



RED C BREAKFAST CLUB:

REACHING HIM RIGHT:

MASCULINITY IN IRELAND AND THE UK

15TH NOVEMBER 2023

We asked AI to show us an 'Irish Man'.

<This is not us_>

EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum



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<This is not us_>

Find out who the Irish really are

EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum



Outline:

- **Introduction to Semiotics**
- **Traditional Codes of Masculinity**
- **The Changing Narratives of Masculinity**
- **Strategies for Brands**

What's happening here?



Brands and consumers are inseparable from the culture that surrounds them





1

Traditional Masculinity in the UK & Ireland

Lets first look at some of the established
codes of Masculinity in the UK and
Ireland...

Purposeful Living

Culturally, men are seen as having a sense of function or purpose measured by the skills and abilities they possess. This sense of functional utility is reflected in the language that is used to describe the desirable qualities of men, such as “solid”, “dependable”, having “integrity” or in the description of masculinity as increasingly “fragile”, terms also used to describe tools or building materials – **traditional masculinity is defined by having a sense of functional purpose**

Solid Bloke 🐦 f

A person (specifically a guy) who is very **friendly** and sound. Usually used in **UK** and **Irish** slang

*Note gave me a **fiver**, he's a **solid** bloke*

by **Anonymousschildnamedgerald** November 22, 2021



MASCULINE STEREOTYPES

- 1 Stoicism
- 2 Provider
- 3 Logical
- 4 Strength
- 5 Active
- 6 Domineering

'No concerns' about Richard Sharp's integrity while he was BBC chairman –



7 Ways to Become a Man of Action

Darya Yegorina, DBA
C-level Executive Strategy | Innovation | Business Development | Sales | [30 articles](#)
Operations

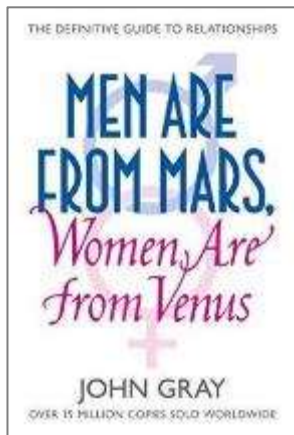


“Men [...] feel stuck with the expectations of their gender – to be strong, to provide” – Grayson Perry, The Descent of Man

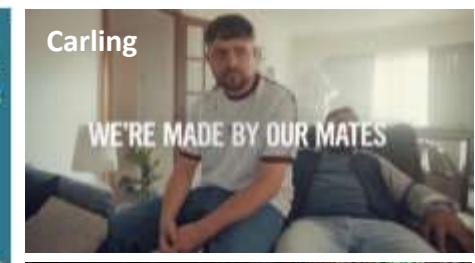
Adversarial Relationships

Men are frequently held up as being in opposition, either to women or to other men. Language referencing a “battle of the sexes”, the expectation for men to take “hits”, “slagging”, and “banter”, and a focus on combative/competitive sporting practice in a quest to be the ‘GOAT’, reflect the fact that men’s strength must be frequently tested – **traditionally men are framed as existing in a state of combat with the world around them**

Men vs Women



Men vs Men



Comment Premium

‘In the land of taunt and banter, it’s always better to take a few hits’: Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney was well able for detractors



“To engage with Irish lager drinkers of all ages, M&C Saatchi London landed on the insight that the seemingly brutal banter Irish people are known for is actually a way of them showing affection.”

“at its most basic, masculinity seems to be a need for dominance” – Grayson Perry, *The Descent of Man*

Conformity

Due to these adversarial relationships, men frequently aim to 'fit in' and not be noticeable, as such the construct of masculinity is confined and maintained. Being a man in Ireland and the UK has meant conforming to certain prescribed ideals, (e.g. "smell like a man", "be a real man") and codes of appearance and performance – ***traditional masculinity has been refined and restricted over time to a limited set of behaviours and appearances***

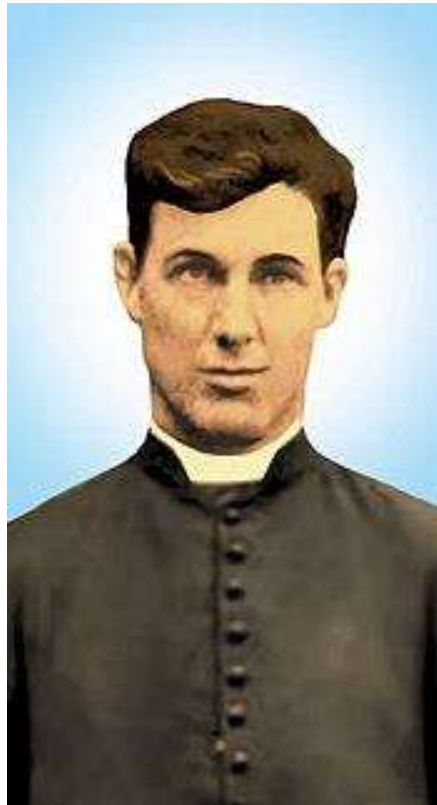


"Fairly observably, men tend not to wear bright colours. The colours for Man Clothes are black, brown, navy, blue and grey. Man colours are essentially the same range you see in concrete, or aggregates" – Caitlin Moran, *What About Men?*



Tender Authority

BUT in Irish culture there is also the trope of the “mammy man”, derived from the role of the priest as a compassionate “father”. The mammy man represents a compassionate authority, and in the battle of the sexes, his allegiance is often with women – ***this represents a more empathetic and less adversarial male perspective within Irish culture***

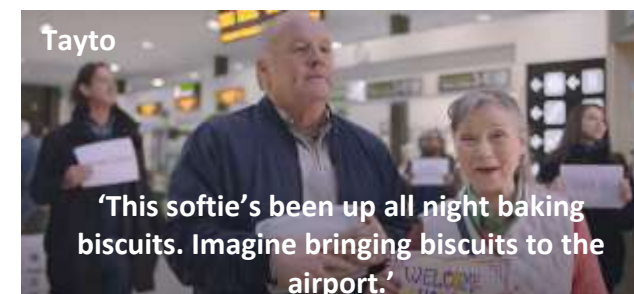


Home / Irish News

The man who changed our way of seeing ...

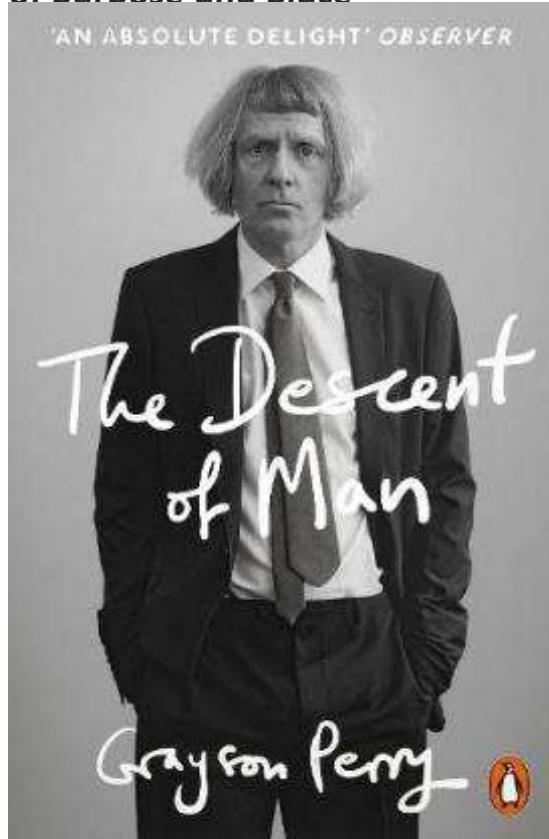
Sat 15 May 1999 at 00:11

Last night's Late Late Show was one of the most sensational programmes in the history of Irish television. Gay Byrne's interview with columnist Terry Keane was yet another compelling insight into Irish society, warts and all. For nearly 40 years the programme has entertained us. Next Friday, Gay Byrne's last Late Late Show



Loss of Place

In the face of high-profile narratives concerning “toxic masculinity”, “male privilege”, and gender equality, the erosion of the industrial and manufacturing sectors, and female success in previously ‘male’ sporting disciplines, there is a sense that culturally, men have lost their definition. The guiding male principles around strength, earning power, leadership, and stoic emotional distance are less valued, *leaving men struggling for a sense of purpose and place*



“as women rise to their just level of power, then so shall some men fall. The men who find them selves justifiably passed over or demoted will inevitably feel angry, they will be bearing the brunt of a very necessary corrective. They may rail against women, but principally they will be victims of their own unhelpful masculinity and a dominant elite of other men.” Grayson Perry - The Descent of Man 24

A photograph of two men in a social setting, likely a bar or restaurant. The man on the left is wearing a dark, vertically striped suit jacket and is smiling broadly while holding a wine glass. The man on the right is wearing a solid blue jacket and is also smiling, with his hand on the first man's shoulder. They are both holding wine glasses. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden bar counter.

2

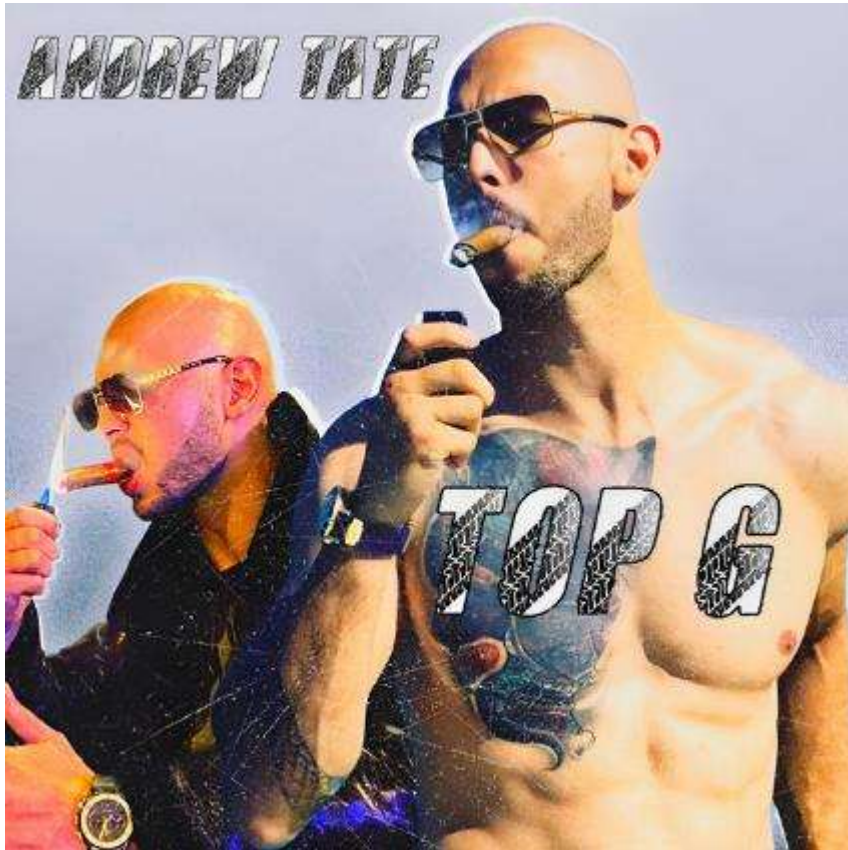
The path of masculinity has forked. Within this there are branches that favour a sense of a 'return' to traditional male roles and ideals, as well as those that embrace a sense of reinvention there is now no longer one singularly defined "masculinity", but many "masculinities".

We can now briefly explore some of the varied key expressions of contemporary masculinity before considering the implications of these for brands...

Varied Masculinities

Extreme Masculinity

At its most extreme end the branch favouring of a 'return' to traditional male values has led to the growth in popularity of a number of right wing, conservative, or even criminal figures who offer aspirational narratives of male empowerment, through overcoming the 'woke' cultural agenda that they preach is set against men – *Extreme Men return to traditional adversarial narratives, presenting themselves as figureheads against gender equality*

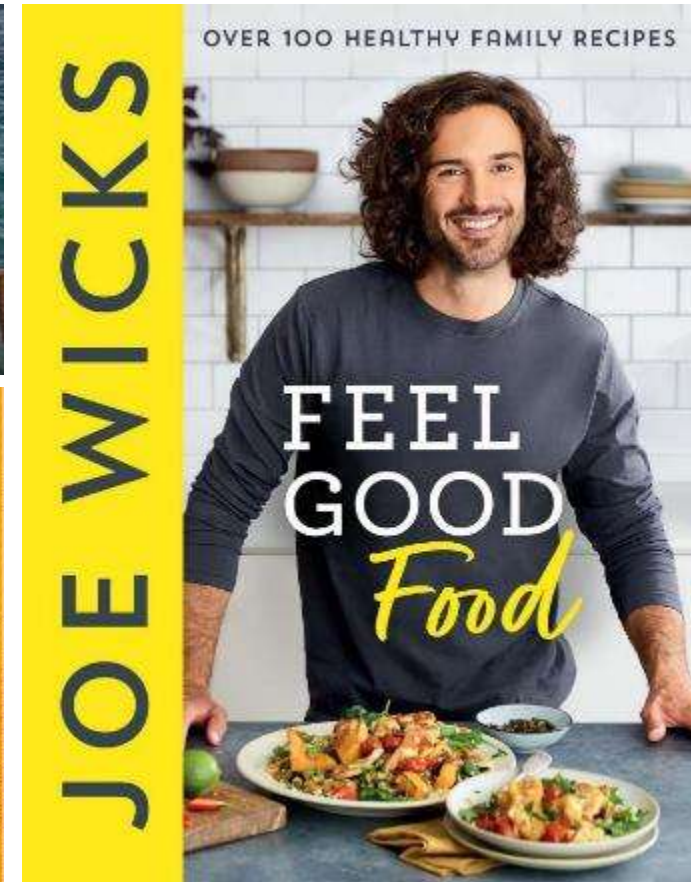
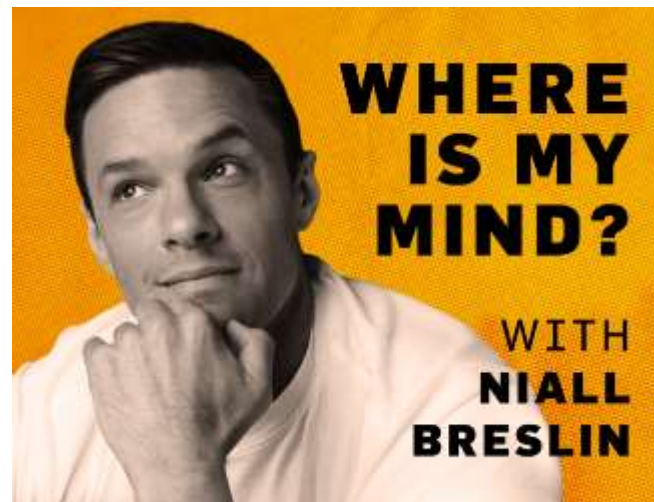
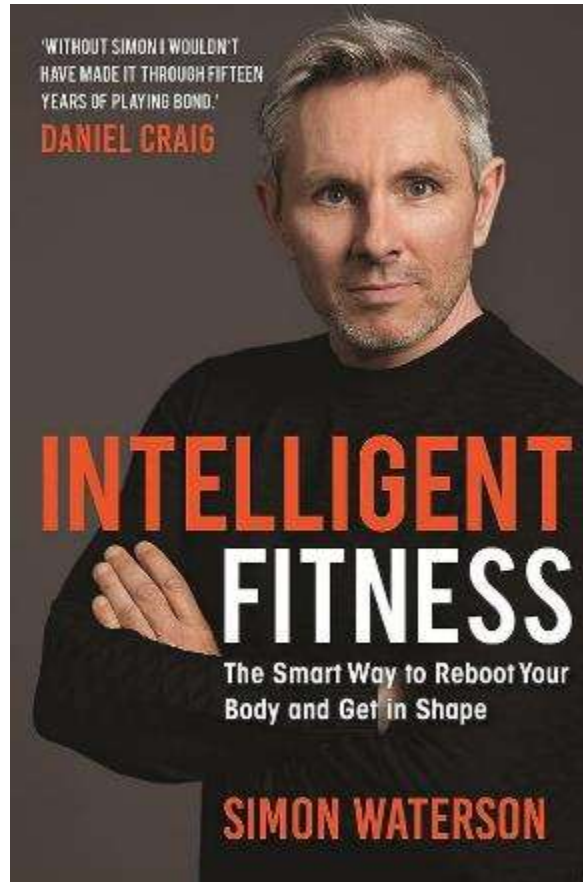


Jordan Peterson



Healthy Man

Alternatively, the quest for purpose is transferred to ones own self/body. Healthy Man, promotes a narrative of self improvement through a set of clear answers and behaviours. Increasingly as the wellbeing discourse in culture moves to embrace greater awareness of mental health, the figure of Healthy Man is increasingly shown displaying a positive emotional state – *Healthy Man has the answers and follows scientific routines to promote personal wellbeing*





The Journeyman

In Ireland, a number of prominent male figures draw upon the cultural mythology of Ireland as a land of “saints and scholars”. The Journeyman looks inwardly and works on himself, then seeks to share and educate, this is reflected in the figures of Tommy Tiernan and Blindboy, or in recent Electric Ireland comms focusing on the personal development of GAA players – *Journeyman develop through intelligent self reflection*



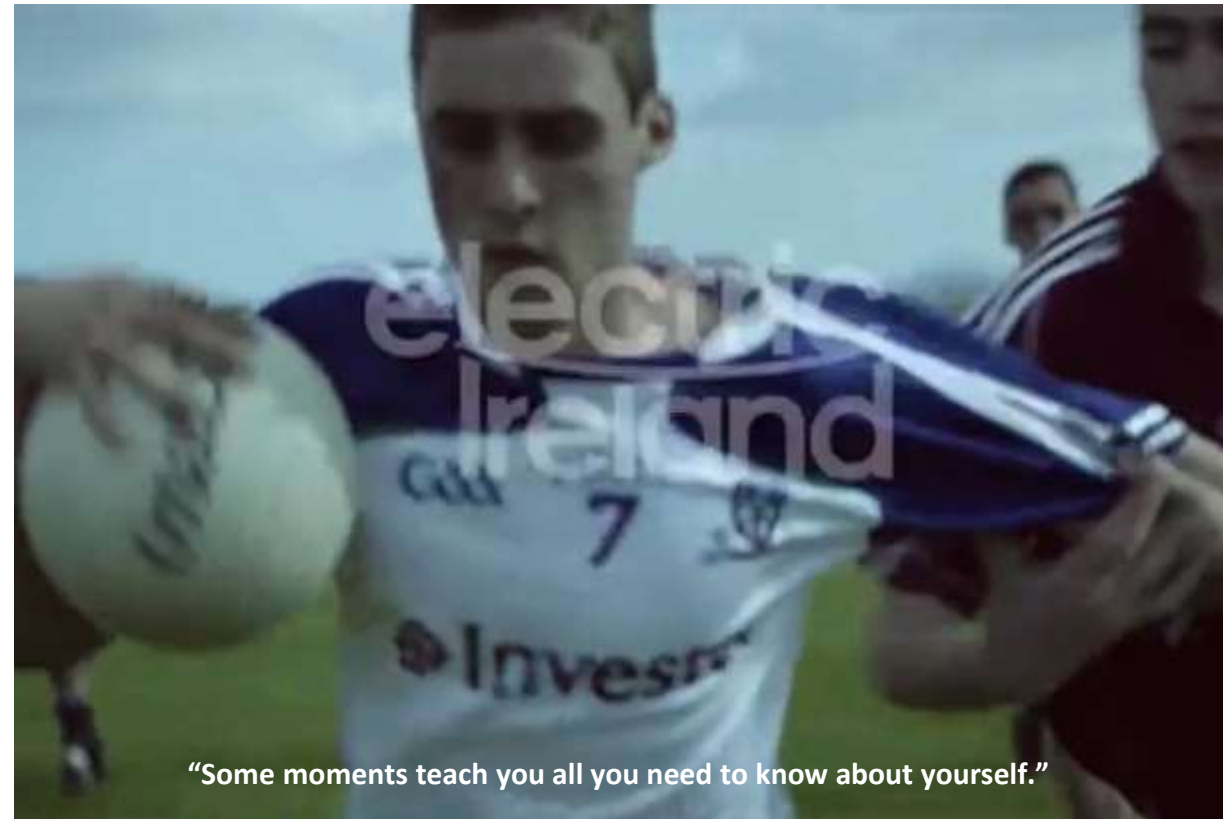
Tommy Tiernan



Blindboy



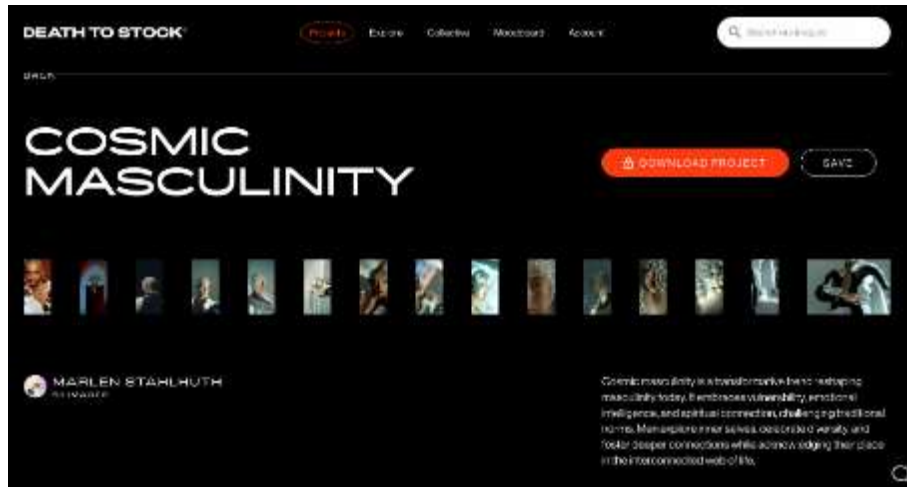
Michael Harding



“Some moments teach you all you need to know about yourself.”

Physical Transcendence

Increasingly, masculinity is becoming fully liberated by divorcing itself from the physical body in to ethereal and ‘blurry’ new spaces as evidenced by the ‘cosmic masculinity’ trend, gender fluid fashions found at events like Club Comfort, and the growing profile in the mainstream of figures like Panti Bliss – *increasingly masculinity no longer needs to look masculine (or even earthy), and is fully embracing creativity and liberation*



Club Comfort: “It was like we were speaking the same language to a lot of people we didn’t know existed”



DANCING QUEEN | Panti Bliss lined up to take part in new series of Dancing with the Stars

3



The Challenge for Marketing

These changes in the cultural context of masculinity in the UK and Ireland represent both an opportunity and a challenge for brands...

Brands are Struggling to Keep Up

While masculinity in culture has undergone notable changes, the marketing sector has struggled to keep up, with many men feeling unrepresented by the depictions they see in advertising - *despite profound changes and diversification in how masculinity is expressed culturally, advertising is still depending on narrow and dated tropes*



Changing masculinity: Is advertising doing enough to represent modern men?

Is it time for brands to acknowledge that many of today's men struggle to identify with adland's definition of masculinity and feel misunderstood?



The Drum

<https://www.thedrum.com> › opinion › 2023/06/29 › a...

Advertising Is Still Selling Men Short

29 Jun 2023 — June 29, 2023 | 8 min read ... While the male view of success has evolved, the advertising and media industry is still fixated on the past – regurgitating ...

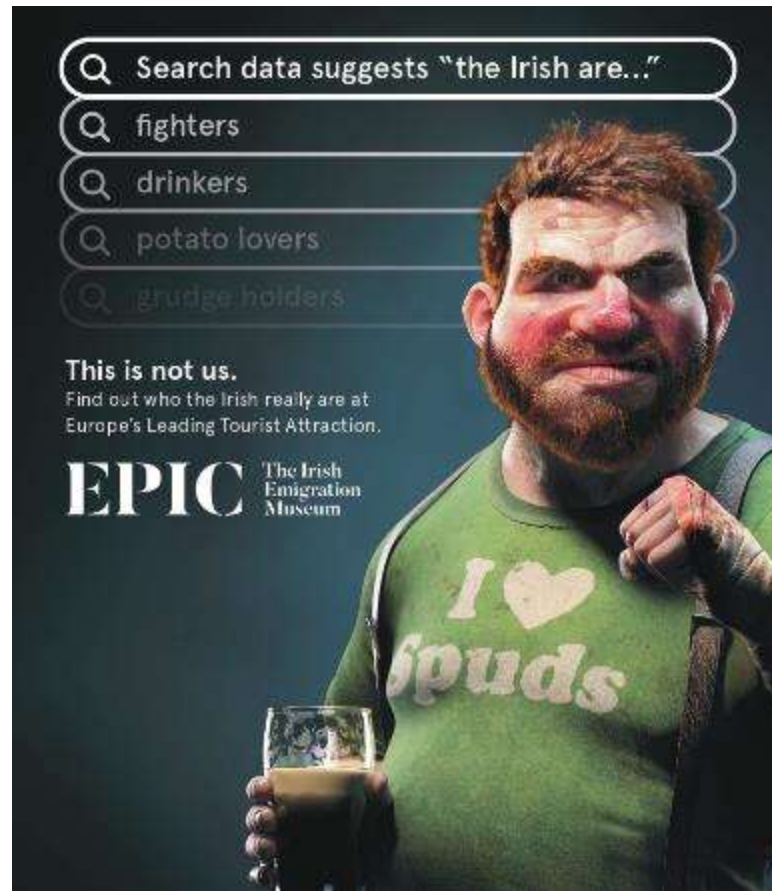
Reinforcing Stereotypes

In the brand space, a number of campaigns align with the cultural 'return' to traditional masculinity. This can be seen evidenced brands that frame products (even in the personal-care category) in terms of functionality (e.g. "facial fuel"), and aggression (e.g. "bulldog", "warpaint"), or in reference to 'male' chores (e.g. "lawn mower"), **reinforcing a narrow, and potentially 'toxic' narrative of masculinity as physical strength and aggression**



Challenging Stereotypes

Alternatively, some brands and organisations aim to directly challenge the negative implications of these stereotypical representations. The recent campaign by The Irish Emigration Museum, present the stereotypical image of masculinity, before subverting/critiquing it, revealing its falsehood. BUT while challenging stereotypes is good **brands need to also represent and offer real alternative representations of masculinity, not just to critique but to offer an alternative**



De-tox Masculinity

A number of adverts are starting to show men who while conforming to traditional roles as leaders, providers, and participants in “slagging”, also reflect a sense of their vulnerability, (e.g. experiencing struggles at work, compassionate parental care, non-competitive male bonding) removing negative ‘toxic’ elements around the performance of strength, and competitive masculinity – **these adverts represent a sense of ‘de-tox’ traditional masculinity**



Challenging Silence & Embracing Emotion

Beyond this we are starting to see a number of brands encouraging and supporting the more emotional side of masculinity. It is interesting to note that most of these campaigns directly address the sense of reluctance that men might feel (e.g. “not gonna cry”, “don’t be soft”) before showing the positive cathartic results of ‘opening up’, - **brands can directly address the challenges men feel around opening up, and support their journey**



Key Take Outs

1 Traditional masculinity has been constructed as a narrow set of attitudes and behaviours focused on a sense of functional purpose, and placed in opposition both to women and other men.

Masculinity has been limited and controlled



2 Emergently, masculinity is broadening and opening up to embrace a wider set of more emotionally engaged, creative, and diverse perspectives.

Now it is opening up, there are no longer one but many 'Masculinities'



3 But brands are lagging behind this change, and have an opportunity to update their communications in order to better reflect the nuance of modern masculinity.

Marketing is still stuck in narrow and dated representations of men and is only starting to embrace the plethora of opportunities available





IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE REACH OUT TO:

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