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Mashrur Shahid Hossain*

Ecstatic Dance! Artistic Bang!!: Economics of Metrosexual Masculinity in Bangladeshi haute couture Visual Discourse[1]

Fig. 1 The *pankha* version of masculinity (Soul Dance)

This image of a *pankha* guy in a Soul Dance promotional invokes metrosexuality. The 'model' is self-absorbed; narcissistic; well aware of

* Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: mashrursh@yahoo.co.uk

the look he carries; well-adorned to invite gaze; well-groomed to exude a mixed aura of glamour and toughness; agile enough to form an athletic posture; is eroticized, or, better, eroticizes himself, an act which he attempts with a clear-cut intention: to look cool, fit, attractive. The image queers gendering; while the posture has the supple alertness of a cheetah, conforming to conventional masculinity, the very same posture betrays the man's avowed invitation of the audience gaze for a sumptuous spectacle the subject of which he is. This visual then offers a negotiation between traditional masculinity—tough, active, functional—and narcissistic masculinity—agile, stylish, attractive. The present paper addresses this curious negotiation to see if it signals a re-conceptualizing of masculinity and if it is a liberal attempt at undercutting machoness or simply a postmodernist consumerist pretext.

Simone de Beauvoir's famous proclaimation that "it goes without saying that [a man] is a man" (Beauvoir 1968: 7) betrays conventional notion of masculinity as a signifier of certain *fixed* features. It, therefore, assumes that 'man' and 'masculinity' are not subjects that require studying, a senile, heteromasculinist assumption that has now been questioned and subverted by Feminism, Queer Theory, and more particularly the Masculinity Studies. If being a 'man' is related to being 'masculine,' a 'man' is always subject to curious subjectivization because, masculinity, in contrast with popular notions, has never been a singular or fixed phenomenon. It is contingent, plural, complicated. While the 19th century Industrialization saw the emergence of functional masculinity, men in the post-industrial society are gym-fit and salon-proof. Testimony to this assertion includes sexualization of male bodies in visual discourses: film (e.g. the lean and fit Ranbir Kapoor), sports (e.g. the metrosexual Beckham), advert (e.g. the bare-bodied Calvin Klein guys), and shopping centres (e.g. the hunk mannequins). The present paper attempts to examine this 'new' concept of masculinity—often called metrosexuality—that is in the making in Bangladesh and argues that this re-conceptualizing corresponds with capitalist, consumerist concerns.

The paper gives compositional and critical readings of some select advert and promotional visual discourses that appear in Bangladeshi magazines and online. It observes that contemporary men's clothing has

cashed in on a new use of sexuality and gendering to ensure good sales. Promulgated and popularized through beauty salons, beauty contests, muscular celebrities, body and hair care products, and fashion magazines, the concept of "attractiveness" has been added to the image of masculinity: this attractiveness is a combination of, for example, gym-toned body curves (e.g. the Ecstasy dudes), glowing cleanliness (e.g. the Artisti men), styled hair (e.g. the BANG! boys) and trendy accessories (e.g. the Soul Dance guys). This invocation of 'metrosexuality' leaves men sexualized and subject/ed to the gaze. On the other hand, the comparison standards set by the well-groomed, well-bodied models and their *osthir* outfit have every possibility to lower the consuming men's self-confidence leading to anxiety, depression, desperation. In addressing this complex issue, the present paper comes to terms with three problematics: first, if the metrosexual masculinity culture is overtaking the retrosexual one; second, if and how metrosexual masculinity culture affects consumer behaviour; and third, if and to what extent it has enhanced 'masculine stress.' This is the second part of a longer paper analyzing the *egonomics* (the act of subjectivization) and the *economics* (the consumerist concerns) of the eroticized representation of men in Bangladeshi haute couture visual discourse.

Dealing chiefly with the economics, the present paper forwards its argument through four sections. The first section rewinds the fashioning of masculinity and men's continuous interaction with body and beauty. Then there is a brief discussion of two major codes of masculinity in Bangladesh that sells: the 'cool' ectomorphs and the 'hot' mesomorphs'. Third section sees how men's concern for 'looks' has fueled consumption praxis ranging from frequenting gyms to compulsive purchasing of beauty products while the last section relates this increase in male consumption to what is often termed as 'masculine stress,' viz. men's attempts at and the corresponding stress for (not) conforming to the dominant codes of masculinity and the resultant behaviour, identity, and health crisis.

The paper combines library research and empirical study. To garner and contextualize the arguments made, 67 men were interviewed. The respondents were of 20 to 45 years of age; educated; living in Dhaka; and were affluent. The brands covered for this paper—some of them

are alluded to in the first half of the title of this paper—include Artisti, Bangl, Cats Eye, Ecstasy (and Tanjim), and Soul Dance, brands that we consider haute couture in a limited, customized sense: these brands are not very exclusive or customized but come in limited edition and are trendy.

*F*ashioning *M*asculinity

Masculinity is constructed, cultural, contingent; it is, therefore, mutable and heterogenous; more complicated and vulnerable than femininity; is as inextricably imbricated with body and sexuality as femininity. It has often to negotiate between paradoxical demands: on the one hand, as outlined by Metcalf and Humphries in *The Sexuality of Men*, masculinity is characterized by "aggression, competitiveness, emotional ineptitude and coldness, and dependant upon an overriding and exclusive emphasis on penetration" (Nixon 1997: 296); on the other, it is realized through chivalry, responsibility, care, and strength. Plural and conflicting, there is no one or dominant version of masculinity; there are masculinities. Referring to Jeffrey Week's phrase "invented categories," Sean Nixon observes how masculinities are "the product of the cultural meanings attached to certain attributes, capacities, dispositions and forms of conduct at given historical moments" (Nixon 1997: 301). Patriarchy and its corollary praxis—sexual act, physical strength, male domination—are not sufficient enough to understand masculinities as these are traversed by various socio-cultural variables: racism (*are black and white masculinities the same?*), ethnicity (*aren't oriental males often either over-sexed or under-sexed?*), gender performance (*queer guys are invariably associated with femininity*), workplace culture (*corporate masculinity can be distinguished from military masculinity*) ...Four frames that Kimmel, Hearn and Connell employ in *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities* to examine the construction of masculinities incorporate these variables: first, the "social organization of masculinities in their global and regional iterations," second, the "institutional reproduction and articulation of masculinities," third, "the ways in which masculinities are organized and practiced within a context of gender relations," and fourth, "the ways in which individual men express and understand their gendered identities" (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell

2005: 7). So, there are not only different, even conflicting, versions of masculinity: more than that, relations between these versions are competitive and hierarchical: thus, during colonization, Englishness was often inextricably related to masculinity (Nixon 1997: 297) while Francis Macomber in Ernest Hemmingway's story "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber", who is a successful business socialite, is shown to gain his 'manhood' by shooting down a buffalo at the cost of his own life!

One of the foci of Masculinity Studies is to explore and expose this constructedness of masculinity. Like femininity, masculinity is performance, or more precisely, using Judith Butler's vocabulary, performativity; it is an elaborate ritual that a human identified as 'man' is supposed to maintain to stay 'man.' The ritual comprises what Foucault dubs as "technologies of the self"—set notions and practices—through which "subject-positions are inhabited by individuals" (Nixon 1997: 322). These technologies range from the everyday way of greeting a stranger to wearing hair in a certain way to philosophizing and legitimizing misogyny. In Mahesh Dattani's play *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, we find Sharad, a campy guy, demonstrating what it means to be 'manly':

> Don't sit with your legs crossed. Keep them wide apart. And make sure you occupy lots of room. It's all about occupying space, baby. The walk. Walk as if you have cricket bat between your legs. And thrust your hand forward when you meet people. … Hi! Shard! … And the speech. Watch the speech. No fluttery vowels. Not "It's so-o-o hot in here!"—but "It's HOT! It's fucking HOT!"
> (Dattani 2000: 101)

If placed vis-à-vis Jamaica Kincaid's crispy "Girl," this demonstration is symptomatic of the performativity of masculinity much of which has much to do with body. In conceptualizing masculinity, body is instrumental, not simply as a signifier of strength and functionality, but also as a site of grace and beauty. Thus, the "beautifully proportioned, nobly disposed, and perfectly ordered" (Glover and Kaplan 2007: 64) male body was indicative of moral strength for a pre-Jesus Greek man; the "armored body" of a knight which "exaggerates and obscures the lineaments of the male body enclosed within it" (Kelly 2011: 54)

underscores both the ability and the nobility aspects of manhood; the concept of able and functional male body was re-strengthened during and after the Industrial Age when manual labour became significant; with the advent of the media in the first half of the twentieth century, fit and muscular male body, denoting beauty and virility, started occupying space along with the female bodies. Man or masculinity's relation with body took a curious turn in the post-industrial age, more precisely in the last three decades, in which men are presented as visual erotica, as sumptuous spectacles: no more there 'body noble' or 'body chivalric'; it is 'body beautiful.' The turn of the century met another postmodernist twist that has blurred the borderlines between masculinity and femininity and questioned the hegemony of heteromasculinity. As if as a kind of synergy, there emerged metrosexual masculinity, a version of masculinity deeply imbricated with body and looks.

Fashion, shopping, and consumption don't go with men: this is a prevalent concept and practice; to many, however, this is a myth. There were knights and samurais—popular icons of chivalric and independent masculinity—whose style became fetish and who were considered as fashion statements. Still, for long, men have been outside the parlance of fashion. So much so that the West at the end of the eighteenth century saw, in Carl Flugel's words, 'The Great Masculine Renunciation': this was an "occasion" in which men "abandoned their claim to be considered beautiful" and "henceforth aimed at being only useful" (quoted in Bourke 1996: 23). Victorian England is, however, a good example that weakens this myth (?) of renunciation. Take, for example, the fashion-fussy *flâneurs*—city strollers—who appear in many descriptions including Oscar Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* while Christopher Breward in his *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life in 1860-1914* demonstrates how much time and energy Victorian Englishmen would put to buy and display their clothing. At the end of the nineteenth century, the emergence of advertising, a corollary of the widespread colonization and what Stuart Hall calls "commodity racism" (Hall 1997: 240), cashed in much on images of men—explorers, adventurers, brave— but, still, men were not explicitly subjected to the 'gaze' as women were. One of the reasons of the de-eroticized and neutralized representation of men in the pre-

postmodern era might be to undercut the controlling mechanism of gaze. The heteropatriarchal versions of masculinity position men as onlookers and women as looked-at so as both to organize the gaze and maximize male visual pleasure. After World War II, however, the unprecedented flourish of the media coupled with the mushrooming of critical theories, the hegemony of information technology, and the consumption culture around and after the 70s impacted upon and re-configured representation of men and masculinity in popular visual discourses. The body, the looks, the wear, all became subjects of scrutiny and hence needed to be taken care of. Be it a muscular body or a lean one, be it glowing skin or dandruff-free hair, be it a lounge suit or a T, technologies of masculinity now involve looks—a technique which for long women were supposed to address—and this concern for the looks brought forth metrosexuality.

A coinage of the twenty-first century, a metrosexaul man is a narcissist who is aware of or obsessed with his look, maintains a stylish urban lifestyle, and is attuned to the aesthetic trends of his time. Mark Simpson, who is said to have coined this buzzword, describes a metrosexual man as:

> a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis—because that's where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are. He might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference. Particular professions, such as modelling, waiting tables, media, pop music and, nowadays, sport, seem to attract them but, truth be told, like male vanity products and herpes, they're pretty much everywhere.
>
> (Simpson "Metrosexual?" n.p.)

Simpson was not at all serious when he defined metrosexuality; it was picked by the media and was soon made a catchword. Well, you may question the politics of such nomenclature but you cannot ignore it as an irrelevant hype. Whatever name you give, contemporary men in their attitude to and negotiation with looks and fashion have triggered a 'new' version of masculinity that re-values what it means to be a man. Visualize David Beckham in his fashion magazine poses. A metrosexual icon, "Becks" allegedly proclaimed that "he likes to be admired" and,

more importantly, he "doesn't care whether the admiring is done by women or by men" (Simpson "Meet" u.p.). This was Beckham's response after he stormed the media for posing for a glossy gay magazine in the UK. For long, or more precisely before the Calvin Klein ads eroticized the male body in the 1970s, fashion and aesthetic sense were either women's or non-straights men's prerogative. Metrosexual men's narcissistic obsession with looks and style re-negotiated masculinity. Vanity is no more exclusively feminine and a flashy outfit is no more a queer referent. Metrosexuality, which still smacks of subtle homophobia, queers sexual and gendered binaries.

Metrosexuality has hit Bangladesh in recent years thanks (!) to information technology. The thriving industry of shopping malls, roadside gyms, up-beat men's salons, beauty pageants like "You Got the Look," and men's fashion and lifestyle magazines—all testify to the emergence of an urban body culture catering to and creating metrosexual men, men craving for a look and looks. The first half of the title of this paper—apart from cryptically referring to four popular Bangladeshi brands—captures the promiscuous, narcissistic nature of metrosexual masculinity. The phrase "Ecstatic Dance" refers to the energy and enthusiasm with which men are tapping their feet to the changing beats of fashion while "Artistic Bang" reflects the ways in which men syncretize masculine stress and aesthetic sense generating a consumerist constituency. The co-habitation of 'dance'—movement, transition, on-beat—and 'bang'—stylish, assertive, awesome—is indicative of the destabilizing of masculinity.

*M*asculinizing *F*ashion

A cursory glance at the advert and promo materials of men's clothing in Bangladesh may give us an idea of this dancing and banging! We may call it 'fashion masculinized' in the sense that fashion—wearing certain looks—is now instrumental to the realization of masculinity. Quite understandably, fashionable stylizing is harder for men than it is for women. This is not simply because metrosexuality is still in its teens, but chiefly because men's stylizing often requires negotiating between differing versions of masculinity and sexuality so that it sells.

This section gives a short critical reading of some select visuals of men culled from contemporary Bangladeshi adverts. These images of men are spectacular, erotic, and inviting, generating voyeurism, narcissism, and fetishism: these are "voyeuristic, because here are beautiful men to look at"; these are "narcissistic, because the male models are confident of their look and appeal and invite approving gaze"; and these are "fetishistic, because cleavages or abs, chains or glasses, are foregrounded in many cases" (Hossain and Hossain u.p.). Having one explicit objective—viz. creating desire—these images supply examples of desired looks and thus excite desires to look-like. Keeping in mind the audience—both youth (irrespective of wealth) and affluent (irrespective of age)—that these ads target, let me put the visual representation of metrosexual men under two categories: ectomorphs, or cool, and mesomorphs, or hot. In order to pinpoint generic styles, the analysis of the select codes of masculinity reads six compositional components: clothes, accessories, hair, skin, body, and the setting.

Ectomorphs, the cool

In the biological sciences, an ectomorph is a thin or skinny guy who finds it hard to gain weight. This paper customizes the 'ectomorph' both to distinguish it from the muscled guys and to concentrate on the 'new' inflection of the ectomorph body. He is lean or fit with stringy muscles and carefully pronounced curves; has delicate frame and bone structure; lean waist; flat chest or balanced cleavage; is agile, young, and trendy. Ectos are 'cool': attractive, narcissistic, nonchalant. He is aware of his looks; is abreast with the changing patterns of clothes, behaviour and lifestyle; devotes enough time to keep his body fit. Ecto is the boy next door who steals your glance. The ectomorphs can be further divided into two categories: the *pankha* version and the *jolil* version.

The* pankha *version

An ecto *pankha* is young, slim, attractive. *Pankha* is a Bangla slang which has its origin in the English "punk" but retains little of its outrageous or rebellious zeal. A man is a *pankha* if he is stylish, self-aware, confident. Good-looking and up-beat, his outfit is casual: a polo, a T, or a semi-formal shirt; mostly short and body-fit; having cap or

short sleeve, and rolled up if long; cuts, colours and designs are cheerful or rebellious. He flaunts accessories and jewellery ranging from bracelet to a multi-layered chain to a pair of cool glass. His hair is styled carelessly or peeps through a stylized cap. He may prefer a well-shaved chin or may wear trendy stubbles, but his skin is fresh and glowing, an outcome of care and concern. He looks straight at you, or flirts with your gaze, or is just self-absorbed. Ecto *pankhas* are good choice for clothing ads as clothes look cool on slim bodies.

The jotil *version*

An ecto *jotil* is neat, slim, sexy. *Jotil* is a Bangla slang denoting being awesome or gorgeous. The ecto *jotil* is different from a *pankha* in his attitude and attire. Here is a guy who is semi-formal, sporting a formal shirt tucked in or a sports coat with one or two buttons open, thus giving a mixed sense of formalism and flirtatiousness. He is cool enough with a pair of dark or chrome glasses, a slim bracelet or chain maybe, and a smart belt. His hair is gel-controlled or cropped short. He may wear patterned stubbles and his skin is fresh and bright. His look—mystified though the glasses—and posture—relaxed but conscious—betray I-know-how-I-look attitude: self-confident, impressive, prepared.

Mesomorphs, the hot

Biologically, a mesomorph has large muscles, broad body frame, and can gain muscle easily. In this paper, a meso is a well-built guy; has defined chest, inflated biceps, and prominent shoulders; has washboard abs or six-packs; a well-proportioned waist; is overbearing, athletic, and dare-do. He is 'hot': attractive, seductive, eye-candy who spends much time and energy to win an approving look. Based on the attire, mesos can be sub-divided further: the *kothin* version and *chorom* version.

The kothin *version*

A meso *kothin* is well-built, attractive, sexy. *Kothin* is another Bangla slang the translation of which is "hard" but it means more than that. If a man is *kothin*, he is stylish, tough, eye-catching. Well-proportioned and well-curved, he knows which clothes flaunt the body beauty; his outfit, therefore, includes skin-tight or body-fit casuals like t-shirt or polo with cap or short sleeve so as to direct attention to chest and arm muscles.

Cuts, colours and patterns are often dark or gothic. He is fond of accessories and jewellery: earrings, bracelet, chain, sunglass, tattoos, piercing, and what not. His hair is spiked or short; his chin shaven; his skin bright. He may aggressively flirt with your eyes or just keeps his eyes averted, both enhancing sassiness. The carefully planned setting—dark wall, sports ground, junkyard—adds a kind of power to the assumed 'toughness' of these men.

The chorom *version*

A meso *chorom* is gym-fresh, seductive, exciting. *Chorom* is a Bangla slang, now a youth fad, denoting "extreme" and connoting being awesome, hot. His body is gym-toned; the muscles of his chest, arms and abs are prominent and geometrically patterned so as to enhance narcissistic and voyeuristic aesthetics. He is either bare-chested or his shirt is unbuttoned, flaunting his cleavage, often made prominent by the use of sweat. He likes wearing jeans or workout pants, prefers heavy boots or shoes, and doesn't mind showing off his undies. He tries all kinds of accessories—heavy belt, flashy sunglasses, thick bracelets—that flatter his sauciness. He is hard and gorgeous but not necessarily aggressive. Narcissistic and powerful, here is a beefcake.

The metrosexual images of men thus queer conventional masculinity. I would like to pinpoint four aspects of this queering: the nature of men's wear, the use of accessories, the condition of skin and hair, and the building of muscles. The choice of colour, cut and fabrics no more conforms to any fixed notion; thus a Bang guy is comfy in a shocking red casual shirt (Fig. 3) and a Tanjim man finds grey gorgeous (Fig. 7). There is an abundance of accessories and jewellery, and undies became subjects of spectacle. Muscles are enhanced and organized not to exude a sense of power or aggression but to maximize visual erotica. Quite interestingly, sharp lines between masculinity and femininity, or heteromasculinity and Camp, are not evident. This re-conceptualizing of masculinity and re-subjectivizing of men has been focused on in the first part—entitled "From Nabab to *kebab*"—of this two-part paper. In this paper, I argue that metrosexual masculinity culture has a strong capitalist agenda.

Fig. 2 The *pankha* version (BANG!

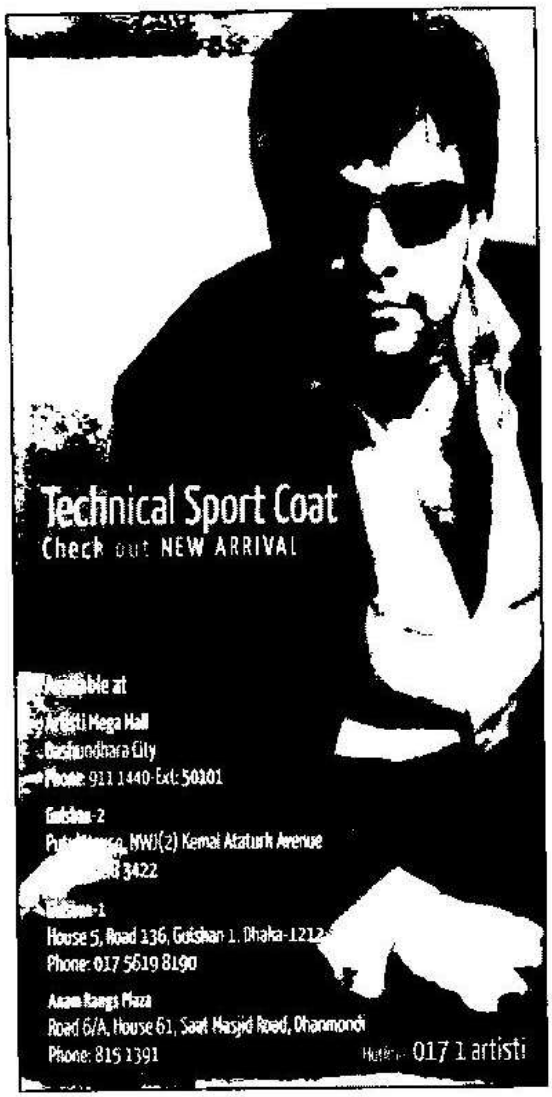

Fig. 3 The *jotil* version (Artisti)

Fig. 4 The *kothin* version (Tanjim)

Fig 5: The *chorom* version (Soul Dance; cropped)

Guys Going Shopping

New codes of metrosexual masculinity have composed a discursive regime in which consumption is imperative. Men go shopping. Men go jogging. Men buy creams. Men try gyms. Metrosexual culture has evolved a 'body culture' which involves developing and having 'body toned' and 'looks groomed.' When I was young, I heard people saying "ছেলেদের আবার বয়স কী?" or "ছেলে কালো না ফর্সা ব্যাপার না"; now the thing is not that clear-cut. Looks became an inevitable component of masculinity that fuel consumerist concerns.

Take, for example, the staple male model, David Beckham. On the one hand, his metrosexual image bulges his bank balance; Mark Simpson told us that Beckham earned in just one year "around $8 million for sponsoring various male fashion accessories, such as Police sunglasses" (Simpson "Meet" u.p.). On the other hand, the sunglasses that Beckham was wearing had a strong impact on the image-building and selling of Police. Quite understandably, metrosexuality is a 'cultural logic' of all-inclusive consumerism. Metrosexual men invoke, in Freud's terms, both 'object-cathexis'—a desire to *have* 'the' other person—and 'identification'—a desire to *be* the 'other' person. Thus these eroticized men in visual discourse have advanced a set of cultural materials and established those materials as components of male or masculine identity. They promulgated certain forms of looks and looking that became instrumental to identifying and subjectivizing an individual. Men these days are aware of and fussy about the clothes, the accessories, the hair style, the skin, and the body. The looks along with the function of the body have become a cultural capital which stands for masculinity, contemporaneity, and individuality.

Queer Consumption

Displaying male beauty and the corollary consumption were once gay prerogatives. It was after Calvin Klein revolutionized the fashion industry in the 1970s by using men as explicit visual erotica that consumerist culture identified the commercial potential of eroticized men and has exploited it. However, the fear that men-for-display may be thought as queeny and hence un-masculine was always there. When Simpson playfully used the term 'metrosexuality' in one of his articles,

the media and fashion industry instantly cashed in on it to differentiate between the straight-but-beautiful-guys and the 'sissy'-type-'homos' (*sissy* and *homo* are often used derogatorily). This homophobic strain has been weakened in the contemporary metrosexual culture. However, the question of the target of these metrosexual guys—their audience—is still disturbing. Who is the intended audience of these images? — straight men? gay men? women? For straight guys, these metrosexuals provide techniques of self through which to inhabit masculine subject-positions. For gay guys, it is more: these images offer scopophilic pleasure and corresponding subjectivization. Businesses are alert in identifying the consumer behaviour of gay men. Traditionally, gay guys are (thought to be) devoted to grooming, to look good and feel confident, which do bring about change in their life-styles. Many of them frequent gyms to gain chiseled biceps, triceps, chests, abs, and asses. And they spend a lot on this kind of grooming. For example, the monthly budgets for buying grooming and beautifying products by the gay men interviewed for this paper range from 3,000 to 15,000 Tk. This buying power of gay men must have impacted upon the nature of adverts for male beauty products. Many of our respondents said that they are "turned on" by the spectacle of the beefcakes in the Soul Dance ads and ads like this considerably affect their buying behaviour. A respondent wittily remarked: "Being gay is expensive." The consumerist culture has cashed in as usual on this need.

Men Market

The visual proliferation of cool dudes and hot guys in recent decades has expanded the fashion and beauty industry and the men market. Four aspects that I identified as crucial to understand metrosexuality cater to consumerism. Thus, a man *requires* updating his wardrobe and follow fashion seasons (e.g. *Pahela Baishakh* or winter); he *feels like* piling accessories and jewellery to suit different events; he *needs to* try a range of skin and hair care products to leave his skin lively and get his shoulder dust-free; he *has to* visit gyms or practise yoga so that he looks fit. Further boosted by fashion magazines like *Canvas* and beauty contests like "YGTL," men's grooming now has a huge market: there are many men's salons like Persona Adams and Facewash; the

supershops boast of special sections for men's body care products ranging from Scholl footcare to 'Max' fairness cream; there are numerous shops that sell only men's accessories; and there's a gym in almost every *para* in Dhaka. The well-proportioned male bodies—attainable but tough to gain—have also encouraged the use of steroids and cosmetic surgery, thus ensuring quick success and approbation. So the re-fashioning of men that is often seen as a way of queering masculinity can, from another point of view, be seen as a postmodernist ploy for consumption. Adverts have a 'legitimate' goal, that is, to create desire for what you don't need or never thought of. The metrosexual men in the fashion ads boost the men market.

Female Gaze

If the 60s narrative cinema had invoked what Laura Mulvey called the "male gaze," the spectacle of men in the fashion ads today invoke the "female gaze." Here are men to-be-looked-at and here are women to look at them, deriving aesthetic and scopophilic pleasure regardless of what the biological sciences and religions proclaim. Now, this invocation of the female gaze has significant effect on consumption. In Bangladesh, women—mothers, sisters, and wives—still do a lot of shopping for men, either because men are busy with their jobs or they find buying clothes un-masculine. Metrosexual masculinity negotiates between the *masculine*—just being a man—and *feminine*—'feminized' because subject to the gaze—aspects of masculinity. Thus, the eroticism of men displayed triggers female voyeuristic pleasure while the guys' so-called feminization helps women disavow the pleasure. This simultaneous operation of contradictory but complementary impulses renders these men attractive and acceptable, leaving women buyers evoked and convinced at once.

Touchable Spectacle

In "Exhibiting Masculinity," Nixon identifies "shop interiors" as crucial sites for the "staging" of looking (Nixon 1997: 324): the use of lights and shadow, the placement of mirrors and mannequins, the stroll that a consumer takes through the shop—all contribute to formulate certain spectatorship and subjectivization. Taking this thread from Nixon, let me digress a little here and focus on the use of male figures

and male mannequins as interior design in men's wear outlets. For example, the interior of the Soul Dance shop at A.R. Plaza maximizes the scope of scopophilia. Colossal images of topless hunks cover its walls; they do not let you miss the grandeur. While the choice of colour—black/white—makes these images distant and mysterious, the very placing of shelves along the chest, abs and groins of the men leaves them vulnerable, both to look and to touch: it is fantasy come true! The facelessness of the men enhances the eroticism as it foregrounds the body: man being identified by body. A mannequin, on the other hand, is a fetish, replacing fleshly subject with plastic replica. A mannequin is fantasy-come-true, an ideal male body which is desirable and achievable as well. A mannequin demonstrates how a particular clothes or jewellery look when it is worn. But it can serve more! Male mannequins are often eroticized: his jacket is unzipped leaving his rippling abs and chiseled chest open; his thigh-gripping pant is evocative; his footwear is trendy. These visual representations—the bare-chested guys in the photos and the mannequin—offer touchability that enhances visual pleasure and strengthens identification with the 'ideal' male body.

*M*asculine *S*tress

What happens when a man is incompatible with metrosexual culture or lacks access to it? The identification process triggered by the male model has many pitfalls, as audience's inability to identify may produce anxiety, inferiority complex, peer pressure, and even eating disorders. The process of identification involved here is scopic and voyeuristic; spectacularity is, therefore, crucial in it. However, five factors that Eisler, Skidmore and Ward identified in their 1988 book as ingredients of 'Masculine Gender Role Stress' or MGRS[3] (Mussap u.p.) do not include looking or being unattractive. Metrosexual culture added 'being unattractive'—a 'Feminine Gender Role Stress' or FGRS—to masculine stress. To many, this is men's attempt at appropriating masculinity in a post-feminist world as well as men's affirmative response to the 'age of spectacle' in which identity is as much formed by one's achievement and orientation as it is by how one looks. Men are now increasingly identified by their bodies, a process which was once only women's 'predicament.'

Anxiety and Inferiority Complex

'Ordinary' men feel pressurized vis-à-vis the image of the metrosexual man. These models are not presented as unachievable iconic figures; they are *there* around you and they are attractive. This attainability of attractiveness creates a comparison standard for attractiveness and consequently lowers individual's satisfaction with what a man is. The metrosexual men in ads—in the magazine pages, in the websites, and on billboards—are visual reminders of the power and effectiveness of body beauty, generating anxiety and inferiority complex. For men who have considerable buying power, this body culture is self-boosting. They welcome it as a space in which to groom and groove oneself which strengthens self-confidence, helps to advance in career as well as sexual life, and renders life fuller and healthier. However, this affordability in turn generates a kind of unrest: he has to be alert to the changing trends and compulsively procures things to stay 'hip.' On the other hand, there are men—young men from low-income groups and adult men in general—to whom this culture is disconcerting. Inability to afford flashy stuff or lack of access to the chameleon variety of metrosexual culture produces sense of insecurity and depression. They may lose confidence and wonder if they are at all attuned to the contemporary world. Some are even worried if the lack of looks puts their 'masculinity' into question. As masculinity is performative and contingent, failure in maintaining dominant codes of masculinity forms inferiority complex, a complex which further complicates the assertion and deconstruction of oppressive masculinity.

Peer pressure

Things go worse when a man's colleagues or brothers-in-law are men with looks. Two major kinds of peer pressure are identifiable: the assumption that he doesn't look attractive enough and the realization that he is socially or financially unable to embrace metrosexual culture. These anxieties and complexes may end in nervous breakdown, lack of confidence, and confusion of values, leading to unnecessary aggression, risk-taking, and administrative and ethical corruption. Referring to their own experiences or alluding to some real life events, some of our

respondents opined that the inability to cope with dominant codes of masculinity may lead to violence against women, thus asserting the masculinity which men feel are under threat!

Adonis Complex

The well-groomed well-built metrosexual models are products of and generate the 'Adonis Complex,' which denotes a pathological obsession with appearance leading to compulsive toning of bodies. Bulging arms, pumped-up pecs, and lean waist—features of a 'perfect' male physique forwarded by men on display create a desire for the 'perfect body.' This postmodernist focus on the look, on the surface, has spawned a handful of physical and psychological problems, four of which Pope, Phillips and Olivardia identified in their ground-breaking book *Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession*. The 'weightlifting and exercise compulsions' render men so obsessed with building bodies that they become oblivious of other factors including healthy sexual and domestic life and developing career. The 'body dysmorphic disorder' leaves men fussy about even minor physical drawbacks resulting in increasing dissatisfaction and depression. The 'eating disorders' range from fatal bulimia to unscientific dieting which in turn weakens mental and physical performances. 'Steroid abuse' occurs when men become desperate to attain perfect bodies and make use of steroids which has numerous after-effects. An inevitable offshoot of late capitalism, the Adonis Complex pampers endless consumption and leaves men vulnerable to mental, physical, sexual, and financial unrest. Ironically, any kind of unrest or crisis gives way to new areas of consumption. This is the suffocating circle of consumerism that defines contemporary life.

Interestingly, all these masculine stress may provide a glimpse of the age-old predicament of women whose gender has for long been defined by body, beauty, and potency. However, it would be wrong to argue that the range and intensity of the anxiety and pressures that men and women experience are similar. The point of difference that Rosalind Gill identified in "Rethinking Masculinity" is that men have other sources of identification—job, position, property, violence, being a man—through which they may ignore or minimize the 'masculine

stress,' the sources which women usually don't have. A good example could be drawn from the 1997 British film *The Full Monty*. Here are four unemployed men who plan to earn money through male strip tease. At the brink of the first show, month-long enthusiasm and hard efforts face a short jolt: they understand that they are going to be *judged* and *enjoyed* by female eyes. Feeling the vulnerability of being looked-at, David, the fat one, prays that the women will "be a bit more understanding about us" (cited in Bordo 2006: 334). Exposure to the gaze is "disarming, and disconcerting too" (Hossain and Hossain u.p.)!

*B*irth of *S*alesmen

"Thanks to marketers finally paying attention to me, I am now buying stuff that I did not know I needed. I have been transformed from a 'fat, dumb, and happy' male to a 'lighter, smarter, and insecure' man" (Readers Report u.p.). This is what Dennis Wong rather jocularly wrote in the online version of *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Quite understandably, this casual joke metonymizes the nature, spirit and consequences of metrosexual masculinity culture: the concept of masculinity is changed and queered, and metrosexuality has foregrounded male body beauty which has brought about a pattern of ceaseless consumption and increased masculine stress. We are witnessing the birthing of sales-men who like and learn to display and sell fitness and attractiveness, a move that re-configured stoic and oppressive masculinity. To an optimist, this is a gender-bender move; to a cynic, this is another pretext of contemporary consumerist culture.

Notes

1. This article is the second part of a longer article presented through multimedia on 12 December, 2008 in the International Conference on "Democracy, the 'New World Order' and the English Studies" at East West University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The first part is entitled "From Nabab to *kebab*: the re-gazing of masculinity in Bangladeshi haute couture visual discourse."

2. In "From Nabab to *kebab*," four major visual codes of masculinity are identified.

3. "For men, appearing physically inadequate, expressing emotions, being subordinate to women, being intellectually inferior, and failing to perform in their work and sex life, are interpreted as particularly stressful (these five factors comprise the Masculine Gender Role Stress scale (MGRS; Eisler & Skidmore, 1987))" (Mussap u.p.).

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