The U.S. male market segment is large and undergoing transformational change. This metamorphosis is reflected in men’s increasing focus on their bodies (Alexander 2003, Pope et al. 2000) and manifest in their shopping patterns (Salzman et al. 2006). Their approaches to specific product categories, including personal grooming have been undergoing particularly notable transformations. Although growth has slowed with the global economic slowdown, the U.S. market for men’s bath, shower, deodorant, and skin and hair products market grew 36% in the five years between 2004 and 2009 (Euromonitor 2011a) while the general beauty and personal care market grew only 8% (Euromonitor 2011b) in the same period. The body spray product category alone grew among 18 to 24 year old males by 62% from 2004 to 2005 (Bosman 2005). Whereas less than ten years ago women purchased the majority of men’s clothes, today it is men who buy the majority of their own apparel (Fetto 2002, Rozhon 2003).

This evolution reflects several cultural changes impacting the trajectory of notions of masculinity in America: men’s increasing focus on the self; the melding of gender roles; the blurring of class lines; the growing importance of celebrity; and the increasing diversity of the U.S. population. Kimmel (2006) describes three paradigms of masculinity that competed with each other for supremacy from the 18th to the 20th century, all rooted in land ownership, monetary wealth, and career success. The genteel patriarch model of wealthy and benevolent Christian landowner competed with the heroic artisan characterized by formal manners with women, stalwart loyalty to male comrades, an honest toiler, unafraid of hard work, proud of craftsmanship and self-reliant; and the self-made man, the wealthy nouveau-riche entrepreneur who derived his identity completely from his activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, geographic and social mobility. This last type of man is uncomfortably linked to the volatile marketplace, considered nouveau riche, and is restless, chronically insecure, and desperate to achieve a “solid grounding for a masculine identity” (Kimmel 2006, 13). It is this self-involved paradigm that achieved prominence in the broader culture by the 20th century and continues to the present day.

The predominance of this self-made man paradigm has not been without upheavals and adaptations, however. At the turn of the 20th century, with an industrial economy obviating the need for the farm-based self-made man of the mid to late 19th century, men reassessed their masculinity through membership in all-male fraternal organizations and a focus on bodybuilding and the masculine physique. In contrast with this self-focused pattern, there was concurrent societal pressure for men to spend time with and focus on their sons. There were fears that young men were being feminized by 20th century industrial life and assertions of women’s roles. Later, after World War II, the self-made man became the corporate man, concerned with fitting into the post-War society (Riesman 1950). Books like The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (Wilson 1955) exposed the conflict male culture was undergoing between this traditional gender role, familial responsibility and the need for self-expression. In 1953, the launch of Playboy magazine spoke to a hedonistic, acquisitive, self-involved urbane male who enjoyed “mixing up cocktails and an hors d’oeuvre or two, putting a little mood music on the phonograph and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex” (Hefner 1953). The mid-1950s presented an anti-social, self-obsessed version of the male, the beat. Books such as On the Road and films such as The Wild One and Rebel Without a Cause presented males rejecting the broader society and living on its fringes.

Meanwhile, society was changing with Federal laws and court cases supporting civil rights for African-Americans beginning with the integration of the armed forces in 1948 through the Brown vs.
Board of Education school desegregation decision in 1954 and culminating with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Following in the mid-1960s was a new sort of male protest prototype, the hippie. The hippie espoused love and peace (in reaction to the Vietnam War) as well as hedonism and self-gratification manifest in hippies’ interest in multiple sexual partners and recreational drug use.

In the 1970s, the men’s movement, a reaction to feminism that was summarized in a book by Warren Farrell, *The Liberated Man* (1974), promised men more autonomy in their lives as they were able to relinquish the role of traditional breadwinner and focus on what made them happy. This autonomy extended to sexual orientation, as the gay rights movement took hold. This progression continued through the 1980s into the 21st century as men were freed from traditional roles as women assumed increasing prominence in traditionally male career and political realms. As described by Ehrenreich, “The man who avoids women who are likely to become financial dependents, who is dedicated to his own pleasures [is now considered] ‘healthy’ (1983, 11-12).”

To summarize, during the 20th century, as the self-made man paradigm was embraced and refined, qualities of assertiveness and competition that were condemned in the 19th century came to be admired and even revered (Rotundo 1993). As a result “the balance of bourgeois values has tipped from self-discipline to self-expression, from self-denial to self-enjoyment (Rotundo 1993, 285).”

This study traces the impact of these changing paradigms of masculinity in America and in the male market segment. It does this by analyzing advertisements for a specific product category – men’s fragrances - throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. Although fragrance has been used since the time of the ancient Egyptians and balms are mentioned in the Bible (Stamelman 2006, 19), the modern perfume industry dates to the late 19th century, when the discovery of synthetic additions to natural scents made it possible to increase the variety of scents and produce fragrances on a large scale (Dove 2008, Stamelman 2006). Masculine fragrances date to the launch of Fougère Royale in 1882 (Dove 2008, 86), followed in 1889 by Guerlain’s Jicky (which initially appealed to men but went on to be targeted at women (Stamelman 2006, 185)). Both personal and public in its selection and consumption, men’s fragrances illustrate both the male consumer’s self-concept and the importance society places on hygiene, fashion and individuality. As Stamelman (2006, 21) states, with fragrance masculinity is “a mere drop away”.

The study, currently under way, includes a content analysis of men’s fragrance print and video advertisements. Ads are analyzed for number, position, gender and ethnicity of models; theme or story of the ad; tagline; and the values expressed in the ad. Advertisements have been located through such sites as Ad Access at the John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, and Marketing History; a variety of online sources for print ads; and YouTube for video ads. A wealth of examples is available via these sources. A simple Google search on the term “aftershave vintage advertisements” generated over 187,000 hits. The authors are selecting a sample of approximately one hundred representative print ads to be content analyzed from decades beginning in 1900 through the present day. To be selected, an ad for men’s fragrance products must be in English, be clearly dated, and feature a clear combination of model(s), tagline and/or product description.

Preliminary results, based on a small sample of fifteen ads, reveal ad themes evolving from the utilitarian and hygienic, to status-oriented, to hedonistic, sexually charged, individualistic and self-focused. Starting in the early 1970s, ads have further featured the imprint of the women’s movement and the embrace of aggressive female sexuality. This trajectory parallels the changing paradigm of masculinity in America during this period and cultural changes impacting American manhood.

References


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