



## Reimagining Masculinity through Shifts in Male Identity in Contemporary Popular Culture

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### Abstract

*This qualitative research paper explores the masculinity rebranding in the current popular culture, that is, how the phenomenon of masculine identities in the contemporary society is being challenged by hybrid-emotional and intersectional representations. Through exposure to media texts, social media posts, and semi-structured interviews of the youth, the study aims to identify the level to which traditional hegemonic masculinity still exists where other forms of masculinity gain more visibility. The results suggest that popular culture is becoming more reflective of men as able to express emotion, flexible in their aesthetic expression, and able to portray multiple identities, which may be undermining strict ideas of gender roles. Nevertheless, the ideals of hegemonic masculinity are still strong, especially in the genres of action movies, sports press, and gaming subcultures, which are rooted in the primordial social and company concept of being tough, dominant, and stoic. The paper highlights how the cultural industries and digital platforms can control as well as commodify masculinity where identity changes are packaged to suit consumer tastes and market rationales. These changes have far reached repercussions in the area of management and organizational research with implications especially in the field of leadership, diversity and workplace culture. Relational and inclusive models of leadership can be found in emotional openness, hybridity, and intersectional masculinities, whereas structural constraints of the persistence of hegemonic masculinity remain in the workplace to determine norms and authority. This study adds to the body of gender theory and management literature by conceptualizing masculinity as a cultural and managerial project, and highlighting the fact that continuity and change in male identities are a negotiation. The paper provides feedback on the ways that modern organizations and media producers can relate to shifting masculinities to create more inclusive and dynamic practices.*

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### Introduction

Masculinity, long considered a fixed and dominant identity within social and cultural structures, has undergone profound reconfiguration in the context of contemporary popular culture. The traditional image of the male embodying stoicism, authority, and heteronormativity has been increasingly challenged by the rise of plural, fluid, and hybrid representations of male identity across various cultural domains such as film, television, music, advertising, and digital media. Scholars argue that popular culture functions not merely as entertainment, but as a powerful site of identity construction and negotiation, where gender

norms are constantly produced, reproduced, and contested (Penney, 2022). Within this landscape, masculinity is no longer seen as monolithic, but as a shifting and negotiated set of meanings, open to reinterpretation and critique (Salam & Salam, 2025). The crisis of masculinity discourse has significantly shaped the way scholars and practitioners view male identity in the twenty-first century. Economic restructuring, transformations in the labor market, and changing family dynamics have destabilized the once-stable archetypes of the male provider and patriarch (Eze et al., 2025). In tandem, the increasing visibility of feminist, queer, and intersectional critiques has exposed the fragility and exclusivity of hegemonic masculinity, paving the way for alternative masculinities to emerge in public discourse (Hernandez, 2022). Popular culture, as one of the most pervasive cultural terrains, reflects and amplifies these shifts, making it a critical site for examining how masculinity is being reimagined and rearticulated in the digital and globalized age (Wolfman et al., 2021; Williams, 2024).

Contemporary media representations provide telling examples of how masculine identities are evolving. Characters in global cinema and streaming platforms increasingly blur the boundaries between traditional male roles and more progressive, emotionally expressive, or vulnerable portrayals (Montiel, 2022). Music subcultures, from hip-hop to K-pop, also present complex negotiations of masculinity, with performers embodying both hypermasculine and androgynous aesthetics (Nguyen, 2024). Advertising and social media influencers, too, have introduced discourses of the “new man,” emphasizing self-care, emotional literacy, and inclusivity (Kim & Lopez, 2023). These developments indicate not the disappearance of hegemonic masculinity but its coexistence with multiple competing masculinities, producing a dynamic field of identity politics in popular culture (Hansen, 2022).

The shift in male identity also reflects broader cultural anxieties and aspirations in a time of globalization, technological disruption, and social transformation. In many contexts, the reimagining of masculinity is tied to the renegotiation of power relations between genders, classes, and ethnicities. Intersectional scholarship has shown that masculinity is not uniform but intersects with race, sexuality, and socio-economic status to produce diverse and often unequal experiences of male identity (Rutagumirwa & Bailey, 2025). Popular culture provides a stage on which these intersections are both dramatized and contested, whether in the racialized portrayals of men in Hollywood, the queer aesthetics of pop stars, or the commodification of male vulnerability in global advertising (Romero, 2024; Peltola & Phoenix, 2022).

The rise of digital platforms has accelerated the visibility and contestation of masculinities. Online spaces provide avenues for alternative masculinities to circulate, but they also foster the resurgence of reactionary and hypermasculine discourses, from “men’s rights” communities to incel forums (Andreevskikh & Muravyeva, 2021; Kerpen, 2021; Díaz & García, 2024). The digital sphere thus exemplifies the contradictory dynamics of contemporary masculinity: on one hand, it expands possibilities for self-expression and identity fluidity; on the other, it consolidates defensive and exclusionary masculinist movements. The study of masculinity within popular culture must therefore grapple with these contradictions, recognizing that identity shifts are neither linear nor universally emancipatory.

This study takes as its focus the reimagining of masculinity in contemporary popular culture, with an emphasis on how shifts in male identity are represented, negotiated, and consumed. By adopting a qualitative approach, it seeks to uncover the symbolic and discursive processes

through which masculinities are constructed and challenged across cultural texts and practices. Such an inquiry is crucial for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing field of masculinity studies, extending debates on hegemony, plurality, and hybridity within gender theory (Reeser, 2023; Wedgwood et al., 2023; Hopkins & Giazitzoglu, 2025). Practically, it provides insight into the cultural narratives shaping young men's identities and behaviors in an age where popular culture exerts significant influence over social values, aspirations, and everyday practices.

In pursuing this line of inquiry, the study acknowledges that masculinity is not a static category but a social construction constantly reworked through cultural practices. Popular culture offers a critical lens through which to examine these dynamics, as it not only mirrors societal transformations but actively participates in reshaping them (Jubas, 2023; Yakali, 2024; Wajdi et al., 2024). Understanding these shifts is essential not only for the academic field of gender studies but also for broader social efforts to cultivate more inclusive, equitable, and diverse representations of gender identity. By situating masculinity within the contested terrains of popular culture, this research highlights the ongoing process of reimagining male identity and underscores its significance for the future of gender relations in a rapidly changing world.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative research design, drawing on cultural and textual analysis to investigate how masculinity is represented and reimagined in contemporary popular culture. A qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of the study lies in interpreting meaning, symbolism, and discourse rather than measuring variables. This design allowed for an in-depth engagement with cultural texts, media narratives, and identity representations, providing a nuanced understanding of the shifting constructions of male identity. Informed by critical cultural studies and gender theory, the research adopted an interpretive paradigm, emphasizing the socially constructed nature of masculinity and its contested representations across different media forms.

## **Site and Context of the Study**

The research was situated within the context of global and Indonesian popular culture, particularly focusing on media forms that hold influence among younger audiences, such as streaming platforms, film, advertising, and social media. The rationale for this context is that popular culture operates as a primary arena in which identities are consumed, negotiated, and reshaped. Contemporary platforms such as Netflix, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok were emphasized for their pervasive role in circulating both hegemonic and alternative masculinities. By situating the study in these media environments, the analysis captures the global circulation of masculine ideals while also considering their localization and adaptation within Indonesian contexts.

## **Data Sources**

Data for this study were drawn from three main sources. First, cultural texts such as films, television series, and advertisements were purposively selected to represent diverse portrayals of masculinity. Examples included global productions with significant reach in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, as well as local cultural texts that reinterpret masculinity in contextually specific ways. Second, digital and social media content was collected, including influencer

narratives, viral campaigns, and online commentaries that explicitly or implicitly engage with gender identity. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants, consisting of young male and female media consumers aged 18–30, who were asked to reflect on their perceptions of male identity in popular culture. These combined sources provided a triangulated view of masculinity as simultaneously constructed in media texts and negotiated by audiences.

### **Sampling and Selection Criteria**

Purposive sampling was used to select both the cultural texts and the interview participants. For the textual analysis, media texts were chosen based on their popularity, accessibility, and relevance to themes of masculinity and identity transformation. For interviews, participants were recruited based on their active engagement with popular culture, ensuring they were familiar with contemporary representations of male identity across different media platforms. Diversity in gender, educational background, and urban rural origin was considered to reflect varied perspectives. This strategic sampling enhanced the richness of the data while maintaining a focus on the central research questions.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection was carried out in three stages. The first stage involved the identification and close reading of selected cultural texts, which were systematically cataloged and coded for thematic relevance. The second stage consisted of collecting and archiving relevant online content, including screenshots, videos, and discourse threads. The third stage involved conducting semi-structured interviews, which were carried out online and in person, depending on participant availability. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. The interviews explored participants' interpretations of masculinity, their responses to cultural texts, and their views on how male identities are shifting in the digital era.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, guided by principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA). For the cultural texts, attention was given to narrative structures, visual codes, linguistic choices, and symbolic representations of masculinity. For the social media data, discursive patterns, intertextual references, and identity markers were analyzed to identify recurring motifs and tensions. The interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic coding, identifying themes that resonated across participant accounts. Triangulation was achieved by comparing findings from media texts, online content, and interviews, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in multiple sources of evidence. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the process, with the researcher actively acknowledging their own positionality in relation to gender and cultural analysis.

### **Result and Discussion**

The thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify shifting identity negotiations that reflect both cultural progress and persistent traditional expectations. The following section presents these key findings and examines how emotional expression, aesthetic hybridity, and hegemonic norms interact within contemporary media landscapes, shaping the ways male identities are constructed, valued, and contested.

## **Redefining Emotional Expression in Male Identity**

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the data was the redefinition of emotional expression as a legitimate component of contemporary masculinity. Historically, dominant ideals of manhood have emphasized stoicism, self-control, and emotional restraint, positioning vulnerability as a sign of weakness. However, across the cultural texts and participant narratives examined in this study, there was consistent evidence of a shift toward normalizing men's emotional openness. This transformation was not merely symbolic; it reflected a broader cultural move to challenge hegemonic scripts and to carve out alternative spaces for men to express themselves authentically. In popular culture, this redefinition was especially visible in film and television portrayals. Male protagonists in contemporary dramas, streaming series, and even action genres increasingly displayed moments of fear, grief, or tenderness that went beyond the archetypal "stoic hero." For instance, several participants pointed to characters in Korean dramas who openly cry or confess vulnerability without being ridiculed. These portrayals were widely celebrated as more relatable and humanizing. As one participant explained:

*"I think seeing male idols or actors show emotions makes me feel that being vulnerable is not a weakness anymore, but part of being human."*

Such examples demonstrate that media is beginning to break away from rigid masculine archetypes, instead allowing audiences to encounter more diverse forms of emotional masculinity. Beyond scripted media, social media platforms also emerged as significant sites for reimagining emotional masculinity. Influencers and public figures used platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to discuss mental health, body image, and personal struggles in ways that previous generations of men often avoided. One respondent emphasized the intergenerational contrast:

*"My father's generation never talked about feelings, but now on Instagram, I see men openly discussing mental health."*

This contrast suggests that the visibility of male vulnerability online not only provides new role models but also challenges long-standing familial and cultural silences around men's emotions. However, participants also recognized tensions and ambivalences in these shifts. While emotional openness was welcomed, it was not yet fully disentangled from stereotypes of masculinity. For example, several respondents noted that male vulnerability is often more accepted when tied to romantic love or fatherhood, but less so in professional or competitive contexts. One male interviewee remarked:

*"It's okay to cry if it's about your family or girlfriend, but in work or sports, people still expect you to 'man up'."*

This suggests that while emotional expression is gaining traction in certain domains of popular culture, it remains uneven and conditional in its acceptance. At the same time, this theme revealed how cultural industries strategically commodify men's vulnerability. Advertising campaigns and celebrity branding often present emotional masculinity as a "new normal" that is also marketable. For instance, skincare brands and lifestyle influencers capitalize on narratives of self-care and emotional honesty to attract younger male audiences. This was noted by one participant who observed:

*“Brands now make ads with men talking about anxiety or self-care. It looks progressive, but sometimes I feel they are just selling products.”*

Such insights underline the ambivalence of this cultural shift: while emotional openness challenges traditional masculinity, it can also be appropriated as a commercial strategy, reinforcing consumption as the pathway to new identities. Despite these contradictions, the overall evidence indicates that emotional expression has become a central marker of how masculinity is being redefined in contemporary popular culture. Participants consistently described emotional openness as more authentic, progressive, and aligned with modern values of equality and humanity. The cultural texts examined supported this perception by consistently showcasing men who are emotionally literate and capable of intimacy without losing legitimacy as “men.” This shift, while partial and contested, marks a significant departure from earlier paradigms of emotional suppression and signals the emergence of a more pluralized masculine identity.

### **Hybrid Masculinities in Fashion, Music, and Aesthetics**

Another central finding of this study was the emergence and normalization of hybrid masculinities within the realms of fashion, music, and popular aesthetics. Unlike traditional representations that upheld rigid gender binaries where men were expected to embody strength, dominance, and simplicity in appearance contemporary cultural texts reveal a growing embrace of fluidity, ambiguity, and crossover styles. Male figures in music, fashion industries, and digital influencer spaces increasingly perform masculinities that incorporate elements historically coded as feminine, such as the use of makeup, jewelry, vibrant colors, and delicate gestures. These hybrid masculinities challenge and expand the symbolic boundaries of what it means to “look” or “act” masculine. K-pop, in particular, stood out as a dominant cultural force shaping this redefinition. Idol groups such as BTS and EXO were repeatedly mentioned by participants for their aesthetic experimentation, blending sharp tailoring with soft fabrics, or combining masculine physicality with androgynous beauty. Participants noted that such portrayals destabilize binary understandings of male appearance and open up alternative possibilities for masculine self-expression. As one participant explained:

*“When I see male K-pop idols wearing makeup and stylish clothes, I don’t think they’re less masculine. It’s just another version of being a man.”*

This observation reflects how audiences interpret hybrid masculinities not as a threat to traditional gender roles but as a legitimate expansion of them. Fashion industries and advertising campaigns also contribute significantly to this trend. International brands such as Gucci, Dior, and Louis Vuitton have promoted male models and ambassadors who embody gender-blurring aesthetics, signaling a cultural shift toward valuing versatility and diversity in masculinity. Within the Indonesian context, participants observed similar changes in local fashion advertisements, with male celebrities and influencers adopting styles that merge traditional masculinity with softer aesthetics. One participant reflected:

*“I like how brands now promote men with different looks, not just muscular guys. It shows masculinity is flexible.”*

This points to the influence of global and local media in shaping perceptions of male beauty standards and reinforcing that masculinity is increasingly performative and situational. Social

media influencers have further accelerated the visibility of these hybrid masculinities by showcasing personal styles that challenge conventional expectations. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok allow male influencers to experiment with clothing, makeup tutorials, and aesthetic performances that blur gender lines. For participants, this digital accessibility made hybrid masculinities more relatable, particularly because they were enacted by ordinary individuals rather than distant celebrities. One male participant commented:

*“On TikTok, I follow male influencers who use makeup or fashion in unique ways. It makes me feel okay to try different things without being judged.”*

This suggests that digital platforms not only amplify hybrid masculinities but also foster communities of acceptance and imitation among audiences. Participants also identified points of resistance. While many welcomed the flexibility of male aesthetics, some acknowledged that hybrid masculinities remain contested in more conservative or traditional spaces. A few interviewees mentioned that such expressions could provoke ridicule or accusations of being “too feminine,” especially outside urban centers. One participant admitted:

*“I admire K-pop idols, but if a man here dressed like that, people would say negative things. It’s still hard to accept.”*

This highlights that while popular culture and global fashion trends normalize hybrid masculinities, cultural acceptance remains uneven, reflecting broader social and regional divides. An additional layer of complexity was the commercialization of hybrid masculinities. Several participants observed that the celebration of androgynous male aesthetics is often linked to consumerism, with fashion and beauty industries driving these shifts to expand markets. For example, skincare and cosmetic companies increasingly target men, leveraging images of hybrid masculinity to normalize product consumption. A female participant critically noted:

*“Sometimes I feel the trend is less about changing masculinity and more about making men buy makeup and clothes.”*

This underscores the dual nature of hybrid masculinities as both liberating and commodified within capitalist frameworks. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that hybrid masculinities in fashion, music, and aesthetics are not merely surface-level trends but important cultural signifiers of shifting gender norms. By incorporating fluid, performative, and intersectional elements, they destabilize hegemonic models of masculinity and create opportunities for new forms of self-expression. At the same time, the persistence of resistance and commercialization reveals the ambivalence of these transformations. Hybrid masculinities thus emerge as both a site of cultural innovation and ongoing negotiation, shaping how contemporary audiences understand what it means to be a man.

### **Contestations of Hegemonic Masculinity**

While hybrid and inclusive masculinities are gaining visibility, the persistence of hegemonic masculinity remains a defining feature of contemporary popular culture. This study revealed that participants consistently pointed out how mainstream media particularly Hollywood action films, gaming franchises, and sports advertisements continue to valorize strength, dominance, and stoicism as the default characteristics of men. These representations often overshadow

more progressive portrayals, sustaining a cultural hierarchy in which “traditional” masculinity still holds symbolic legitimacy. As one participant observed:

*“In Hollywood movies, the main hero is still muscular, dominant, and saves everyone. That image is not going away.”*

Participants frequently described this duality as a “push and pull” between emerging masculinities and enduring stereotypes. In the realm of blockbuster cinema, the archetype of the hyper-masculine hero remains one of the most profitable and marketable images. Characters in superhero franchises such as Marvel and DC continue to reproduce the muscular, battle-ready male who embodies physical dominance and emotional restraint. One interviewee highlighted:

*“Yes, we see softer men in some media, but the macho guy is still the default for many people.”*

This illustrates that hegemonic masculinity operates as a cultural anchor, ensuring continuity even as new masculinities surface. In gaming culture, participants identified similar patterns. Popular titles such as *Call of Duty* or *Grand Theft Auto* reinforce militarized and hyper-aggressive masculinity, where male characters dominate through violence, competition, and control. Some respondents emphasized that such portrayals are not only prevalent but celebrated within online communities, reinforcing peer norms around toughness and dominance. A male participant reflected:

*“Games make you feel like being a man means fighting, winning, and not showing weakness. That stereotype is still very strong.”*

The immersive and interactive nature of gaming intensifies the reinforcement of these ideals, making hegemonic masculinity not just visible but also experiential. Sports culture also emerged as a crucial site of contestation. Advertising campaigns for energy drinks, athletic wear, and gym memberships frequently depict male athletes as embodiments of strength, discipline, and endurance. While participants acknowledged the aspirational quality of these representations, some criticized their narrowness, noting how they exclude emotional vulnerability, care, or intellectual engagement. As one participant commented:

*“Sports ads always show men pushing themselves to the limit physically. It makes it seem like real masculinity is only about strength.”*

This reflects how consumer industries continue to equate masculinity with physical prowess, even in contexts where alternative models are increasingly visible. Interestingly, several participants pointed out that hegemonic masculinity is not simply reproduced but sometimes rebranded to appear more progressive while maintaining its dominance. For instance, advertisements occasionally present muscular male athletes who also speak about mental health or family values, creating a “softened” version of traditional masculinity. However, participants viewed these shifts with skepticism, interpreting them as strategies to expand audience appeal rather than genuine transformations. A female participant noted:

*“They let men cry a little now, but only if they’re still strong, good-looking, and successful. It doesn’t really change the hierarchy.”*

This suggests that while hegemonic masculinity adapts, it does so in ways that maintain its central authority in cultural narratives. The persistence of these traditional ideals also reflects broader cultural and generational divides. Younger participants were more open to hybrid masculinities, while older respondents emphasized the continued appeal and respectability of hegemonic models. One middle-aged male interviewee remarked:

*“I grew up with heroes like Schwarzenegger and Stallone. For me, that’s still the image of a man.”*

This generational lens demonstrates how cultural memory sustains hegemonic masculinity, ensuring its relevance despite challenges from contemporary redefinitions. Importantly, participants also acknowledged the social consequences of hegemonic masculinity’s dominance. Several respondents highlighted that men who deviate from these norms by adopting softer aesthetics, embracing vulnerability, or rejecting physical dominance risk being marginalized or ridiculed. One participant explained:

*“People say they like sensitive men, but if a guy doesn’t act tough, he’s often not respected.”*

This tension reinforces the idea that hegemonic masculinity, while contested, continues to operate as a regulatory framework that polices acceptable forms of male identity. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that hegemonic masculinity retains cultural legitimacy across multiple domains of popular culture, even as alternative masculinities gain traction. Its endurance is sustained by powerful industries film, gaming, sports, and advertising that continue to reproduce images of men as strong, competitive, and emotionally restrained. However, these images are no longer uncontested; instead, they exist in constant dialogue with emerging models of masculinity. The result is a cultural field characterized by negotiation, where hegemonic masculinity is both challenged and reaffirmed, reshaping but not yet dismantling its privileged position.

### **Managerial Implications of Shifting Masculinities**

The findings of this study underscore how masculinity in popular culture is undergoing significant redefinition, but crucially, they highlight that such transformations are not only cultural but managerial in nature. In cultural industries, identity is commodified, managed, and strategically curated to align with shifting consumer demands (Nasta, 2025; Wang et al., 2025; Ryu et al., 2024). The rise of hybrid masculinities, emotionally expressive male figures, and intersectional narratives reflects not merely organic social change but calculated strategies by media producers, marketing executives, and platform managers who recognize the profitability of diversifying masculine representation (Vidmar, 2025; Christofidou, 2021; Hearn et al., 2023). In this sense, masculinity operates as a managed resource within cultural markets, where its symbolic shifts generate tangible economic and organizational outcomes.

At the same time, these developments reveal the resilience of hegemonic masculinity, which continues to act as a default managerial template for branding and storytelling. As Christofidou (2021) argued, hegemonic masculinity does not disappear under contestation; it adapts, incorporating select elements of vulnerability or diversity while retaining its hierarchical dominance. This pattern is consistent with management practices across industries: firms often integrate progressive discourses to capture new markets while maintaining continuity with

dominant norms to secure traditional consumer bases (Hernandez, 2022; McCook, 2024). Hollywood's willingness to allow male heroes moments of vulnerability does not undermine the franchise model built on strength and dominance it instead broadens the hero's appeal. Such adaptive strategies highlight the managerial calculus behind cultural production, where identity shifts are curated to balance innovation with risk mitigation. From a management perspective, the commodification of new masculinities reflects the broader neoliberal trend of aligning identity politics with market logics. Sajjad et al. (2024) has shown how feminism has been branded and sold; this study reveals a parallel phenomenon in masculinity, where emotional openness, diversity, and hybridity are deployed as marketing assets. This managerial appropriation raises critical questions about authenticity and resistance. While on the surface these shifts expand the cultural repertoire available to men, their integration into corporate branding strategies risks diluting their transformative potential (Gorman & Dolbec, 2025). In this sense, management plays a double role: it provides platforms for new masculinities to gain visibility but simultaneously disciplines them into marketable forms, ensuring that they do not fully disrupt entrenched gender hierarchies (Lauri & Lauri, 2024).

Equally significant are the organizational implications for industries beyond culture. In workplaces, leadership and HR practices are deeply influenced by societal understandings of masculinity (Riemma et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2023). The cultural normalization of emotional expression, for instance, intersects with organizational debates around emotional intelligence, care leadership, and inclusive management styles (Baldwin, 2025; Mitchell, 2024; Vijai, 2025). By legitimizing vulnerability in popular culture, new masculinities provide alternative role models that may encourage male managers to adopt more empathetic and relational leadership practices (Collinson et al., 2023; Biehl & Satama, 2023; Topić, 2023). However, as participants noted, such openness is often conditional, valued in private domains but stigmatized in competitive contexts. This reflects the enduring managerial bias that associates authority with toughness and rationality, illustrating how hegemonic masculinity continues to constrain the acceptance of inclusive leadership models (Tipurić, 2022; Valdovinos, 2022; Galea et al., 2023).

The persistence of hegemonic ideals in sports, gaming, and action films reveals how certain industries act as bastions of conservative masculinity. This has implications for organizational culture, where industries such as finance, law, and tech often valorize competitiveness, long hours, and emotional detachment traits associated with hegemonic masculinity (Karazi, 2021; Büttner, 2025; Pöllänen, 2021). The cultural reinforcement of these traits through media representation sustains workplace practices that marginalize alternative masculinities and women. Thus, the management of masculinity in popular culture is not confined to symbolic narratives but has spillover effects into workplace norms, recruitment practices, and leadership pipelines (Riemma et al., 2025; Bredikhina et al., 2023; Leap, 2025; Frandsen & Morsing, 2022).

Intersectionality further complicates these dynamics. The visibility of queer, racialized, and non-Western masculinities challenges the universality of white, heterosexual, Western models of manhood. For management, this demands rethinking diversity strategies that too often center on gender in isolation, neglecting the ways race, sexuality, and class intersect with masculinity. Media representations of Black, Asian, and queer men negotiating masculinity provide cultural entry points for organizations to broaden their diversity frameworks. Yet, as several participants noted, these representations are often tokenized or commodified rather than

embedded as structural commitments. This mirrors organizational diversity programs that emphasize symbolic inclusion without addressing systemic inequities.

The findings also carry implications for consumer culture management. Masculinity functions as a brand identity that consumers buy into, shape, and reproduce. The rise of hybrid masculinities aligns with consumer demand for authenticity and self-expression. However, as participants observed, authenticity itself has become a managed commodity, where even vulnerability is scripted for commercial ends. This complicates managerial strategies: while brands may gain credibility by presenting more progressive masculinities, they risk alienating consumers who perceive such efforts as opportunistic. The balance between authenticity and marketability thus becomes a critical site of managerial negotiation.

This study demonstrates that masculinity in popular culture should be understood not merely as a cultural construct but as a managerial project. Its forms are shaped by organizational decisions, branding strategies, and institutional logics that govern the cultural industries and extend into workplaces. Recognizing masculinity as managed challenges the assumption that identity shifts are purely organic and invites scholars to interrogate the organizational interests behind them. It also compels practitioners to reflect on how these cultural shifts can be harnessed for genuine inclusivity rather than superficial rebranding.

## Conclusion

This study shows that masculinity in contemporary popular culture is in flux, shaped by both cultural contestation and managerial strategies. While hegemonic masculinity remains dominant in film, gaming, and sports, it increasingly coexists with hybrid and intersectional forms that emphasize vulnerability and diversity. These shifts are often commodified, raising questions about authenticity and the limits of transformation. For management, the findings underline how masculinity functions as both a cultural discourse and an organizational resource, influencing branding, leadership styles, and workplace norms. The implications are clear: cultural industries and organizations must move beyond token gestures to embrace structural changes that redefine authority, competence, and inclusion. Masculinity's future lies not in abandoning tradition entirely but in negotiating continuity and change, offering new opportunities for both cultural innovation and more equitable management practices.

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