



Re- Designing Masculinity

PATTERNS

*Designing insights emerging
and converging*

guest authors
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How men are emerging from the gray zone of gender roles

Although the square-jawed, Marlboro-smoking male role model has been under pressure since feminism, civil rights, and gay liberation came into play, he still shows up in contemporary advertising, branding, and design, while the traditional masculine model of protector and provider has gone from ideal to ironic.

Many men are figuring out that what they were raised to be no longer works, and society has not yet stepped in to support proper alternatives. This is a systemic

design challenge fifty years in the making—one that tailored suits and eye-wrinkle creams do little to address.

In metropolitan hot spots around the globe, men are looking for options that appeal to their identities, roles, and behaviors. Some are expressing themselves through a new palette of products, brands, and services. Others are at a loss as to how to redefine their masculinity.

Between these poles lies a wealth of design opportunities.

TAKE ACTION – *designing for Life's Changes*

1.

Give guys tools

Provide men with tools that enable them to curate their own masculinity, instead of dictating an ideal they can only achieve through your brand's support.

2.

Beware of stereotypes

Sex, sports, and power still sell, but they are becoming less relevant and more simplistic. Engage men through complexity.

3.

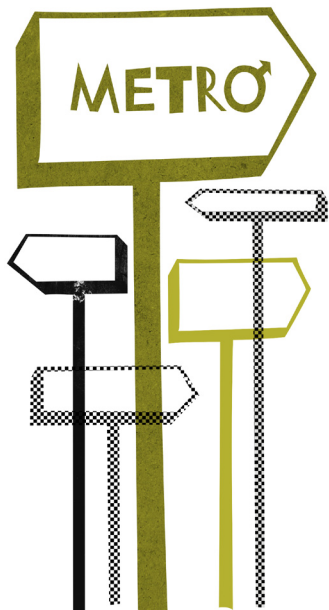
Don't dismiss women just yet

Often enough, in the end, it's still about what appeals to women. Be wise when deciding what drivers and behaviors can be related to your brand offering.

4.

Use humor to ease anxiety

A bit of humor goes a long way when helping men explore foreign territory. Think Jon Stewart's wit more than Will Ferrell's buffoonery.



Permission to explore

The media have been quick to invent a new type of urban male: the metrosexual. This certainly opened doors and defied some dogmas, but it doesn't get to the heart of the motivation. Men are experiencing greater permission to explore, and the desire to look and feel good is only one dimension of this new freedom.

Like many other affluent teens, Tyler's life revolves around school, sports, music, and friends. "I like to think that my opinions are not dictated by my masculinity," he says. "There's a lot more flexibility in terms of my future and what I have to be like." Add to this a teenager's willingness to try out what feels true, and we have a magic place for design.

How might we help more men and boys explore and experiment? How might we identify and learn from extreme explorers?

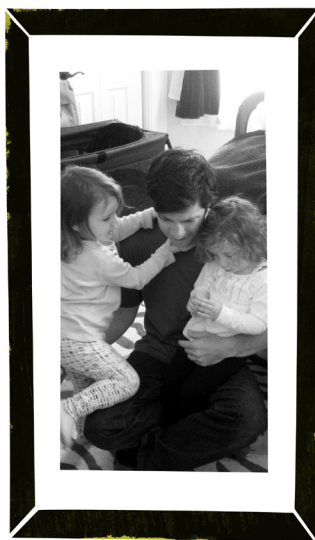
Legitimizing new roles

Fathers are becoming more physically and emotionally present in their children's upbringing, and are looking to connect with other men going through similar experiences.

When his daughter was born, Josh made a conscious decision to be engaged in her upbringing. He shifted his career and became a full-time nanny — a male nanny. It's not always easy, he confesses, but "I learn so much about myself with these kids and the love they give you back. There's no measure to it."

Jeff is a successful screenwriter and primary care provider to his two small children. He cringes whenever he is forced to deal with any of the parenting magazines and products relentlessly targeted at moms.

How might we provide fathers with parenting tools that speak to them in their own language?



Be a pattern spotter: Now that you've been exposed to a few different examples, don't be surprised if you start seeing *Life's Changes* patterns all around. Keep your eyes open and let us know what you find, especially if it's the next new pattern.



Definition through differentiation

Men are looking for things that haven't lost their masculine purity, that speak to the question, What makes me special as a man? Fashion is an easy place to find such examples.

Pablo, a European designer, created his own accessories to make a statement about masculinity. Browsing street shops in London, he spotted a pair of 24K gold collar stays — the kind used to keep the collars of dress shirts pointy and crisp. "Collar stays are something women can't have," he says, "at least not yet." Pablo was inspired to create his own. "Some accessories don't exist anymore. What do we have besides cuff links and an occasional tie clip?"

How might we celebrate men for being men without falling into discredited stereotypes? How might we design to help men express themselves?

Be prepared

Gary Greenberg is a standup comedian and writer. When he and his wife became parents, they were surprised at the lack of books to help new dads take care of their infants. From that experience came *Be Prepared*, "a funny, informative survival manual for guys entering the trenches of fatherhood." With just the right balance of humor and useful information, the book offers amusing insights and no-nonsense advice for mastering the first year as a dad.

New heroes

How do Daniel Craig's James Bond and Christian Bale's Batman differ from previous versions of their characters? The new hero displays his weaknesses. Another high-profile example is Don Draper, the outwardly confident but deeply tormented star of AMC's *Mad Men*. For Ben, a 23-year-old New Yorker, "Draper is the ultimate role model; he's old-school cool and he's messed up." The story takes place in the 1960s, just as increased pressure on the male role started to mount.



Pretty boy culture in Asia

A new breed of Asian men is hinting at fundamental cultural shifts around masculinity. Xiao Hue, 36, is used to it: "I was shocked the first time I noticed a guy wearing foundation in Japan, but now it's pretty common in Shanghai, too." Although Xiao Hue doesn't see this behavior spreading to rural China anytime soon, he is quick to point that there's a good incentive for it: "Young girls like the softer appearance of flower boys."

PATTERNS are a collection of shared thoughts, insights, and observations gathered through our work and the world around us. We invite you to join the conversation, so we can raise the bar and develop richer design thinking experiences collectively.

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