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## The Health Guru: Masculinity and Fitness Coaching in the Blogosphere

*Through a close study of blogs, where male fitness experts share their expertise, this article analyses how masculinity are framed within the Internet-mediated context of the fitness culture. This is done against the background of Connell's theory of masculinity, and recent critiques of the concept of hegemony. Through an in-depth analysis of three blogs, we get a complex and contradictory image of the different forms of masculinity portrayed in these blogs and in fitness culture at large. The texts and imagery on the blogs clearly exceeds the criteria/limits of traits and norms traditionally considered male or female. In doing so, they may contribute to an increased acceptance for, for example, gay identities and other submissive masculinities.*

*Keywords:* masculinity, blog culture, hegemony, fitness, personal trainer

During the past four decades, gym and fitness facilities have emerged as a global industry (Sassatelli, 2010). According to the *International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association*, this business alone has a total annual turnover of more than 71 billion dollars and the association has more than 128 million members (IHRSA, 2011). Such facilities are typically seen as places where individuals can improve their physical standards, lifestyle and well-being. In Sweden, for example, where the sports movement traditionally has assumed responsibility for voluntary physical education for children and adolescents, gym and fitness training activities have advanced to play a significant role in promoting health and given advice on how to live a successful life. In Great Britain, subscriptions to private health clubs have risen steadily during the past decade, and a public survey shows that 14 percent of the population attended a gym in the beginning of 2000 (Crossley, 2006).

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The basic system on which the contemporary fitness culture is founded is bodybuilding (Denham, 2008; Klein, 1993). But the culture has changed, and new ways of approaching the whole field of bodybuilding and fitness have emerged. There is, for example, less emphasis on the large muscular body, and more on the well-developed, tight, perfectly defined and moderately muscular body (Nixon, 1996). Within today's gym culture, the hard, beautiful body is idolized as both an aesthetic and a sexual object. The body that is sculptured to perfection is partly revered because it symbolizes success and hard work and partly because it awakens desire and has become a beauty ideal (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 157). It is simultaneously an extremely gender-neutral creation and a sexualized and gender-definite one (Johansson, 2003). Naturally, this cultural transformation process also affects people's exercise habits and the goals being pursued. Among young women, for example, an interest in strength training and muscles has increased markedly. Although it is still the case that women largely cultivate slender, thin and fragile bodies, relating their bodyliness to traditional and normative perceptions of femininity, they are showing up more and more at the gym to do strength training (Leeds & Liberti, 2007). Their initial motives may be to develop a more well-defined body—a body with clearer contours—but perhaps also later to build up muscles and a more solid body (cf. Markula, 2001). Further, even though the bond between masculinity and muscles has a long history (Kimmel, 1997; Messner, 1992), most men at the gym are not trying to develop a grotesquely large, bodybuilder body, but are content with becoming muscular, supple and well-trained (cf. Wienke, 1998). Even though both ends of the continuum can be seen at the gym—bulky, massive male bodies and thin, fragile female bodies—there is an evident tendency toward a convergence of masculinity and femininity. A hard, slightly muscular, dynamic and supple body has become the target for both men and women (cf. Bordo, 1990; Johansson, 1996; Malcolm, 2003; Rohlinger, 2002). Every detail of this physique is attended to with the greatest of care, and gym-goers, regardless of gender, are largely negotiating, rather than absorbing, multiple visions of the idealized, slim, fit, toned body (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 33).

The changed ways of looking at body and gender certainly constitute a new modern and upgraded fitness culture. In this culture, the highest goals and aspirations are commercialized and framed in terms of health, and the fitness centre is seen almost as a health clinic for the masses (cf. Smith Maguire, 2008). As a centre of knowledge about health and training, this is a cultural “location” filled with health expertise and human role models. In the present article, we turn our focus towards the “heroes” of the gym and fitness culture: the personal trainers and experts. Through a close study of a number of carefully selected blogs and home pages, where fitness experts share their knowledge and expertise with us, we will analyse and dissect central parts of this culture. The purpose of the study is twofold. We are first interested in how these experts portray themselves as role models and fitness gurus, and thus in their self-presentation. Second, we are mainly interested in the construction of gender ideals and masculinity within the blogs. Although blogs run by female fitness gurus are also of great importance for understanding gender and the fitness cultural, such an analysis will be addressed in another article. The present article focuses exclusively on male bloggers and how they tend to frame masculinity, in relation to this particular cultural context. The article addresses above mentioned objective(s) with the help of the following questions.

1. What kind of self-portraits and understandings of the body and health appears in the blogs?
2. In what ways is masculinity perceived and promoted?
3. How do the narratives presented relate to the cultural context in which they are produced and commercialized?

In an attempt to answer these questions, the article is structured as follows: In the next section, we will present some theoretical considerations relevant to the analysis. This will be followed by a methodological discussion concerning virtual research methods, sampling and some ethical considerations. Thereafter, we will systematically address the three blogs selected, one by one, and analyse how they are constituted and what kinds of understandings of health, body and masculinity they express. The article ends with some concluding thoughts where we link findings to theories on masculinity, the fitness culture and the commercialization of the body.

### MASCULINITY AND THE ROLE OF THE FITNESS GURU

The body techniques developed within the fitness culture are intended to train each body part until the limits of perfection are reached. Similar to the statues of antiquity and other prototypes of current body ideals, the contemporary gym-made body is a *sculptured body* (Johansson, 1998; Sassatelli, 1999). Enormous sums of money and a great deal of hard work are invested in perfecting the exterior: in creating a hard body, shaving off unsightly hair, dealing with everything that leads to disorder. "Beauty blotches" are attended through training, diet and plastic surgery. The hard, almost genderless and aestheticized body is raised to the level of a dominant ideal, and the mass media "force" people to relate to this ideal in one way or another (Johansson, 1998). At the same time, there are also strong tendencies towards maintaining and defending hegemonic masculine positions. In 1995, Connell put forward this definition of hegemonic masculinity:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (p. 77)

The concept of hegemonic masculinity indicates possible and also considerable changes and transformations of masculinity (cf. Johansson & Hammarén 2012). The actual number of men practicing and embodying hegemony are few, but Connell argues that most men have some kind of complicated and ambivalent relation to power. Connell also states that the organization of gender on a larger scale "is centred on a single structural fact—the global dominance of men over women" (Connell, p. 183). In *Masculinities* (1995), Connell elaborates on the relation between different masculinities. She also introduces a more complex discussion on the interplay between gender, race and class. Hegemony is still tightly connected to patriarchy, and also described as a strategy to legitimate a particular gender order, and a constellation of cultural ideals, institutional power and politics. But the hegemonic position is always contestable and changeable. The power structure put forward is dynamic, and changeable, but also stable and durable. This structure builds on a hierarchical system

of different and inter-related gender relations. These are described either as subordinated—for example gay masculinity—or as complicit, which means that the majority of men benefit from the patriarchal dividend. The concept of hegemonic masculinity gained ground in the 1990s, but the most frequent and intensive discussions on the status and content of this concept have taken place during the past decade (Connell, 2000; Donaldson, 1993; Hearn, 2004; Howson, 2006; Wedgewood, 2009).

In *Inclusive Masculinity* (2009), Anderson puts forward a different view on hegemonic masculinity. Anderson's thesis is that what we are witnessing today is a considerable change in masculinity (cf. Johansson & Hammarén 2012). The lessening of homophobia is gradually leading to a widening of the range of masculine identities and positions that are possible to embody and perform. Anderson presents quite an optimistic view on gender and changes in gender structures. However, he is fully aware that these changes are uneven, and that in many masculine contexts and milieus masculinity is still defined as the opposite of femininity and homosexuality. At the same time, he is obviously describing a scenario in which masculinity is gradually becoming more inclusive and permissive, and where the concept of hegemony is less useful:

Connell's model is unable to capture the proliferation of men's femininity and parity among masculinities that occurs in these settings. Results from this research show that heterosexual men exhibiting various forms of inclusive masculinity are not complicit to or subordinated by any singular version of masculinity. These men are not looking up to another form of hegemonic masculinity, or desiring to be associated with any one dominant archetype. (Anderson, 2009, p. 154)

Against the background of Connell's theory of masculinity, and recent developments and critiques of the concept of hegemony, we will explore different types of masculinity in the gym culture. Through a selection of cases and portraits of different male experts and personal trainers, we will investigate the different masculine ideals and identities that can be found in the gym and fitness culture.

#### METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

This article is methodologically inspired by Kozinets' (2010) definition of netnography. We have directed our focus "on written accounts resulting from fieldwork studying the cultures and communities that emerge from on-line, computer mediated, or internet-based communications" (Kozinets, p. 58). The fieldwork carried out and the textual accounts given are methodologically viewed from a perspective inspired by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology and ethnography (Hine, 2000). However, "the field" being studied here is not typical and requires some clarifications: First, it cannot be neatly located to a certain place and community, which is a distinctive feature of more conventional ethnographies. Second, using mediated communication certainly limits our ability to gather all the information provided in, for example, face-to-face interaction and observations within any given culture. Third, using virtual methods also makes it nearly impossible for us to capture what is going on "off the screen" (Hooley, Marriott & Wellens, 2012, p. 77). However, regardless of these limitations, this type of material at the same time has many similarities with more "conventional" empirical sampling (Fleischmann, 2004; Sheehan, 2010, cf. Johans-

son & Hammarén 2012). Online spaces for communication and social media are embedded in a national, social and cultural context (Johansson & Hammarén, 2012, p. 5). Blogs and other types of social media often target specific lifestyle groups and sections of the potential audience (Orgad 2006). Moreover, the technological and social practices on the Internet have also meant that personal and community data have become more open and easier to access than ever before, thus creating a new form of intimacy (Joinson, McKenna, & Postmes, 2007). Naturally this also affects people's everyday life and their relation to their cultural surroundings. Kozinets (2010) states:

The way that technology and culture interact is a complex dance, an interweaving and intertwining. This element of technocultural change is present in our public spaces, our workplaces, our homes, our relationships and our bodies –each institutional element intermixed with every other one. Technology constantly shapes and reshapes our bodies, our places, and our identities, and is shaped to our needs as well. (p. 22)

Emphasizing the importance of including technology as a means for understanding the construction of culture meaning, Kozinets pinpoints the value of using narratives on the Internet. In the present article, using discourse analysis, we turn our focus to texts and images on certain fitness blogs. We are interested in analysing how the writers categorize and schematize their perception of the world, thereby helping to shape a specific understanding of fitness, masculinity and the body (Smith Maguire, 2002).

There is a massive amount of fitness blogs on the Internet. It seems as though every personal trainer with career ambitions is present on this mediated forum. We have carried out a carefully conducted strategic selection of blogs, partly based on blog popularity, i.e., a high ranking on number of readers, and partly based on analytical and theoretical relevance. Hence, in addition to the blogs' attractiveness, the aim of the sampling is that the blogs together would reflect different aspects and representations of body and gender within the fitness culture, such as traditional views of masculinity as well as commercialized, sexualized and aesthetic constructions.

The first blog selected is run by Nate Green, who describes himself as a 26-year-old fitness and lifestyle author, and as a fellow hero-in-training. He runs a successful blog, has written a book on exercise and fitness, and promotes a healthy and heroic lifestyle. The second blog is edited by Davey Wavey, who describes himself as a "globe-trotting gay YouTube personality and fitness guru." The short video clips that Davey regularly publishes on his blog or YouTube have more than 80 million hits. In addition to given training advice and selling training programmes, Davey also deals with questions concerning body ideals and sexuality on his blog. The third blog selected is run by Chuck Ryan Strogish, who tells his readers that he has earned a Master's level personal trainer certification at a university. Although he describes always having been passionate about fitness and training, his interest in body aesthetics on the blog mainly seems to be filtered through his modelling career. In summary, the three selected blogs can be seen as important "cases," which both illustrate diverse ways of approaching gender and exemplify different tendencies within a changeable fitness culture.

As a technological phenomenon, the use of blogs raises ethical questions. For instance, they partly blur the traditional distinction between public/private and published/unpublished

material, which raises questions about confidentiality and consent. The status of openness on the selected blogs is that they are not password protected and hence accessible to anyone with an Internet connection (Rosenberg, 2010). On the basis of this, we have concluded that the authors have no reasonable expectation of their personal privacy needing to be normatively protected (Grodzinsky & Tavani, 2010, p. 45). Naturally, this does not give us free rein to use the material in any way. When selecting quotations, we have been careful not to focus on the most sensitive material, and restricted our use of quotations to those that promote relevant analysis of this new kind of phenomenon (Johansson & Hammarén 2012, p. 5).

## RESULTS

### The Hero

Nate Green is a 26-year-old American man. He is running a blog for any person “who want to get something more out of life than just going through the motions.” The blog is not for slackers, and people who do not care about their bodies and lives, according to Nate. He describes himself in the following way:

I’m a 26-year old fitness and lifestyle author, and a fellow hero-in-training. Along with actually practicing what I preach (i.e. I actually work out, travel, volunteer, and try to live the “life of my dreams” every day), other people think I know what I’m talking about, too. Penguin gave me a book deal (crazy, I know), and I’ve been featured in the LA Times, Men’s Health, and Men’s Fitness. Plus my mom thinks I’m cool. That’s gotta count for something. (Nate Green’s blog)

This blog is filled with advice for people on how to exercise, build muscles, and in general how to take care of their body and develop a healthy lifestyle. In this way, it is similar to many other fitness blogs. However, large parts of the blog also contain personal remarks about life, masculinity and Nate’s philosophy on becoming a hero in one’s own life.

Let’s face it, most of us are lazy. We don’t read or educate ourselves more than we have to. (When’s the last time you read a book that wasn’t assigned to you?) We have fickle self esteem and mistake machismo for manliness, a by-product of watching hero movies and never connecting with any of our friends. We have shallow romantic relationships we don’t work at to make better. And the kicker? We have absolutely no fucking idea who we want to become or what we want to accomplish. It’s goddamn terrifying. So, what’s a guy to do? Wallow in self-pity? Sack up? (Nate Green’s blog)

Reading this, it is easy to get the impression that Nate has read and studied Robert Bly (1990), the poet, and the guru of a masculinity movement in the early 1990s. In *Iron John: A book about Men*, Bly argued for a more sensitive manliness, deeply anchored in itself and in the core of an authentic masculinity. The masculinity Nate describes contains many aspects of Bly’s philosophy, but it also draws heavily on conceptions of normative and ra-

tional masculinity. Nate puts forward masculine values and an ethos that builds on physical and moral strength, honesty, homosociality and close friendships with your buddies—generally a successful male career and rationality. This description fits perfectly well into more stereotypical conceptions of dominant masculinity.

A central cornerstone of Nate's image of masculinity, and of fitness, is the conception of the hero. Heroes are in control of their lives. They live by a set of well-formulated rules, build their bodies, seek fun and fulfilment, and know how to make money. A hero "commands a room with his confidence." A hero puts his body, exercise and maintenance of the body at the forefront of his life, whereas a *coward* treats his body like "a shitty vehicle instead of something he is proud of." At the same time as Nate is a part of the gym culture and bodybuilding, he tries to distance himself from certain parts of this culture.

Let's get one thing clear: I am not a meathead. Not in the way you think of it anyway. I understand you're confused; I don't blame you. I know I kinda look like that muscular guy at your gym who grunts, slams the weights, and scowls. The gym is filled with meatheads like that, guys whose lives revolve around their insecurity. They feel small inside so they have to project bigness. They're the dwarf behind the curtain, all fake confidence and loud noise, walking dicks with no balls. They're boys who haven't become men yet. I'm not going to bullshit you: I'm in the gym for *some* of the same reasons they are. I want a powerful, good-looking body because it makes me feel, well, powerful and good-looking. But you gotta understand the gym doesn't define me. I am not my broad shoulders. I am not my six-pack. I am not my freakin' biceps. I don't say stupid shit like, "Have you seen the weight room?" while flexing my arms. I don't know how to bounce my chest like a male stripper. I will not fuss and bitch if my girlfriend's parents serve me high-carb pasta for dinner; I'll eat it and thank them for the meal. (Nate Green's blog)

Nate Green has recently started working for Scrawny to Brown, a fitness organization. The whole idea behind this fitness company builds on an old tradition of muscle building, and of making boys into (heterosexual) men. In one of his first blogs, Nate describes his own journey from a skinny young boy to a muscular and confident man:

I was sick of feeling small. At 5'9" and 145 pounds, I looked wiry and lean, but lacked any real substance. When I walked down the halls, I remember blending into the crowd, becoming just another set of feet and slumped shoulders. I didn't take up any space or stand out in any way. I felt insignificant. Ordinary. (Nate Green's blog)

This significant experience of being small and ordinary was the starting point of a career in fitness and bodybuilding. Nate Green follows in the foot steps of giants such as Charles Atlas and Eugene Sandow (Reich, 2010). The concept builds on before-and-after pictures, showing clearly how the body changes from a skinny and tiny young boy's body to a masculine and grown-up body. This is a typical and almost paradigmatic masculine narrative. But if we read Nate's blog more carefully, we can also see how this apparently confident and dominant masculinity constantly has to defend and expand itself. There is a certain degree of reflexivity in this story and narrative about becoming a man, pointing also to changes in

masculinity that are moving towards a more sensitive and caring masculinity. But in many respects, this is primarily the same old story about boys becoming men.

### **The Sensual**

Davey Wavey works as a personal trainer and runs a fitness blog. He also has a more personalized blog linked to the first one. He twitters and is a frequent traveller, writing travelling guides. On his training blog, the reader can ask Davey questions regarding weight training, carbo-exercise and nutrition. They can also learn about healthy recipes and read about recent research on fitness. Regarding his background, Davey tells us the following:

Dear Blog Buddy, I know what it's like to be overweight. I know what it's like to hear the names, see the stares and to look in the mirror and cry. For years during childhood, I struggled with weight problems, overeating and an inactive lifestyle. As my frustration increased, I tried to control my eating through anorexia. From heavy to dangerously thin, my journey to a healthier lifestyle was one with many challenges. But where there are challenges, there are opportunities for growth, and I learned a lot during my weight loss journey. While I lost weight from exercise and nutrition, I realized that weight loss isn't just about hitting the gym and counting calories. If it were that easy, all of us would be at our target weight.... The Davey Wavey Weight Loss Program is a complete program that will help you lose weight and transform you life. (Davey Wavey's blog)

Clearly trying to legitimize and commercialize his training programme, here Davey follows a rather familiar narrative about how the ugly duckling turns into a beautiful swan—a story not so very different from the one told earlier by Nate Green. The underlying moral and the message sent are that a transformation of body and soul is possible, that he, as a personal trainer, understands his readers' plight, and can offer the road to rebirth. In many ways, the meaning constructed is that a sense of happiness can be found through regularly exercise and through the process of creating an idealized slim, well-defined muscular body—a body that he now inhabits himself and willingly puts on display.

The imagery on the blog is quite uniform. Davey more or less solely presents himself in a passive manner, leaning against a wall wearing nothing but his underwear. Having studied how masculinity is represented in different kinds of mainstream magazines aimed at men, Rohlinger (2002) notes that the male body is increasingly being represented in a sexualised and erotic way, that is, in a manner traditionally associated with representations of femininity in the consumer culture (Nixon, 1996). Rohlinger (p. 71) states that, in this way, the male body has become “a blank canvas on which the viewer can project meaning” with regard to, for example, sex and gender.

In Davey Wavey's case, the narrative can be interpreted in different ways simultaneously. His well-defined muscular male body could be read as a heterosexual manifestation of dedication, hard work and a narrative about a man who is able to stick to a strictly defined routine, in order to reach his goals (and who transformed his life by “honouring his body,” as described above). These are ideals that in many ways coincide with positions within a hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). However, the story told here could also, and probably

should, be read in the more sensual manner, as representing a masculinity defined through beauty, fashion and commercialization. Davey clearly seems to use his physical characteristics, his developed chest and arm muscles, as a means to achieve a gendered identity, this on the premise that sexuality is to be seen as an important expression of masculinity (Fracher & Kimmel, 1995). The following quote, regarding his new-found interest in yoga, clarifies this perspective, where masculinity, beauty and commercialization seem to merge:

Many professional athletes and celebrities are yoga buffs, too. Madonna, Jennifer Aniston and Sting do it. Matthew McConaughey (yum!) includes yoga in his workout routine... and we all know how amazing his physique is, right? ... I found one of the most amazing yoga instructors—Nick Kindrick—and created an easy to follow, highly effective, program for men (though women will enjoy it, too) with beginner, intermediate and advanced fitness levels. All you have to do is follow along at a comfortable pace. Nick makes doing yoga so easy. There is never any pressure, he provides more challenging variations of poses for those at an advanced level—and he looks mighty fine in his skivvies. (Davey Wavey's blog)

Starting up a course for underwear yoga, Davey gets quite explicit about his sexual orientation. Accordingly, this type of exercise is supposed to strengthen one's bones and muscles as well as improving one's sex life and so on. What is being sold here is not only a way to a healthy body, but also a taste of fame and pictures of sexuality. Emphasizing near nudity makes the description of yoga almost a homoerotic practice. This perspective becomes even more explicit when he, in a video clip posted on his blog, discusses his relationship to clients. The heading for the video is, "Having sex with groupies?"

You know I am very grateful to the people who watch my videos and I think it's very important to give back, and I think one of the best ways to give of your self is through your penis (smiling). That's right. I hypothetically was on a vacation a couple of months ago and i met this guy and we hooked up. And hypothetically when we are in throes of passion, he may hypothetically have said in his New Zealand accent, "I can't believe I'm being fucked by Davey Wavey." I had no idea that he watches my videos so I kind of sat there and, stunned, and then I, hypothetically ... yeeaa. Yea, you are (simulating intercourse). (Davey Wavey's blog)

Nevertheless, though partly said in an ironic manner, the interactive nature of this statement certainly blurs the boundaries between the construction and the consumption of homosexual masculinity. Here, Wavey clearly challenges the culture of silence and the orthodox masculinity that otherwise typically surrounds gay athleticism and supports hegemonic constructions (Anderson, 2002; Wolf Wendel, Toma & Morpew, 2001; Pronger, 1990). It can be seen as an example of what Nixon (1996, p. 13ff) calls a cultural transformation process in which men have become sensualised as pleasurable objects. At the centre of all this we find the muscular (nearly) naked male body that is idolized within the fitness culture, regardless of sexual orientation. This is a body through which Davey shows how traditional concepts of masculinity can fuse with the gay gym culture and homoerotic practices (Alvarez, 2009).

## The Model

Chuck Ryan is presented as a university educated, Master's level personal trainer in New York. He describes himself as always having been passionate about fitness, an interest that also got him introduced to modelling. Hence, his blog can be viewed as a mixture of a model and fitness blog. Chuck describes his ambitions in the following way:

My motivation comes from the ability as a model to inspire others. I feel that models have more of a presence to kids than they think and don't take enough time or use what they have for the good of someone else. If it takes me one more job for one more company to get my words across to someone that what I say in my blog is true, well then, that's what I'm going to do. (Chuck Ryan's Blog)

When asked about alternative careers, Ryan says that he would probably have worked in his father's commercial cleaning business or become an acupuncturist. The blog is filled with pictures of Chuck, first and foremost presenting himself as a model, but this professional status is closely tied to advice and fitness coaching, and an explicit will to spread knowledge about the modelling/fitness industry. In his detailed postings, we can read about how to lose weight, and what diet we should try, as well as detailed advice about exercise and training. The ideal painted and pictured by Chuck is not a heavy and muscular body, but instead a 'beautiful' aesthetic masculine one:

Deciding to get more toned, have a leaner body to be healthier, looking sexy, and being more confident is a choice you have to make. It can seem like a long process or just too much BS to have to think about how to go about starting your change. But make it simple, make it quick, and still get lean. I'm going to show you how ... now. (Chuck Ryan's Blog)

This blog is almost exclusively focused on fashion, modelling and fitness. There is not a great deal of information about the person Chuck Ryan, or more general lifestyle issues, or gender ideals. In this way, his blog differs considerably from the other blogs presented here. A careful reading of the blog, however, brings forward the cornerstones of Ryan's body philosophy, especially when combined with the perfect model shots included in the blog. The visual material fits nicely into a modern, aesthetic and perfectly moulded masculine body.

Adonis lines are those deep lines you see that gives the impression of someone in great shape. They are awesome looking and if you don't have them yet, here is the best ways to go about getting them the fastest way possible. Some ways are so simple you would think it don't even work! (Chuck Ryan's Blog)

In Greek mythology, Adonis was the God of beauty and desire. He is often referred to as the mortal God of beauty, and there are strong connections between the cult of Adonis, the handsome male God, and Sappho, the woman poet. In November 1994, the *metrosexual* male was identified and described by the cultural critic Mark Simpson (Coad, 2008). This

market segment consisted of young, urban, white, middle-class men, consumers and young narcissistic men preoccupied with looks, style and image. In the 1990s, these men and this phenomenon were thought to indicate a crisis in masculinity, a closer relation between homo- and hetero- men, and a general movement towards a new masculinity. Coad (p. 197) writes: “Metrosexual males may look prettier and more beautiful than their nonmetrosexual brothers, but metrosexuality is the motor behind more decisive changes in the realm of sexual politics; it influences how heterosexual males interact with homosexual males and it is in the process of replacing traditional categories of sexual orientation” (cf. Hall, Gough & Seymour-Smith, 2012). Chuck Ryan fits nicely into this description of metrosexual masculinity. He also draws a clear line between more traditional concepts of masculinity represented by, for example, a bodybuilding lifestyle and the masculinity attached to his way of life, and fitness/modelling in general.

As a fitness model, the difference between me and a bodybuilder is that I must be in prime condition all year round, as opposed to preparing to look your very best on a specific date. Because of this, sometimes you can't afford to take weeks necessary in a strength building phase because usually when I did this, you gain some fat and lose those cuts from the rest periods increasing. Read on to bypass this so that you can still improve your strength, yet not sacrifice your fat burning and lean look goal. (Chuck Ryan's Blog)

This story does not follow the more common Charles Atlas narrative. Instead it is focused on here-and-now, and it is mainly a success story, about how you can use different means—training techniques, diet, and particularly marketing—to promote a career. Prescribing rules of how to keep fit, how to control weight and defining his vision of continuous fitness and beauty, Ryan's lifestyle seems to be inextricably embedded in the consumer culture (cf. Smith Maguire, 2008, p. 106). Furthermore, the story (and Ryan) embodies a central ethos within fitness culture: highlighting the body's status as a site of investment, a form of capital and at the same time a means of self-expressing. In addition, this is clearly also a story about a more aesthetic and metrosexual masculinity influenced by a mediated consumer culture that idealizes fitness consumption.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present article is based on material from three blogs. On the one hand, we have focused on individual careers and different motivational trajectories. On the other, we have studied aspects and fragments of a global fitness industry, where these three top fitness experts have strong symbolic and economic positions. National training cultures have gradually become corporatized by a commercial and global fitness organization. Consequently, the masculinity and identity portrayed and put forward in these blogs represent fundamental changes in the global representation of masculinity.

Common to all three blogs presented here is their tendency to sell a similar concept. It is a concept of health, fitness and prosperity that is being commercialized and indeed sold. The blogs deliver a customized service, where motivation and specialized knowledge about the body, health and fitness are presented and intertwined with marketing strategies (cf. Smith

Maguire, 2008). However, following the blogs, it does not require a great deal of effort to see that they also are selling gendered identity claims. Traditionally, masculinity is—and has long been—something to be accomplished and performed, especially with the help of bulging muscles. Performance clearly seems to be tied up in these technocultural manifestations, and the underlying moral presented throughout is that the making of an idealized/appealing and healthy-looking male body can and should be pursued through continuous effort, and of course with the support of the concepts and training strategies developed and commercialized by the blogging health gurus. This is clearly a paradigmatic narrative and a fairly stable part of a hegemonic masculine construction. Analysing the nostalgia expressed in relation to this normative masculinity stereotype, which is moulded by traditionalism, the blogs do not seem to bring about much of an immediate change in how manly bodies and ideals are perceived (Mosse, 1996). The basic narrative follows the logic of how the thin, or obese, boy, through massive efforts and physical training, becomes a man, thus reproducing hegemonic conceptions. However, beyond this core of similarities, the images of hegemonic masculinity propounded by the three blogs reveal nuances (cf. Laberge & Albert, 2000, p. 218). In the body culture within which the bloggers operate, the performance-oriented lifestyle is combined, to different extents, with a strong zest for bodily aesthetics, for beautiful, commercialized and slender bodies. This ambiguity creates an analytical window through which one can see how different transformations and understandings of masculinity manifest themselves in a contemporary global gym culture.

This ambiguity and complex presentation of the self and the body highlight the fact that the social production of hegemony is not a self-reinforced system. On the contrary, it shows how the contestation and transformation of an orthodox masculinity may generate a multiple and more differentiated masculine chain of identification. Clearly targeting, partly different, audiences within the same cultural sphere, the picture of masculinity that emerges in the blogs seems to diversify and transform, and to represent a hybrid combination of old and new ways of embodying masculinity. Cultivating an interest in a bodily aesthetics of hairless, bare-chested and tanned bodies clearly can be understood as a partial transformation of a rigid heterosexual gender power order. It can be seen as an expression of a cultural transformation process in which men, regardless of sexuality, can move into and gaze at other male bodies in a more sensualised manner. In this sense, the texts and imagery found in the blogs clearly exceed the criteria/limits of traits and norms traditionally considered male or female, absorbing values and images previously associated solely with homosexuality (cf. Cashmore, 2004). In doing so, they may contribute to increased acceptance of, for example, gay identities and other submissive masculinities. They also illustrate an eroticized depiction of masculinity that seems to dominate mainstream conceptions of masculinity within the gym and fitness culture (Rohlinger, 2002). In this process, the sexual orientation and identity of the man/model seems to be less important than his physicality. This celebration of the body certainly can contribute to a loosening of traditional norms and a contestation of hegemonic gender values, while at the same time liberating sexuality from a rather narrow and heterosexist definition, despite the fact that the same processes also seem to include a commoditization and commercialization of masculinities.

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