics present in these advertisements—particularly within the frameworks of *hybrid* and *inclusive*

masculinity—is the concept of "gay-window-dressing" (Lewis et al., 2024, p. 197) or "gay window advertising" (Bronski, 1984, p. 187, as cited in Tsai, 2012). Originating in the 1980s, this concept describes how advertisements subtly incorporate stereotypical markers to signal an intention to target a homosexual audience (Tsai, 2012). Typically, this is achieved through the use of specific "clothing, grooming, and poses" that indirectly communicate this aim or appeal to that demographic (Branchick, 2007 as cited in Tsai, 2012). Such symbols are often presented discreetly to avoid alienating heterosexual consumers (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2025, p. 425) or offending homosexual audiences, who may perceive certain advertising content as overly stereotypical or hypersexualized (Lewis et al., 2024).

Therefore, instead of producing separate advertisements with explicit signifiers targeted exclusively at homosexual audiences—often distributed through "gay media," which typically have limited reach—marketers incorporate subtle signifiers into mainstream media advertising (Lewis et al., 2024, p. 425; Sender, 1999).The increased presence of elements associated with this "marginalized group" in mainstream advertisements is frequently regarded as a sign of progress toward greater inclusion, visibility, and social acceptance (Tsai, 2011, p. 90). Nonetheless, Tsai (2012) contends that advertisers often "downplay" this strategy, asserting that the inclusion of homosexual signifiers is largely accidental and that consumers ultimately determine how to interpret the advertising content (p. 43). This "ambiguity appeal" (Tsai, 2012, p. 44) is deliberately employed to engage a broader audience. As a result, homosexual and other marginalized groups remain positioned in subordinate roles, as their identities are neither dominant nor explicitly embraced within mainstream advertising narratives (Tsai, 2011).

Individuals should be cautioned against assuming that the inclusion of mixed aesthetics in advertisements is a recent or uniquely contemporary development. This practice originated in the 1980s and, therefore, is not an entirely new phenomenon (Bronski, 1984, as cited in Tsai, 2012). Given its existence over several decades, audiences have likely become increasingly aware that advertisements commonly blend heterosexual and homosexual signifiers in creative and often subliminal ways. It is important to historicize the objects under study, as doing so enables the observation of representational shifts over time and prevents the erroneous assumption that these strategies are novel. Marketers have long employed such techniques to appeal to broader audiences. Consequently, further research that examines this and related concepts would be useful for understanding how these advertising strategies have evolved over time.

Concluding Remarks

There are four significant takeaways from this study, derived from the interpretation of the corpus of data through three theoretical frameworks. First, it is evident that the representations within the sample both reinforce and redefine masculinity simultaneously. The five themes identified through reflexive thematic analysis demonstrate the presence of this dual dynamic within the advertisements. Additionally, various sonic, textual, and visual elements distinctly indicate that these advertisements are primarily targeted toward a male-identified audience. For example, darker colour schemes—commonly associated with traditional masculinity—are frequently employed. Conversely, even when lighter, more traditionally feminine colours are used, masculine-coded cues remain prominently integrated.

Second, a greater number of advertisements seek to reinforce conventional norms of manhood rather than resist them. Nonetheless, despite the preponderance of hegemonic masculine

representations throughout the sample advertisements, there is also clear evidence of increasing acceptance in society of men who adopt progressive and non-traditional masculine traits. The mere fact that makeup is being marketed to men suggests, at least to some extent, that contemporary men possess the capacity to construct more flexible and diverse masculinities. It appears that the cosmetics companies behind these advertisements aim to normalize makeup use—traditionally associated with femininity—by promoting it as a simple addition to men's grooming routines. For instance, advertisements that challenge traditional masculinity often feature male models with androgynous characteristics and more conspicuous, bolder makeup looks.

Third, the advertisements frequently focus on alleviating the anxiety that male consumers may experience regarding makeup use. They must carefully balance reinforcing traditional notions of masculinity while persuading men to embrace certain transformations aimed at enhancing their appearance. The inclusion of hegemonic masculine signifiers likely functions to reassure men that makeup is acceptable and to mitigate apprehensions among hesitant consumers. However, while men are encouraged to broaden their aesthetic practices, this expansion remains normatively constrained—evident in the portrayal of rugged, stereotypically heterosexual male models engaging in makeup routines. Although marketing strategies aimed at male consumers are not new, promoting makeup as a daily grooming practice for men represents a significant departure from its longstanding association with femininity in recent decades.

Fourth, the contradictions evident in these advertisements arise precisely because they seek to both reinforce and redefine masculinity simultaneously. For instance, several advertisements promote different makeup finishes for men as a means of transforming the skin. Some advertisements recommend a matte look, while others emphasize a dewy, more natural shine that

suggests it is unnecessary to completely alter one's facial appearance (Mac Cosmetics, 2013). Additionally, representations aligned with the *hybrid* and *inclusive masculinity* frameworks reveal these inherent contradictions through the subtle inclusion of feminine and LGBTQ+ aesthetics within the messaging. The ongoing effort of these advertisements to mitigate anxieties surrounding makeup use—particularly its associations with femininity and LGBTQ+ aesthetics—while concurrently upholding traditional masculine ideals indicates that masculine aesthetics remain contested in contemporary society (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025). This dynamic precisely illustrates the crisis of masculinity that many scholars argue occurs during periods of social change. Men's makeup advertisements thus provide evidence of a shift toward inclusive masculinity, thereby capturing the spirit of the contemporary age, while also revealing a desire to cling to past norms of manhood.

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