What Makes the Man?
Television Makeovers, Made-Over Masculinity, and Male Body Image

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This article examines television makeover transformations of men, arguing that makeovers provide a means of observing how manliness is constructed by the media and how male identity and body image become implicated in gendered investments about masculinity. The televised “manly” makeover also offers an opportunity to observe the relation between men’s bodies and self-esteem. Since it is designed to heighten men’s sense of masculinity through a process that requires men to be passive in full view of an audience, the made-over man then comes to occupy a feminized position. He must be the object of the other’s gaze and accept externally determined changes of his body and self-presentation.

Keywords: male identity, body image, hegemonic masculinity, self-esteem, self-presentation

The makeover has long been a mainstay of women’s advice and entertainment literature. Since the beginning of the new decade, however, television has launched a proliferation of make over-themed shows for the house, car, and body that seek to inform men and women of the pleasures and possibilities of transformation, rejuvenation, and alteration. At present, there are more than 30 makeover shows on U.S. and international television that offer to change and improve symbolic manifestations of the self from MTV’s Pimp My Ride to HGTV’s Trading Spaces to BBC and TLC’s What Not to Wear to Fox’s The Swan, cars, rooms, appearance, and bodies are all made over. While still predominately addressing women, televisual transformations have opened an imaginative terrain apart from the traditional homosocial male spaces, such as the military training facility or the athletic practice field, where men are invited/compelled to undergo change in the name of improving their physical and psychological health.

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287
As I have argued in other work, makeover interventions are largely concerned with writing gender norms onto typically female bodies (Weber, 2005). On plastic surgery shows, the gendering of women’s bodies is often done quite literally by “sculpting” the body so that it more fully emits signs of femininity: large breasts, an hour-glass figure, a pert nose, etc.¹ On other makeover programs where clothes, spaces, and behaviors are the raw material with which experts work, feminization of a woman quite often happens through the guise of offering her greater self-esteem so that she can take pride in her house or show off her womanly style choices. Experts typically occupy positions of decision-making authority, which, in turn, tends to heighten and over-simplify the gender binaries mapped out by the show, so that authorities appear to function with masculine domination, while makeover subjects perform feminine subordination. The over-simplified gender binaries also reify the significance of visual stimuli as the most important indexical link to physical and emotional well-being. The logic suggests that the outside is a reflection of the inside, but also that the outside can influence the inside. Beautiful people make for healthy bodies.

Inviting men to the (operating) table, as many shows have done, opens a fascinating cultural space where it is possible to see how male power and success is imagined and constructed, and how the discourses of health become implicated in gendered investments in masculinity. It also offers a very specific arena in which to observe a socio-logical phenomenon about men’s bodies and self-esteem. Across cultures, one of the privileges of masculinity has been its retention of the unmarked or normative category, and thus the capacity to go unexamined.² Given this, the makeover poses a threat since it reveals, quite literally, what makes the man. And yet, since the conceptualization of manhood often relies on self-determination and invisibility, the makeover offers a puzzling enigma in that it enacts a technology of gender specifically designed to heighten one’s masculinity through a process that requires men to receive assistance passively in full view of an audience.³ The made-over man, consequently, occupies a feminized position, since he must be the object of the gaze, willing to accept externally determined change. Though some shows teach the man (or woman) how to make better consumer, grooming, and cooking choices, which in itself might be construed as a form of agency, in this article I examine how a process that makes men’s bodies both visible and docile performs a makeover of white Western masculinity itself, offering new possibilities for thinking about men and their bodies.

¹ Though these shows often support radical transformation of the body, they make clear they are not creating surgery junkies who are pathologically driven to change the body through endless surgerical procedures. The patients are presented as having “good” and reasonable desires for changing their looks, rather than as obsessive victims of body dysmorphic disorder. For more on this topic, see Pitts (2006).

² Feminist socio-linguistic work is particularly adept at pointing out men’s erasure through the normative, see Tannen (1996) and Lakoff (2004).

³ It is important to note, as well, that makeover shows do not create a viable space for female masculinities. All notions of gender binaries are very much tied to corresponding sex differences, with no room for inter-sexed or inter-gendered expressions.
Much important scholarship has aptly demonstrated the ways in which gender for men is situational, pluralized, and fluid, although popular media rarely communicate this nuance (Connell 1995, 2000; Brod 1994, 1992). The U.S.-based makeover programming I examine largely reinforces the concept of masculinity as singular. Indeed, to be single-minded, and thus clear of focus, is often taken as the central hallmark of Western masculinity itself. As Bordo (1999) has noted, to be considered “soft” is “one of the worst things a man can suffer in this culture” (p. 55). And yet, the very nature of the makeover so problematizes a singular conception of masculinity that to believe in a successful makeover outcome also requires a realignment of how gender is understood. In turn, this may open new conceptual possibilities both for mediated forums, like television, and for real men about their bodies and lives.

Though the shows I examine in this article are produced in the United States, they, like many U.S. media products, have a wider international distribution. Fox’s makeuver/pageant show for women, The Swan, for instance, continues to air in more than 50 countries. Other shows, like ABC’s Extreme Makeover or Extreme Makeover: Home Edition have similar international audiences. The makeover mandate is now a core element of television programming outside of the U.S., as seen in the BBC’s surgery shows, Brand New You and Bride and Grooming, Holland’s Make Me Beautiful, and the Iraqi-produced Labor and Materials that aims to restore war-ravaged homes. Though I believe there is a provocative cross-cultural analysis to be done on how television makeovers manifest by country and region, in this article I discuss how three very different U.S. makeover shows write American-style masculinity onto a male body and universalize the resulting “after” body as a type of everyman.

Though the male makeover show Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (BRAVO) is a rich text about masculinity in its own right, I elect not to discuss it in depth here, and instead turn to three shows that typically transform women, and thus offer a sharper point of gender contrast. Doing so allows me to read how men and masculinity are represented in genres that appear to be predominantly about women. I approach these shows in the order of their escalating closeness to and intervention with the physical body: What Not to Wear (Cohen, 2002–present, TLC), that alters wardrobe, hair, and grooming, Ten Years Younger (Stroupe, 2005–present, TLC), that offers minor and non-surgical procedures, such as Lasik eye surgery and dermabrasion, as well as style and grooming advice, and Extreme Makeover (Gofrain, 2003–present, ABC), that performs multiple plastic surgeries (usually ten or more), as well as offering moderate...
physical training and style advice. Examining these shows also allows me to conjecture more broadly about media effects on male body image and health. Before turning to the shows themselves, however, it is important to lay out what's at stake in the conception of American manhood that stands behind these manly makeovers.

Globalizing the Self-Made Man

The self-made man [is] a man whom America made out of the very earth ... unprivileged, unknown. The story of Abraham Lincoln is the story of the American dream—the ability to rise from the simple beginning to one’s highest potential. (Plaque at the home of Abraham Lincoln’s birthplace, Hodgenville, Kentucky)

American masculinity has long been predicated on the values of the self-made man, the concept that manhood finds its greatest source and definition in self-determination, autonomy, and individualism. As the above quote from Lincoln’s birthplace indicates, it is not only Lincoln’s stature as a war-time president during an epochal moment in American history that makes him important, it is his very embodiment of American principals of masculinity—his rise to fame and power, his transformation of mind and body that took him from the plain log cabin where he was born to the most prestigious (white) house in the land.

As Kimmel (1996) and Nelson (1998) have both suggested, archetypes of American manhood did not emerge from a vacuum but were the result of a consolidated series of choices that heightened how the new nation wanted to view itself. The United States, marked by its declaration for independence, needed men who were similarly stand-alone types. This model of manhood could not depend on inherited material wealth or social power. The man had to make himself on his own by proving himself through physical strength and material success. Faludi (2000) further contends that this historical model still operates, since “a man is expected to prove himself not by being part of society but by being untouched by it, soaring above it. He is to travel unfettered, beyond society’s clutches, alone—making or breaking whatever or whoever crosses his path” (p. 10). Quite often, as Kimmel notes, “anxiety, restlessness, and loneliness” are the by-products of this commitment to masculinity, and yet such disaffection itself becomes the evidence of the man’s successful negotiation of gender (p. 23).

This model of what Connell (1995, 2000) has termed hegemonic masculinity is both specific to and outside of what constitutes the cultural history of the United States. Though hegemonic masculinity is informed by American-ness, the goals of market achievement and professional success mark a twenty-first century globalized political and gendered economy, what Connell has identified as transnational business masculinity. Connell notes that, “To the extent particular institutions become dominant in world society, the patterns of masculinity embedded in them may become global standards” (2000, p. 45). This is marked through the body, he observes, by the fact that “almost every political leader in the world now wears the uniform of the Western busi-
ness executive” (2000, p. 45). In a similar way, the concept of the self-made man, and all of the rugged individualism, lack of self-reflection, and emotional distance that goes along with him, may have reached its fullest articulation in the U.S. iteration of him, but it is in no way isolated to U.S. experiences. How U.S.-based media products conceptualize and celebrate this man, positing him as fit for a globalized economy and an exemplar of a universalized and homologous masculinity, is at the heart of the makeover. So, too, is the man’s very body, since the body itself is the text on which physical, and, increasingly, social power can be written.

Enhancing Male Bodies

Indeed, the body is a critical link between hegemonic masculinity, male self-regard, and overall self-esteem. As Bordo (1999) has noted, we have long been encouraged to believe that the natural male body is a strong and aggressive machine. This aggression is continually rewarded, Bordo observes, though a series of cultural perks, “scholarships, community adulation, romantic attention . . . administrative leniency when ‘boys will be boys’” (p. 234). Connell reinforces the link between male privilege, hegemonic masculinity, and the body, suggesting that a man’s physicality is the locus of his cultural power and sense of self-esteem. Ironically, as Connell (2000) demonstrates through the case of a professional athlete, the need to preserve the signifying values of the powerful body through abstinence (sexual or pharmacological) often curtails men from participating in the very behaviors that mark the hegemonic, which underscore the inherent instability of the hegemonic position.

Given the body’s centrality in signifying male strength, intelligence, and virility, men are increasingly a critical consumer base for industries that cater to appearance. These industries consist of typical male activities, such as bodybuilding, but now include traditionally female preoccupations like weight loss, fashion, and plastic surgery. Indeed, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, between 1997 and 2005 there was a 9 percent aggregate increase in cosmetic surgical procedures (such as buttock lifts, abdominoplasties, and lipoplasties) for men. During the same period, men increasingly sought out non-surgical procedures (such as Botox and dermabrasion) at a rate of increase of 749 percent. In Beyond Plastic Surgery (Michon, 2004), a documentary on cosmetic alteration that often verges into cautionary tale, the message is clear: men are equally obsessed with self-observation and body perfection, underscoring similar claims made in academic and medical circles (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005; Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). Plastic surgeon Richard Fleming, in-

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6 In saying this, I am mindful of the admonition offered by Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb (2000) that we must problematize the assumption that there “is really something called ‘Western ideology’ that gets imposed on non-Western societies” through gender practices (p. 10).

7 Increases for women during the same time span were 147 percent for surgical procedures and 724 percent for non-surgical procedures.
terviewed in Beyond Plastic Surgery, observes, “If you had asked what percentage of men came into the practice seeking plastic surgery about ten years ago, I would have responded about ten percent of our patients were men. Today it’s fifty-fifty.”

The reasons for this increase are varied, and as with most sociological and representational phenomena, there is not a clear cause and effect relationship. We can, however, see the ways in which women’s increasing social and economic power have, in many ways, reconfigured a cognitive landscape that historically gave men automatic rights of entry into culturally dominant positions. In this regard, men not only need to compete against one another, they must compete with women. Coupled with such change has been a shift in the global marketplace that, in turn, has privileged employees with social and technological skills rather than those possessing sheer physical power or mechanical savvy. Conceptually, the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are awash with the power of images and consumerism, so that the flooding of visual images through television, advertising, the internet and other forms of popular culture means that both men and women experience greater awareness of body ideals and greater pressure to work toward, even if not to achieve fully, perfect bodies. Celebrity culture plays a significant role in both modeling and affirming the rightness of these ideals. Constant reminders of beautiful bodies also takes place amidst a social backdrop of a critical mass of middle-aged consumers who possess considerable financial means and an attitude that if something bothers you, change it. These consumers, newly aware of the aging body, are enacting technologies of self-care, creating a new cultural investment in “good health” by arresting the signs of time’s progress and actively fighting for positive self-esteem through the beautiful body, which, in turn, has altered, though not entirely erased, the social stigma attached to plastic surgery. Finally, technological advancements in cosmetic surgery procedures, recent failures in socialized and privatized health coverage, and an expanding logic to meet market demands, mean that doctors and other medical personnel are increasingly turning to cosmetic surgeries as a way to create revenue streams outside of insurance-based economies.

What this all indicates for men is that there are new cultural, social, financial, and physical pressures for appearance to match cultural perceptions of authority. For instance, Agovino reported through CBS News (2004) that when 53-year-old airline pilot Chris Bourgeois sought out surgery to clear his sinuses, he also opted for procedures to make him appear younger (by having the bags under his eyes reduced) and leaner (through liposuction to eliminate his double chin). “I just wanted a more professional look,” said Bourgeois. “I wanted the people who fly with me to feel safe.” For both men and women, cosmetic youth-enhancing surgeries are considered a necessary business strategy to keep one competitive, but also, as in the case of this pilot, to signify competence, strength, and trustworthiness. For men, however, the stakes are different. As Beyond Plastic Surgery notes, “The ideal for men has always involved strength. Nowadays for some, the appearance of strength may be enough.” According to the documentary, this means that men are increasingly seeking out silicone implants to simulate muscular contours and hardness (these include calf implants and abdominal silicone six packs).
Interestingly, makeover shows, either of style or of the body, have been reluctant to give the man ersatz muscular (or phallic) strength. There have been no cod pieces or under-the-clothes muscle prosthetics, as we saw in the Elizabethan period or even in Robocop and Batman, neither have there been cosmetic procedures to write masculine strength onto a “weak” male body through silicone implants, though most shows are very eager to write a similar femininity on female bodies through breast implants. The penis is conspicuous for its absence, particularly on plastic surgery shows where phalloplasty would be an easy procedure to include. Though operations on the penis are not completely forbidden on expanded cable television programming such as Dr. 90210 (E!) Drastic Plastic Surgery (Discovery), or the fictionalized Nip/Tuck (F/X), the mainstream manly makeover concentrates on the face, pecs, and abs. Such attention in many ways seem to correlate with what surveys of male body image find to be the more pressing places of concern for men. Franzoi and Shields (1984) have found, for instance, that men’s body image connects to three qualities: physical attractiveness (face and facial features); upper body strength (biceps, shoulder width, arms and chest); and physical conditioning (stamina, weight, energy level). And yet, as social historian Luciano (2001) notes, in 1995, “American men spent twenty-four million dollars on penis surgery,” suggesting that the hidden zone of a man’s private parts may, indeed, still constitute the ultimate marker of masculinity, or at least of male body satisfaction (p. 185).

Let me offer one other interpretation here. Reality TV makeover shows are not documentaries about the social phenomenon of men’s embodied experience, though they surely may offer such information. Instead they are cultural texts that speak to, and sometimes shape, fears and desires. The unmentioned penis, in this regard, does not mitigate against its symbolic value, but merely suggests that within the stories being fashioned about men and body image on reality TV, the hidden penis is secondary to the more visually prominent features of muscles and facial features. In this regard, then, reality TV may be seen to off-set one of the larger sites of unease and insecurity for men—the challenged phallic power of the penis—through the very culture of images on which the desire for improved physical appearance thrives. In other words, a genre about masculinity that resolutely ignores the penis in favor of other elements of the body may offer men one escape from the tyrannies of castration anxiety and phallic impotence. This suggests, quite importantly, that the makeover is not simply another nail to seal the coffin of male narcissism or only a postmodern fascination with surface over substance, but a significant re-routing of long-held embodied anxieties experienced by men.

Manly Makeovers?

Though there are many conceptual differences between makeover programs, most adhere to a remarkable formulaic regularity that heightens the complicated gender instruction communicated through the shows. This rigid lock-step narrative typically is organized into discrete pieces that follow one another with unflinching regularity. Shows open with the initial shaming of the pre-made-over “ugly” subject, move on to moments for spectatorial surveillance by audience members and experts, include con-
fessional opportunities where subjects speak of their shame and lack of self-esteem, extract pledges from the subjects that they will put themselves fully in the hands of the authorities, perform the actual “work” of the transformation (a work done predominantly by surgeons and style experts), and conclude with the mandatory “shock and awe” of revelation, including the euphoria of the new-and-improved subject and the satisfied experts.

Depending on the program, there are both explicit and implicit goals for the transformations, expressed by the shows themselves and by the makeover subjects. Sometimes these goals are abstract: empowerment, self-confidence, happiness. Other times the goals are concrete: “I want to smile,” says one makeover subject. At The Swan pageant, DeLisa, the eventual winner, states her makeover goal, “I’ve worked very hard for this new body and I want to show it off. I want them to see a strong confident body” (Galan, 2004). In all cases, goals are directed at achieving gender/sex congruence, so that female bodies can be carved into more feminine shapes and male bodies made to emit masculine signs.

I have suggested that there is an enigma at the heart of makeovers for men, since masculinity is often construed as natural, independent, competitive, physically dominant, indifferent to pain (external or internal), not self-reflexive, non-emotional (except for anger), and in every way separate from the feminine. The makeover as described above is fueled by the awareness of one’s appearance, consequent psychological pain, and the desire to achieve a happier emotional state through the help of others. The makeover is also a format that is considered to be gendered feminine and, in roughly 90 percent of cases, directed at women as transformation subjects. Given its demand for male submission and its link to women’s interests, the concept of the manly makeover flies in the face of hegemonic masculinity.

This is somewhat ironic given the shows’ attempts to release the real man. I emphasize the word “release” because a founding principal of hegemonic masculinity presumes a biological essentialism: Man is not created. Man simply is. As Connell (2000) phrases it, “masculine embodiment” stands in for the possibility and limits of masculinity, which “being ‘natural,’ can never be changed” (p. 65). Cohan and Hark (1993) observe that this concept of man’s natural being applies to media in that, “the male’s seeming exemption from visual representation may work very hard to preserve the cultural fiction that masculinity is not a social construction” (p. 3). In the thorny domain of the manly makeover, there is a tacit understanding that a man’s masculinity is already fully present since it is a natural dividend of his male body. The job of the makeover, then, is not to create masculinity; it is simply to make it more manifest.

But here we encounter a tricky paradox. As so conceived, masculinity is predicated on a natural or “real” manhood grounded in the body. Since by altering that body the makeover threatens to reveal a man’s bedrock authenticity as a fiction, the makeover must develop a secondary premise that contends artifice can be more persuasively masculine than the man’s natural body. As such, whether it compromises a man’s claim to being “real” or not, we are made to understand that some men are clearly better off if they employ the feminized mechanism of the makeover for improvement. This, in itself,
WHAT MAKES THE MAN?

is a direct challenge to a hegemonic system, which allows for no valid articulation of masculinity outside of itself, even while a complicated "hierarchy of masculinities," as Connell phrases it, demands that men compete, often through force, to rise in the ranks (2000, p. 217). The notion of a series of subordinated masculinities, all aware of and eager to claim the dominant hegemonic position, gives sustenance to the concept of the makeover, which promises to assist the man up the hierarchy. And yet, since one of the platforms of that hierarchy is that the hegemonic man requires no assistance, the makeover subtly undermines its own success.

Shows quite often diffuse the threat they offer by slightly altering the terms of how the makeover transpires for men. And, again, since the makeover canon is so consistently formulaic, these alterations stand out. In the remainder of this article, I analyze the more insistent differences between how men and women are made over within the three programs that are functioning here as test cases, looking specifically at the role that resistance plays, the significance of professional confidence and heterosexual appeal as makeover outcomes, the degree of decision-making authority and active participation asked of each makeover subject, and the ways in which the male body is both referenced and revered within the programs. Contrasting the gendered intentions built into these makeovers reveals how these shows both underscore and also destabilize conventional forms of hegemonic masculinity.

“He’s a Reluctant Student”

On most makeover shows, subjects respond to their transformations eagerly. The makeover is represented as a gift or a reward, and subjects are predominantly shown as desiring difference and grateful for advice. And yet, because we are talking about significant personal change as depicted through a television narrative, conflict of some sort is not only inevitable but also necessary. Given this, resistance to the makeover plays a key role in how the advice unfolds—each subject’s form of recalcitrance calling forth greater powers of persuasion, or humiliation, from the experts. In this context, men are generally given more screen time than women in which they actively resist experts. On What Not to Wear, though women are also depicted as feisty or recalcitrant, men typically resist longer and more vociferously, with style experts and the voice over narrator commenting on, and thus accentuating, their reluctance. On Extreme Makeover and Ten Years Younger male makeover subjects quite often critique the advice given to them by experts. They do this insistently and repeatedly, with multiply played intra-textual moments that serve to remind the viewer of the importance of the man’s resistance. Women on the show are, by contrast, more consistently thankful and obsequious. They do not scrutinize advice; neither do they express reservation or judgment. For instance, when the host and stylist of Ten Years Younger, Mark Montano, offers Dane, a 32-year-old swimming pool contractor whom the general public reads as 40, a pink shirt with a broad daisy pattern, Dane exclaims no less than four times, “Flowers? Pink flowers?!” Similarly, when the make-up and grooming expert, Damone Roberts, insists that Dane shave his heavy dark beard, he balks, “I just grew it back. I just had to shave
it for the acid peel,” a scene that is repeated three times. The voiceover narrator states the obvious, “Dane is reluctant to let the glam squad make him over.”

As in these two examples, men on makeover shows are quite often depicted as resisting experts who are aligned with subordinated positions, typically women or men who are marked as “ethnic” or gay (or both). Mark is Hispanic and Damone is black; in the above-described moment, both enact, even if they do not actually claim, semiotic behaviors that mark them as gay. When “straight” white men—generally surgeons—give advice, neither male nor female patients resist. By depicting makeover men resisting experts who in themselves are represented as occupying positions outside of dominant masculinity, the shows appear to offer the transforming men a position of power.

However, it is these same “subordinated experts,” the saucy and sarcastic Stacy and (seemingly gay) Clinton on *What Not to Wear*, the falsely sympathetic (and seemingly gay) Mark on *Ten Years Younger*, the peppy (and seemingly gay) Sam the Style Guy on *Extreme Makeover*, who have the power to heap shaming invective on the makeover subject. Critiquing Charlie’s underwear, Clinton asks, “When was the last time you were a lounge singer in Vegas?” Sam reminds the viewers that before *Extreme Makeover* both James and the girlfriend he meets on the show were “unlucky in love, in looks, and in life.” Across these shows, the gay style gurus function as a foil against which to read the emerging masculinity of the made-over man. Much as with *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, putting gay men in positions of authority does not undo the relentlessly heteronormative goals of the makeover, even on one episode of *Extreme Makeover* where a male makeover subject had a long-term same-sex partner. For both men and women, the overall logic of the makeover requires that subjects experience mortification before transformation can occur. Allowing men to more actively resist the shaming they receive from the gay style gurus enables these shows to minimize any potential weakening of the made-over man’s claim to masculinity while simultaneously visually heightening his submission.

Though these moments of resistance seem intended to substantiate the man’s masculinity, they actually problematize it, allowing for conventional forms of both strength and weakness. Resistance suggests that the man is strong, opinionated, and willful. As such, his participation in the makeover cannot be seen as an indication of his weakness since it takes strong measures to subdue him. And yet, resistance is also a crucial technique whereby the makeover narrative itself asserts its own masculine dominance over the transforming subjects. As Charlie says about his makeover experience, “Don’t ever recommend somebody for *What Not to Wear* unless they have a good thick skin, be-

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8 In this case, Bill was made over in tandem with his sister, Kim. The visual-cinematic code referenced their opposite sex connection much more insistently than it did Bill’s relationship with his male partner, Blane. If one were watching without sound, it would appear that brother and sister were romantically linked (complete with tears, hand holding, hugs, and kisses) and Bill and Blane were work buddies. (Season 3, Episode 9).
cause it's really tough. I can take a little criticism, but hours of it, over and over again, with pictures and video. What Not to Wear is not for sissies.” In this regard, the makeover functions as a masculinized technology of gender, much like the army or the marketplace itself, which creates the man by forcing him into submission. Charlie regards the makeover as “not for sissies,” strong enough to test a man. Like Chris, who initially believes What Not to Wear is “a girls’ show,” Charlie’s initial resistance and newly earned respect for the phallic power of the makeover process creates a gendered hierarchy to which he is willing to surrender.

The makeover’s devices for instruction include not only the public shaming that women endure, but also a series of scare tactics about how important it is, even for many men, to take care of themselves. When Ten Years Younger’s Dane must be “scared into going to the dentist” through dire pronouncements that he has created a breeding ground for infection and disease, he is simultaneously presented as strong and weak. His resistance heightens his congruence with codes that mark the man as indifferent to pain unless life-threatening, but the representation problematizes conventional formations of masculinity by suggesting Dane can be frightened at all. And yet, overall, the makeover mandate is clear: even if it disturbs his sense of masculinity, the man must actively engage in health-enhancing practices. We see a similar move on Extreme Makeover when James comments on how strong and confident he feels post-makeover. “I’ve changed. I’m more confident. I can talk to anybody now,” he notes, and yet his words, while establishing his confidence, serve to remind the viewer of his previous trepidation and tears, two very “unmanly” acts. Success for James, then, requires that he proactively address his anxieties through self-care and a willing reliance on health professionals.

In the cases of Dane and James, the shows set up a logic whereby both have a compromised sense of self-esteem because of the literal scars each bears from the hands of other, more dominant, men. Dane’s heavy beard obscures scars from “fights gone bad.” James, as we will see, feels his scar is a shameful reminder of being jumped. In this regard, then, it is their failure to compete successfully (and violently) with other men that has left scars and thus makes the makeover necessary. By altering the appearance of their scars, the makeover holds out the possibility that it can change how those earlier physical altercations are read on the body. And yet, in many ways, the erasure of experience on the body—through scars or signs of aging—constructs the ideal male body as a perpetually innocent surface on which no experience has left its mark. Such a semiotic landscape directly contradicts an historical understanding of male bodies that reads for character, knowledge, or physical power through wrinkles, grey hair, and battle scars.

One way the makeover narrative circumvents this dilemma is by refusing to lose the pre-made-over body. Indeed, the makeover narrative, for both men and women, is not one of stair steps whereby an old look can be transcended, forgotten, and left behind. It is one of simultaneous visual realities where the old and new body are made to signify in tandem, the after body inseparable and meaningless absent the before body. By showing the image of the after body on the same visual screen as the before body, the evidence the makeover provides substantiates its value. For a greater demonstration of
this claim, visit any makeover website or magazine feature where before and after pictures are paired with one another. The “made” body can never be separated from the natural or else it loses its meaning as a product of expertly intervention.

“I Can Take on the World!”

Unlike the majority of female subjects, the post-makeover male subjects’ gender status is reinforced through more moments of resistance and emotional distance but also through reassurances that the man can now improve his professional status and sexual allure. As if to underscore Sally Robinson’s (2001) contention that “male power is secured by inexpressivity, even as inexpressivity damages the male psyche and the male body” (p. 134), Dane deadpans when he sees himself, “Wow.” The host Mark interjects, “That, in guy talk, means WOW!!!!” To remind the audience of the status discrepancy between the heterosexual Dane and the tacitly gay expert, Dane points to Mark’s t-shirt that depicts the silhouette of two nude women, “How did you end up with the naked girls and I got the flowers?” This moment is immediately followed by putting Dane back in the box where he can again be scrutinized by an anonymous public, now all uniformly admiring and believing him to look 29. Dane’s wife approaches him with kisses, exclaiming, “He looks like a college kid,” a statement indicating that his body, whose sun damage used to signify his work as a laborer, has now shifted its class signification. The successful makeover outcome, in this regard, is the heightening of the man’s professional status, youth, and heterosexual desirability, all meant to offset whatever destabilization has occurred to the man’s gender ego through the process of transformation itself.

*Extreme Makeover* echoes this same theme of making the man by pushing him up the class ladder, simultaneously accentuating his youthfulness and sexual allure. Nathaniel, for instance, though the first person in his family to earn a college degree, had been rejected for “decent jobs because of his appearance and terrible looking teeth.” Arthur had been pre-maturely aged through the loss of his wife, his job, and his hair. Post-makeover, both men claim the energy of recaptured youth and all of the opportunity, both romantic and professional, that their new appearance allows. Even when actual age is not a factor, the makeover functions as a way of giving a man the power, optimism, and self-confidence of youth. Before his makeover, 23-year-old James worked as a stereo salesman, which he considered to be a “dead-end job.” He felt that his large nose, protruding ears, and weak chin held him back professionally and personally. His looks created a toxic situation that eroded his self-esteem, since it made him unable to approach women and too willing to befriend a group of men who, six years earlier, turned on him, broke his nose, and scarred his forehead. If the voiceover narrator is to be believed, the experience “nearly killed him.” In addition to a nose job,
cheek and chin implants, scar removal, and having his ears pinned back, James requires "extreme dentistry" that includes, as dentist William Dorfman puts it, "25 veneers and crowns, 6 root canals, four crown lengthening, one cosmetic lip re-positioning, and a partridge in a pear tree." Surgeon Harvey Zarem speculates about James, "I think he's going to feel very good about himself, and as you know, if you feel good about yourself, you're handsome." Though, of course, were Dr. Zarem's words true, James could have willed himself into handsomeness, saving a lot of pain, expense, and swelling.

Conveniently, the doctor's pronouncement comes to fruition, so that by the end of the show James can believe himself both good looking and self-efficacious: "I always thought I'd have the no chin, the floppy nose, the scar. Now I'm ready to move on and get my life going. This is the kick in the butt I've needed." Fortunately for James, another transforming body, this one female, offers an Extreme Makeover first: true love between two makeover recipients. Similarly, Will on What Not to Wear says post makeover, "I feel great. I've got so much more confidence than I usually do. For me in the future, it's going to be straight to the top. I'm going to go back to work with a great attitude and work to the top someday. Hopefully, become a vice president. That's my goal." Will's heterosexual appeal in this case is reinforced through the physical attention given by the host Stacy, who strokes his shoulders, cuddles next to his side, runs her hand up and down his leg, and asks for hugs. Similarly, when makeover participant, Chris, gets a new haircut, Stacy rubs her hands over the top of his head, "I love the hair. Meow!" Carmindy, the make-up specialist, gets into the act of reinforcing heterosexual appeal by leaning over the men, telling them how sexy they look, and reinforcing their new status in the masculine hierarchy. She tells Chris, "You're slowly moving from the guy I wanted to beat up in school to the guy I wanted to date in school." The makeover, then, enables these men to claim a masculinity that will have material effects in the bedroom and the market place, thus underscoring that personal transformation in the name of increased performance (or decreased chance of being beat up by a girl) establishes masculine ethos.

This same logic plays out in an episode of Ten Years Younger with Steve, an executive for a market research firm. Steve desires his makeover not out of insecurity or failure but as a way to keep his edge. "I have 40 people working underneath me," he says, "I have a big crew. We run between 20 and 30 studies a year. Most of the people who work for me are people right out of college. The majority of people [are] in their 20s and 30s." This episode departs from any other version of Ten Years Younger that I have studied in two significant ways: it takes the camera to Steve's home, giving the audience visual evidence that he is a good provider, and it makes physical strength a part of the makeover regime, in this case introducing Steve to a personal trainer who coaches him on how to run a marathon. In both cases, we are made to understand that unlike many of the other men (and all of the women) who appear on this show, Steve is not a pity case. He is a good provider, heterosexual (with wife and children mentioned and shown), and physically active. The makeover is intended to help him preserve his dominance by making Steve's appearance more fully conform to what a boss should look like. And yet, in many ways the boss's need for assistance undercuts his authority, again problematizing the possibility that a makeover can make the man.
The Man of Action

A similar complicated discourse is at play in how the shows depict male agency. While women typically receive procedures rather than decide what will be best for them, men are more frequently depicted as actively evaluating their options. For instance, on What Not to Wear, Chris authoritatively informs the camera, “I agree with [Stacy and Clinton] on certain points, but I want them to understand that I have a certain sense of what I am and what people think about me. They say that they got some good stuff planned, but I’ll be the judge of that.” In addition to making choices about their transformation procedures, men are also encouraged to proactively participate in the makeover. On a show like Extreme Makeover, men are, literally, put in the driver’s seat when they drive themselves to reveal ceremonies, often in high-end sports cars that attest to their new status as financial achievers. Women, by contrast, are encouraged to live out either princess or movie star fantasies, as they are typically chauffeured to their reveal ceremonies in horse-drawn carriages or limousines. By emphasizing these binaries, makeover shows tacitly reinforce stereotypes of men as active agents and women as passive, even infantilized, recipients. Because men are depicted as active, which is in accord with hegemonic masculinity, their gender ego is seemingly not at risk. And yet, for the made-over man to fully claim a hegemonic position, he must become detached from his need for a makeover in the first place, a separation which the makeover narrative, by definition, cannot provide.

The makeover, as a consequence, must be designed to enhance an already present masculinity, rather than to create the man altogether. For point of contrast, one need only look at how often surgeons on The Swan and Extreme Makeover attempt to correct a woman’s “block-like masculine body.” Even when men have ample breast tissue or no muscle mass at all, they are not described “like a woman.” Extreme Makeover recipient James gets new porcelain veneers that are shaped to look “more masculine,” but nowhere is there a sense that without the veneers James had gone about the world with feminine teeth. In this regard, then, the makeover preserves the sense of an immanent masculinity that emerges naturally from the male body, even while the makeover sets about altering that body.

“You’ve Got a Cute Little Figure. I Mean, You’ve Got a Great Body”

As this discussion makes clear, the man’s body is central to the version of masculinity the makeovers attempt to draw out of him. All three of these shows typically reference the pre-made-over man’s body as flawed and weak, something and someone to be disregarded as juvenile, unserious, or, a common trope for Stacy and Clinton, crazy. On What Not to Wear, Ed, who has a remarkable zest for fashion, is described as walking the fine line between “quirkiness and just being psychotic.” Also on this show, Charlie is described as looking like a bum in need of a soup kitchen. On Extreme Makeover, Dan describes his own face as like Charlie Brown’s–weak, round, and chubby.
On *Ten Years Younger*, Dwayne, one of the few African-American men to go through the makeover machine, confesses his pitiful state, “I don’t like my grey hairs. I don’t like my complexion. And I don’t like my teeth. I’m basically a modern-day hermit. As far as companionship, golf has become my girlfriend.” The host, Mark, asks, “Why don’t you have a positive image about yourself?” Dwayne answers, “It probably goes back to when I was a kid. I was short and fat. People used to pick at me. I just never really had a positive image about myself.” Mark counters, “You’re not short and fat now.” Dwayne responds, “I know but after 12, 14 years of being called every name that’s associated with a fat person, it sort of sticks. And then my dad always had this thing about boys are not supposed to look at mirrors, so I am what I am. I try to avoid mirrors at all cost. And I don’t like people to look at me.” Mark tells him he is surprised by this, that he looks like a guy who is tough and doesn’t care what people say about him. Dwayne nods his head sighing, “No, that’s the image I project.” Were it not for his gruff exterior, Dwayne concedes, “I’d be a puddle of tears all the time.”

Through these many examples we see evidence of male bodies in crisis, weakened by their own self-scrutiny, threatened by the judgments of father figures, undermined by an awareness that they must project a strength they do not possess. Much like the motivation for women who engage in makeovers, the overall goal of the transformation is ostensibly to bring the outside and inside into harmony. And yet, the clear message of makeover programming is that by improving the outside, one can make the inside better and healthier. Given this, it is not congruence between inside and outside that the makeover subject needs, but heightened internal confidence brought on by an embodied expression of conventional modes of attractiveness. For men, attractiveness is about showing a body that is lean, strong, and physically able, which requires pre-selecting makeover candidates who already possess such a body or can be made to look like they do. Though authenticity is the key to masculinity, illusion is the stuff of makeovers, or, as Trinny and Susannah say to their male subject on the BBC version of *What Not to Wear*, “Alright, so you’ve got a large tum, but that can be hidden so easily with the right clothes” (Barass & Jeune, 2001–present). It is at the level of the body, moreover, that we can see the three makeover shows I have selected for case studies here begin to fissure and separate, differing in their messages by how much the makeover technologies they offer can alter the materiality of the body.

On *What Not to Wear*, for example, the overall credo is “don’t wait to lose weight, dress the body you’re in.” For men who undergo makeovers through *What Not to Wear*, the typical advice is to buy smaller clothes. A repeated refrain to men is they will look bigger if they throw away (literally) their over-sized pants and baggy sweaters and instead buy clothes that fit. As Stacy says, “You’ve got to go smaller with the clothes if you want to look bigger.” (Oddly, when women buy clothes that fit, they are not told the outcome will make them look bigger). This piece of advice is received with trepidation by many of the show’s male “fashion victims.” Dave, who requires a makeover because at age 30 he dresses like a frat boy, says to the camera while trying on a shirt, “I don’t think I’m a medium. I think Clinton is flat-out wrong.” But, of course, it is Dave who is flat-out wrong. Similarly, *What Not to Wear*’s makeover subject, Will,
who has "got a great body, but we can't see it under all of those clothes," mumbles in his facing-the-mirror soliloquy, "All of this booty man. Just eats up pants. I'm worried about the crotch. Especially, when I sit down. It's going to be uncomfortable." For both Dave and Will, wearing clothes that fit becomes the way for their "great bodies" to be more readily intelligible to the outside world, a world always conceived of in terms of potential employers and lovers. As Clinton warns Will, "You'll never know who you'll see on a night out. It might be a potential boss, a potential colleague." Such statements underscore that the man's body registers his worth, indicating, by inference, that the sloppy or slovenly man is no man at all.

On Ten Years Younger, as one might expect, the emphasis is on youthfulness. There are minor procedures that can make a world of difference—new clothes, teeth whitening, maybe a facial peel. Because the show can make greater changes than style allows, it does. The logic, then, is not about accentuating the body you're in as we saw in What Not to Wear, but enhancing the body through non-surgical interventions. In this case, however, since these non-surgical procedures are exclusively focused above the shoulders, the face functions metonymically for the body, at least when women are being made over. Quite often, when men move to center stage, their bodies come with them. As noted above, narrative time is devoted to Steve running in a park, whereas for women makeover subjects, the camera stays in the studio. It is in this visual-cinematic coding of gender where Ten Years Younger begins blurring the lines between gender and sex. When men like Michael, who cries in his pre-makeover interview, or Dwayne, who admits he could likely be a "puddle of tears," are made over, they are so resolutely coded feminine that their makeover stories quite often follow a similar trajectory as the dominant story for women, with limited opportunity for resistance or chances to visually explode the narrative frame by taking the body into the public sphere. When women are coded masculine in this text, as is Kimberly who is a stocky postal worker, we see footage of her delivering the mail. Significantly, however, the show works to bring gender and sex into greater alignment by de-emphasizing and restricting the physical mobility of the masculinized female body, while emphasizing the range of movement and physical strength of the masculinized male body. The feminized male, however, is left in a gender/sex netherworld, supposedly reclaimed by the makeover process, and yet still not fully occupying a secure position. All of this underscores the ways in which, as Ditz (2004) has noted in his review of masculinity research, "gender order itself is as much about relations of domination and subordination—and competition and affiliation among men—as it is about the subordination of women" (p. 3).

True to its name, the level of intervention is extreme on Extreme Makeover, yet there are still a series of tacit brakes in place to direct surgeries. Yes to nose jobs, liposuction, and facelifts. No to penis enlargements or sex change operations. Extreme Makeover is serious about the business of gender. For a man, as I have noted throughout this article, being so fully at the mercy of the doctor's hands threatens to undo his masculinity. Given this, the show's discourses work to underscore hegemonic values. For instance, Anthony, who must lose weight in order to receive surgery, is described as having "earned" his makeover through his diet. The surgeon, Dr. Jon Perlman, compli-
ments Anthony, “You’ve done a great job! You should be very pleased. I’m really impressed.” In this case, we can see the transforming man’s stock rising through the compliments a man in a superior position offers him. “I have to say,” Perlman emphasizes, “I don’t think we’ll have to do any liposuction in your chest, but we can increase the tone [in your abdomen] just to supplement what you’ve already done.” Again, the father figure in this text establishes Anthony’s gender credibility by underscoring that his efforts have performed the primary work of the transformation, giving Anthony credit for being a self-made (over) man. As point of contrast, in the next scene, Perlman consults with a female makeover subject, La Paula, who has also been dieting in order to be a candidate for surgery. Looking over her body, Perlman observes when examining her eyes, “we need to remove some of the fat here. Even though you lost weight, that fat doesn’t usually go away with weight loss.” Indeed, the remainder of La Paula’s interview with Perlman consists of ways in which he points out to her that the work she did on her own only makes his surgical interventions all the more necessary. In this regard, then, we can see an ordering of hierarchical status based on notions of gender and sex. Dr. Perlman is the hegemonic male, immediately below him is Anthony, who is commended for his movement up the scale, and clearly far below Anthony is La Paula, who is feminized in her inability to exert the same sort of control over her body that Anthony achieves. What Extreme Makeover tells us about masculinity in this episode, then, is that its basic values of self-control, physical strength, and autonomy can be preserved even when the male body itself lies passive and anaesthetized under the surgeon’s scalpel.

For all of the shows, the goal is to achieve the appearance of a naturally strong and youthful body, fueled by internal self-confidence and marked by market success and heterosexual achievement. Ironically, given the emphasis on self-awareness, the goal for men is to look natural, as if they in no way had knowledge of their transformations or collusion with their transformers. The make-up artist on What Not to Wear, Carmindy, expresses this ideal most succinctly when she tells Dave, “The worst thing a guy can do is over groom his eye brows. The key phrase for guys is a little goes a long way.” Damone, the make-up expert on Ten Years Younger, though wearing full make-up himself, often limits his instruction to men to applying sunscreen. Even on Extreme Makeover, where radical alteration is built into the transformation, the goal for men is to look rugged and natural rather than over-processed and “feminine.” The made-over man, in this regard, is constructed to pass as a natural man, visually signifying what the un-aided body could not.

**Concluding with Crisis?**

Potter (2006) has observed in her think piece about men and male body image that a governing mode of masculinity in the 1940s and 1950s contended that a man’s indifference to his appearance only made him sexier. Though Potter sees that ideal as completely overwritten by a new form of male narcissism brought about largely through a gay male aesthetic of the 1980s, I would argue that effortlessness still holds as a com-
pelling ideal for heteronormative hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, the makeover genre promises as much. By attending to his appearance long enough to improve his looks, the logic goes, the made-over man can finally become fully oblivious to his looks. In this way, the man is able to enact through gender what Haiken (1997) has described as “ethnic anonymity,” or a freedom from self-consciousness (p. 181).

And yet, since makeover shows continually air scenes in which “manly men,” who have failed in the maintenance of body and image and are made to feel ashamed for their lack of self-care, this life unhampered by appearance requires that the made-over man be diligent about his seeming lack of concern. In order to do so and thus preserve his hegemonic role, he must force his behaviors and anxieties deeper within himself, but he must also take a more active role in protecting and promoting his appearance. The television makeover thus serves as a primer for a new kind of masculinity that enables a man to claim conventional models of manhood, while also requiring that he develop a critical consciousness of his own body and well being.

Doing this does not come without complication. Though the common truism contends that the metrosexual was born out of shows like Queer Eye, which made shopping, grooming, smelling good, and looking fabulous “safe” for the straight guy, the shows I examine here suggest that the made-over man must learn a complicated dance: how to improve the way he looks without seeming to have done so. Anything more will too flagrantly point to the aid and intervention offered by the feminized mechanism of the makeover. Anything less will too overtly compromise the ways in which masculinity is grounded in indifference.

In sum, makeover television for men offers another cultural arena where the dream of male privilege tries to find its meaning. The gendered dynamics of the makeover in many ways seem to give evidence to the growing contention that masculinity is in crisis, or as Faludi (1999) has put it, that “manhood [is] under siege” (p. 6) since the message contends that “men cannot be men, only eunuchs, if they are not in control” (p. 9). Indeed, men’s very awareness of and concern about their bodies has led medical researchers such as Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia (2000) to contend in their book, The Adonis Complex, that “there’s a widespread crisis among today’s boys and men” in that both are “preoccupied with the appearance of their bodies” (p. xiii). Though there are clearly troubling pathologies of the body that both men and women experience and that are outside the scope of my discussion here, I believe we should be cautious about too-quickly accepting the prognosis that masculinity is in crisis because men are invested in their appearance. As Ditz (2004) notes, the “theme of crisis in academic men’s history” risks returning the study of gender to the “study of malekind” (p. 7). Rather than seeing the makeover as an affirmation of crisis, then, I would like to conclude here by suggesting that the complexities of the makeover instead reveal the basic contradictory tensions at the heart of masculinity. Made-over masculinity does not indicate a crisis moment when action must be taken to avoid a complete disaster or breakdown, but instead points to the conflict and contestation that is part of the continual (re)making of gender. In turn, makeovers themselves, for all of their seeming emphasis on vanity and images, offer a significant reconceptualization of how the man might be both con-
ventionally masculine and more fully and consciously invested in his own emotional and physical health.

References


305


