

**“The Metrosexual Man” Appearance in Bulgaria: a Western Trend in a
Post-State Socialism Context**

By
Pavlina Doublekova

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Department of Gender Studies*

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Supervisor: Professor Allaine Cerwonka

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Abstract

Metrosexuality has become an influential form of masculine identity for young men in the globalizing world. It appeared in the Western world from the intersection between the development of consumer society and the shift of gender order. From the junction of these processes, the figure of the narcissistic young men, best symbolized in the figure of the soccer player David Beckham, who enjoys self-indulging and invests a lot of finances and efforts in his appearance, emerged. Inevitably, once established, this masculinity was transmitted in other contexts. This paper studies “metrosexual man” as a Western trend which appears in the post-state socialism context of Bulgaria and that determines its specific form of existence and nuances of meanings.

In order to situate the study in the Bulgarian context, the paper investigates the post-state socialism legacy in the country, with a special accent on gender norms and constructions of masculinity. Then, through the method of discourse analysis, it reconstructs the media image of a popular Bulgarian metrosexual soccer player and compares and contrasts it with the representation of David Beckham. Lastly, through in-depth interviews and ethnographic participant observation, the study focuses on the young metrosexuals in the country and their construction of masculinity.

Through the analysis of the gathered data, the paper shows that as an overarching trend, metrosexuality allows more flexibility in gender positioning. As for the Bulgarian context, it demonstrates that meanings of consumerism and male vanity are different in the country, and heterosexual normativity is still very strong, due to local historical and material conditions.

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Introduction and Methodology

The tendency of young men in Western societies, who are concern with their look and formulate their masculine identity around their appearance, became a visible social phenomenon in the 90's. In order to explore it further, the British journalist Mark Simpson invented the term “metrosexual man” in his article “Here comes the mirror man” published on 15th of November, 1994 in *The Independent*¹. Afterwards, the term and the issue it raised gained popularity and become a matter of discussion. The soccer player David Beckham is always pointed as a personification and symbol of this new set of ideals. What characterizes him as a metrosexual man is his vanity, taste for self-indulging and openly admitting the fact that he enjoys using a lot of cosmetics and wearing expensive designer products. Those lifestyle choices are the primary markers of his masculine identity, while previous determinants such as sexuality, have lost importance.

Metrosexuality first appeared in Western societies but in the situation of developing process of globalization, its values easily spread across the world and found local applications in different contexts. However, each context has its specificities, which shape the implementation of new models coming from other contexts. This thesis will study the appearance and the specific meanings of this Western trend in the post-state socialism context of Bulgaria.

Being a “metrosexual man” is becoming a more and more common form of masculine identification for the males of young age in the country. It was first introduced by a pop singer – Rushi Videnliev - who had been living in Italy for a long period of time and then came back in Bulgaria, and afterwards it become hip among models, actors and soccer players, who are

¹Simpson, M., *Here come the mirror men*, available at http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

the role models of the young generation of Bulgarian men and who themselves are significantly influenced by the ideals of metrosexuality in formulating their masculinity.

However, even though the presence of this new set of norms is visible on the level of everyday living, it is undertheorized on the level of academic studies. As a matter of fact, even in the West, metrosexuality is mainly discussed and problematized in articles published in popular magazines and not in scholarly research. Simpson is one of the leading figures, commenting on it, but since he is a journalist, his style of writing is not scholarly. His tone of talking about metrosexuality is different and his observations beg to be complicated with questioning the deeper layers of this social phenomenon, like what people are trying to achieve with that and what are they signifying. That leaves a significant gap in the literature about the issue and the data gathered for this thesis complicates the understanding about metrosexuality, because it reveals that it is not simply a superficial vanity but it presents a new set of values, which allow to young men to fantasize that there is a chance for social mobility and success. Moreover, all of the journalistic publications focus on the Western context of appearance and development of metrosexuality and this tendency has not been studied in a non-Western context. Generally, this form of male identity is vaguely researched in the region of Eastern Europe and there are no investigations at all about it in the specific Bulgarian context.

Since the influence of this trend is becoming more significant in Bulgaria, but there is a lack of scholarly investigations, that makes the appearance of the metrosexuality as a Western trend in a post-state socialism context meaningful to be studied further. This research will cast light on the issue in several directions – first, it will find out what is the ideology of metrosexuality as a Western tendency; then the research will study how metrosexuality works in a non-Western context by tracing the changes made in its original values in order to make it applicable in Bulgaria; last but not least, looking specifically at the Bulgarian context, the

study will allow a better understanding of the gender positioning in the society in the present socio-historical moment, because through following the appearance of the metrosexuality, it will reflect the reaction of the post-state socialism generation of young men to the moment of turbulent economic conditions, in which new codes of masculine identity are established.

For the opening and the grounding of the general theoretical framework of the paper, R.W. Connell's book "Masculinities"² will be used in which the main method applied by the author is the ethnographical approach developed on the basis of case studies. The most essential concept reached in Connell's writing is the understanding that "masculinity" is not a single, monolithic category, defined once and forever, but it is rather a situational construct, depending on the socio-cultural context and the given historical moment. With regard to that observation, this paper will first study the "metrosexual man" as a Western tendency by focusing on its specific meaning in the context where it was defined, the history of its development, and the possible relations with larger tendencies of the time, such as the consumer society, globalization and changing gender positioning.

Then, in the second chapter, in order to contextualize the research specifically in Bulgaria, this study will look at the legacy of the communist past of the country, with regard to the prescribed gender roles and especially the normatives about masculinity. For that purpose Petar Vodenicharov's articles^{3 4} will be used to accurately reconstruct the pattern of changing requirements towards men, by comparing the ideal of masculinity before the establishment of the regime with the new ideas brought about by the communist state and the shifts within its framework of operation.

² Connell, R., *Masculinities*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995

³ Vodenicharov, Petar "Restructuring Gender to Preserve Nationalism: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Memory Politics of the Bulgarian Totalitarian State in the 1960s and 1970s". Karl Kaser and Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch, (eds.) *Gender and Nation in South-Eastern Europe*. Anthropological Yearbook of European Cultures. Vol. 14 (2005)

⁴ Vodenicharov, Petar, "Fighting Masculinity in a Communist State? On the Discourse of Real Socialism in Bulgaria", In Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (eds.) *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspective on Womanhood and Manhood in 19th and 20th Century*, Graz : Institut für Geschichte der Universität Graz, 2002

Once the post-state socialism legacy is explored, chapter three will investigate the images of the new role models of metrosexuality, by comparing the representation of David Beckham to the one of the Bulgarian soccer player Valeri Bojinov. This will allow to find the similarities in the construction of the metrosexuality which transcend the boundaries of the different national contexts and as well to distinguish the entities, which are different in the Bulgarian case. In the last chapter, the study will look at the reception of metrosexuality among young Bulgarian men and will study why this set of normatives is appealing to them.

Lastly, on the basis of the gathered and analyzed material and the theory applied, the paper will draw conclusions about the specificities of metrosexuality as a Western tendency in general, and about the differences that appeared in its Bulgarian translation.

The exit hypothesis of this paper is that the “metrosexual man” appears in Bulgaria as a Western tendency which is developing in a post-state socialism context that determines its specific shape, sphere of influence and form of existence. The research wants to determine those specific, local boundaries, forms and meanings of existence of this male identity. The research questions that need to be answered in order to achieve that are: “What is the motivation behind the appearance of the “metrosexual man” in Bulgaria?”, “How does it relate to the communist past of the country and the present economic conditions?”, “Why this image is appealing to those men and what do they want to signify by identifying with it?”

Several methods of gathering and analyzing data will be used in this thesis. First, the media image, constructed on the pages of popular Bulgarian magazines, of a famous Bulgarian soccer player who is representative of metrosexuality and can be perceived as trying to imitate Beckham’s image, will be reconstructed and compare with the one of Beckham through discourse analysis. The usage of this method is appropriate here, because of it is interested in “language and texts as sites in which social meanings are created and reproduced, and social identities are formed” as F. Tonkiss pinpoints in “Analyzing

Discourse”⁵. That way the study of the public image of the metrosexual role models, taken from two different contexts, will reflect the ideology behind this masculine identity and the way it is presented in each society which is “interpretative context” defined as “the social setting in which a particular discourse is located”⁶. That will help to distinguish the overarching characteristics of metrosexuality and the local specificities of the Bulgarian context.

The second and the third methods applied are closely interrelated, because I made ethnographical participant observation, visiting the places attended by “metrosexuals”, such as coffee places, clubs and shopping malls in the capital of Bulgaria - Sofia, and at the same time taking interviews with them. The basic tool used for the observations is “situational thick description”⁷, in order to describe the places and to distinguish their specificities.

Simultaneously, five in-depth, open-ended interviews with young men, between 18 and 25 years old, who can be categorized as metrosexuals, were taken. However, since the concept of metrosexuality is basically a theoretical tool and men following those norms do not consider themselves as being “metrosexuals”, I was in a position of judging who can be labeled as constructing his identity through the social codes of “metrosexuality”. In order to decide, I was looking for men, fitting into the definition given by Simpson. The basic purpose of the interviews was to find out the attitude of my informants towards the present socio-economic conditions in Bulgaria, its communist past, the new ideals entering with the Western media productions and the emerging gender requirements.

I did not have difficulties with creating contacts with potential interviewees, since I was doing them with people around my age in an informal surrounding. Nevertheless, a significant difficulty, which required a careful preparation beforehand and deciding several

⁵ Tonkiss, F., “Analyzing Discourse”, In *Researching Society and Culture*, SAGE, 1998

⁶ Ibid, p. 249

⁷ Denzin, N., *Interpretative Interactionism*, Sage: London, 2001, p. 109

questions before entering the field, was the gender positioning – me being a female, interviewing males about their masculine identification.

The most important issues I had to resolve at the preparatory stage were: my positioning as a researcher, the formulation of the power relations and the subjectivity of the interviewees. As a foundation of the methodology of the research Chris Weedon's article "Subjects"⁸ was a useful reading because of the description given by the author of the different possibilities that exist in defining subjectivity. For the purposes of this research, I used the understanding of the "liberal-humanist subject"⁹ which allowed me a construction of relation of equality with the interviewees. Of course, as Alessandro Portelli¹⁰ pinpoints, "equality, however, cannot be wished into being"¹¹, that is why it had to be established throughout mutuality and depends upon the "social conditions"¹² in which I was an "insider", as Donald Ritchie names it¹³.

Furthermore, I was careful to apply a feminist methodology in doing oral history, understood as "doing research with people rather than on them"¹⁴ as well as to be sensitive to all experiences and not omitting the once which do not fit into the dominant notion¹⁵. Together with this form of sensitivity, due to the specificity of the research, several matters, described by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln when comparing qualitative with quantitative ways of researching, were essential in doing the interviews for this thesis¹⁶. The correct application of those principles was important for my study of the "metrosexual man"

⁸ Weedon, Chris, "Subjects" In, *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*. Eagleton, M., (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 2003

⁹ Ibid, p.113

¹⁰ Portelli, A., "Research as an Experiment in Equality", In *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (English Translation Albany-New York: Suny Press, 1995)

¹¹ Ibid, p. 30

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ritchie, D., *Doing Oral History: Practical Advice and Reasonable Explanation for Anyone*, New York: Twayne, 1995

¹⁴ Reinharz, Shulamit, "The Principle of Feminist Research, a Matter of Debate", In *Disciplining Feminism. From Social Activism to Academic Discourse*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, p. 426

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 426

¹⁶ Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y., "Entering the Field of Qualitative Research", In *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, Sage London, 2003, p. 5-6

in the Bulgarian context, since I am investigating a current practice, which is a gender identification that is influencing many spheres of everyday living. The need of “postmodern” sensibility is visible, especially in relation to the overall framework of a trend, transmitted from the West to an Eastern European country and more specifically with regard to the above mentioned subject positioning and establishing relations of equality. Furthermore, in order to find out the personal motivation behind the actions I definitely needed to be able to capture the view point in the responses and to understand them in their own context. The main formula I was following in doing the interviews was, “engaging in conversation, having a cup of coffee”¹⁷ because it answered satisfactory to the needs of my study.

¹⁷ Ritchie, D., *Doing Oral History: Practical Advice and Reasonable Explanation for Anyone*, New York: Twayne, 1995, p. 57

Chapter 1 – The rise of metrosexuality in the West

As R.W. Connell argues¹⁸, masculinities are multiple and each is a socially constructed set of social expectations which varies according to context. It is an intersection of different factors which determine the specific meanings of what a man should be like according to the society at a given historical moment within a given culture. The socio-economic and cultural values, operating in a social space in a given temporal span, are among the most influential determinants. Metrosexuality has become one of the leading forms of masculine identities among young men in the present Western world. It is undoubtedly a product of its time, which emerged in response to two main reasons: the fast spreading consumerism which is determined to conquer new markets, and the overall climate of changing gender roles, which is prompted by feminist critique of the contemporary gender order.

Metrosexuality comes into being in this moment, as a possible answer to the challenges faced by men in this situation of shifting power relations between genders at certain levels and that is reflected in the values and it formulates. This new masculinity manages to be progressive in many aspects – by showing that sexuality does not need to be a base for formulating gender identity and that interests that are traditionally thought to be feminine can be as much enjoyed by men as well, which illustrates that the prescribed gender roles are socially constructed. Yet, it also creates new limiting boundaries by emphasizing on the importance of the outer appearance and establishing strict rules about how young men should look – good-looking, fit, wearing designer clothes and using cosmetics. Still, this focus on the appearance, is the outer expression ideology that stands behind this trend.

¹⁸ Connell, R., *Masculinities*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995

1.1 Who are the metrosexuals

The term “metrosexual men” itself was first introduced by the English journalist Mark Simpson in an article for *The Independent*, from 1994. The definition Simpson gives, to describe the emerging tendency in the West of males taking great deal of care for their outer appearance is:

The typical metrosexual is 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.¹⁹

As this definition points out, the metrosexual man has taken himself as his ultimate love object. Because of that, in all his discussions of metrosexuality, Simpson uses the term “narcissism” to describe this new form of masculinity, not as a technical or psychological category, but as an emphasis on the of great significance given to young men’s look and this is the meaning of “narcissism” this paper will use as well.

As the founder of the term emphasizes, the metrosexual men invest much effort and money into their look and that is why they like to be looked at by others. That way they believe to be appreciated by the society in general, including other men and women, no matter their sexual preferences. As a matter of fact, this is one of the most subversive characteristics of the metrosexuality in comparison with the traditional heterosexual patriarchal ideal in which women are the ones who should be gazed at by men²⁰. Furthermore, this positioning reverses the places of who is being active and who is being passive in the gender order since what is being looked at is static and the voyeur is the one performing the action. Since the

¹⁹ Simpson, M., http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/metrosexual_ios.html (accessed 13 February, 2008)

²⁰ Simpson, M., *Meet the metrosexual*, <http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/feature/2002/07/22/metrosexual/index.html> (accessed 18 May 2008)

metrosexual wants to be the center of attention, he might be read as a passive subject of other's (including women) gazes. Because of this shift in power relations, Simpson claims that: "no longer is a straight man's sense of self and manhood delivered by his relationship to women; instead it's challenged by it"²¹.

Due to the narcissism of the metrosexuals, who, by this popular definition, admire the most their own reflection and which is the core of this masculine identity, the other essential characteristic of metrosexuality is the irrelevance of the question of sexuality for its grounding and formulation. As Simpson puts it: "Metrosexual man might prefer women, he might prefer men, but when all's said and done nothing comes between him and his reflection"²². Still, since sexuality is not among the signifiers of belonging to the category of metrosexuals, men labeled as such can be both straight and homosexual, but it is not meaningful as a marker of individuality. What is important for the perception of the metrosexuals are the "lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, brands, social circles"²³. In relation to that, Simpson pinpoints that being a metrosexual is not so much a belonging to wealthy social class but it is rather a question of "spending priorities"²⁴. Since the outer appearance and the presentation is what matters the most, many young men are willing to invest substantial share of their income in building their image or even to sacrifice other things in order to be able to consume the right goods which ensure their possibility of being included in the prospectus social circles.

1.2 Historical overview

Even though metrosexuality is a new category, which is defined on the basis of other characteristics, other than sexuality, in the perspective of the historical development of the subjectivity and priorities behind metrosexuality, homosexuals played a vital role, still not

²¹ Ibid

²² Simpson, M., *Here come the mirror men*, http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

with their sexual preferences but with their style of living. The “prototype” of metrosexual men is the gay men of the 70’s, observes Simpson²⁵. The qualities in the homosexual’s way of living, which were taken as a basis of metrosexuality, were that gays were “decidedly single, definitely urban, dreadfully uncertain in their identity”²⁶. Moreover, they were interested in style and appearance and served as a “test-market”²⁷ for the possibilities of making men a better consumer.

In the 80’s this “gay lifestyle became an inspiration for non-homosexuals”²⁸. The image of the single, good-looking male appeared in many commercials on TV and in magazines. However, at this stage, this image of men was still silently admired but not yet largely practiced. Probably one of the reasons for that were the ideological fights between the heteronormative stereotypes and the new temptation, since this way of living was associated with homosexuality and a straight man might have been afraid to openly embrace such a lifestyle because he probably would have been labeled as gay.

The real change and popularization of the tendency begun in the 90’s, when the men’s style magazines mushroomed and were flooded with advertisements, promoting male cosmetics and clothes. It is often thought that Mark Wahlberg’s photo session for Calvin Klein’s underwear in 1990 was the actual beginning of “mainstream male vanity”²⁹. From this moment on, the metrosexual is “he’s everywhere and he’s going shopping”³⁰ in the Western world.

²⁵ Simpson, M., *Meet the metrosexual*, <http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/feature/2002/07/22/metrosexual/index.html> (accessed 18 May 2008)

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Simpson, M., *Here come the mirror men*, http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ *Rise of the Metrosexual*, <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/03/10/1047144914842.html> (accessed 18 May 2008)

³⁰ Simpson, M., *Here come the mirror men*, http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

However, even though the concern with the outer appearance was influencing more and more males, especially young men, it was still undertheorized as a social phenomena and its presence was in a phase of rejection by both – men affected by this image and the people around them. There was a certain degree of embarrassment combined with fear about what the others would think of the emerging metrosexual³¹. The lack of visible role models also increased the uncertainty of establishing this new normative of masculinity. Simpson explains that this was one of the main reasons why he come up with the term itself – to tackle this situation of confusion in which on the one hand many young men have begun enjoying being narcissist, but at the same time were afraid to state it clearly. As a matter of fact, this is the stage at which is metrosexuality in Bulgaria at present, as this paper will argue later. However, the new tendency could not be held “in the closet”³² for too long.

No doubt, after metrosexuality was defined, that made it more visible and slowly it gained a social prestige and even become a dominating ideal of masculinity among young men who could afford and were willing to follow suit. Moreover, soon role models emerged – like David Beckham, Brat Pitt and Tom Cruise – who made the image of metrosexuality even more attractive and desirable. What distinguishes those figures from previous famous men, appearing in the media, is that they openly admit their vanity, the efforts they put into their look and express their enjoyment of doing things that previously were labeled as feminine in the society, like consuming designer products or doing waxing of their bodies. Moreover, their image is appealing to a larger audience, which includes men and women with different sexual orientation. In addition to that, not all of them have a profession which requires them to be good looking, as for instance David Beckham who is a soccer player and not an actor or a model. Still, he invests a lot in his appearance and, in general, is even more famous for the

³¹ *MetroDaddy speaks!*, an interview with Mark Simpson, http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/feature/2004/01/05/metrosexual_ii/index.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

³² Ibid

way he looks than for the way he plays. Of course, those characteristics of metrosexuality were not left unnoticed and Simpson emphasizes that giving a name to this trend, attracted the attention of “a giant advertising company” and transformed “metrosexuality into a marketing tool” which was the actual reason “for this global epidemic of metrosex-mania”³³.

1.3 Metrosexuality as product of the consumer society

No doubt metrosexuality was promoted and gradually constructed through the mass media. The images of the new role models, were spread through glossy magazines, TV shows and newspapers in which besides the well know names of Brad Pitt and David Beckham, many commercials of different goods – clothes, cosmetics, sunglasses, watches - appeared showing how modern man has to look like. In a relation to that, Simpson argues that “metrosexuality is one of the most flagrant symptoms of a media-tized world: The male body was the last frontier and it’s now being thoroughly explored and mapped”³⁴. Furthermore, there is a reciprocal relation established between this masculine image and the media – on the one hand metrosexuality is a product of the media but on the other hand the contemporary popular media can not be successful if it does not present this masculine vision.

Of course, mass media is one of the main tools of spreading desired messages in the capitalistic consumer society, which is especially developed in the Western world. Zygmunt Bauman notes that the figure of the consumer is completely different than any other that has been operating before, because: “The way present-day society shapes its members is dictated first and foremost by the duty to play the role of the consumer”³⁵. This social organization makes its members live according to the logic that “one lives so that one can consume”³⁶. That way consumption has become a basic ground for formulating identity, which transcends

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Bauman, Z., *Globalization The Human Consequences*, Polity Press, 1998, p. 80

³⁶ Ibid, p. 81

many of the previously operating and shaping boundaries, like sexuality, gender and even national borders. It also determines the social circles in which one can participate and those from which this member of the society would be excluded since he or she does not consume the same entities.

There is one more essential characteristics of the consumerism which is shaping metrosexuality: “For the consumers in the society of consumers, being on the move – searching, looking for, not-finding-it or more exactly not-finding-it-yet is not a malaise, but the promise of bliss; perhaps the bliss itself”³⁷. This constant anxiety of searching is probably what challenges the consumer, makes him or her feel as an active participant in the game, even though the truth is that there is a restricted number of options available on the market, among which one can chose. What is more, the role models, like Brat Pitt and David Beckham, seems to stand in the public imagination as examples of successful consumption, as if the promised bliss is actually achievable and that encourages the consumption quest further.

However, the involvement of men in this game of consumption was an important enlargement of the market, which is constantly looking for new potential consumers. And the metrosexual men image was constructed as a result of this desired expansion. As Simpson pinpoints: “traditionally heterosexual men were the world’s worst consumers”³⁸ so they had to be made interested in their image or in other words to be seduced to become narcissist and to enter into the game of consumption.

As a matter of fact, this same market strategy was applied to women in the 80’s, when they had to be tempted as consumers, as Susan Douglas shows in the chapter “Narcissism as Liberation”³⁹. The advertising agencies based their campaigns on the presentation of female’s narcissism as the liberation of women’s free will. It was promoted as “the ability to indulge

³⁷ Ibid, p. 83

³⁸ Simpson, M., *Here come the mirror men*, http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

³⁹ Douglas, S., “Narcissism as Liberation”, In Scanlon ed., *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, 2000

oneself, pamper oneself, and focus at length on oneself without having to listen to the needy voices of others”⁴⁰. This same understanding of freeing the individuality to be selfish is implied in the messages targeted at men in the 90’s. What is not said by the commercials, however, is that this type of narcissism that they encourage, constructs new normatives of masculinity. These emerging ideals of what men should be like are especially targeted and influence young generation of males, which is establishing its identity in this context. In regard to that, Simpson observes that “metrosexual man is a commodity fetishist: a collector of fantasies about the male sold to him by advertising”⁴¹.

1.4 The changing gender order in the globalizing world

However, this extreme focusing on the outer appearance of young men is eased by greater level of instability of the previously dominating values, such as the construction of masculinity as a categorical domination over women in most aspects, which is inevitably related to the overall shifts in the gender positioning in the globalizing world and the advances made by feminism in specific, which have made women in the Western society more independent. In correspondence to this femininity emerged “a new kind of man, one less certain of his identity and much more interested in his image”⁴². This feature of metrosexuality is noticed by Simpson but it is not as largely discussed and analyzed as its relation to the consumerism and the values instilled by advertisements. Still, he argues that:

...the more independent, wealthy, self-centered and powerful women become, the more they are likely to want attractive, well-groomed, well-dressed men around them. Though not for very long. By the same token, the less men can rely on women, the more likely they are to take care of themselves. Narcissism becomes a survival strategy;⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 268

⁴¹ Simpson, M., *Here come the mirror men*, http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/mirror_men.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

⁴² Simpson, M., *Meet the metrosexual*, <http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/feature/2002/07/22/metrosexual/index.html> (accessed 18 May 2008)

⁴³ Ibid

A possible reading of this statement can be related to the fact that femininity and masculinity, as social constructs, are reciprocal terms, which determine one another's specific meaning in each socio-historical moment. That is why, it sounds reasonable to believe that if one the terms of this binary becomes more powerful than it used to be, this destabilizes the other complimentary position. Of course, a natural reaction to that will be the quest for new meaning of identity in order to be adequate to the new overall power relation. In that sense, metrosexuality can be seen as an answer to the advances of the feminism, which understands its claims and tries to adjust masculinity accordingly.

In that logic, the founder of the term metrosexual distinguishes two aspects of this new trend that has seduced a huge portion of Western young men – on the one hand it can be seen as liberation, because it shows that temptations that have been labeled as “unmanly” in the traditional heteropatriarchal order can actually be enjoyed by men⁴⁴ and because it demonstrates that sexuality does not necessarily have to be a main determinant of masculinity. On the other hand, however, metrosexuality presents a new sets of norms which are “kind of enslavement”⁴⁵ because the image of metrosexual man creates a new stereotype of social expectations towards young males. This observation can be related to the general discussion of the “crisis of masculinity” in Roger Horrocks’s “Masculinity in Crisis”⁴⁶. In this book the author argues that masculinity in Western society is in a crisis because of the stereotypical expectations and norms imposed on men, which are limiting their identity expression and are harmful to them. In relation to this view, metrosexuality also can be seen as prescribing expectation to young men.

From a male standing point, the controversy which determines the inner uncertainty and creates need for defining new meanings of masculinity such as metrosexuality, can be

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Horrocks, R., *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies and Realities*, The MacMillan Pres, Great Britain, 1994

explained as “crisis of masculinity” in the way Michael Kimmel⁴⁷ perceives it, exacerbated by the double-standards imposed by the society towards men. Kimmel studies the “crisis of masculinity” in American society by investigating the competing images of “a real man” on the political arena of the presidential elections. His claim is that the crisis is partially due to the development of feminism and the women’s liberation movements, because it has empowered women and they have begun entering fields which were traditionally reserved for men. However, Kimmel’s view about men’s rights being violated by the reshaping gender positions in the society is expressed from a male stand point. Nevertheless, from a feminist perspective the present social order is hetero-patriarchal and its ultimate aim is to change that. In that sense, this “crisis of masculinity” that males experience, may be interpreted as reaction to certain achievements of the feminism and metrosexuality comes as a second phase of dealing with the new gender positioning, when masculinity tries to adjust to the new situation.

Still, it is true that the shifts in gender positioning open space for uncertainty for young men, who can not fully rely on the model of their fathers any more in formulating their masculinity and encounter controversial messages, targeted at them, coming from the society. Simpson names the previous dominant ideal of masculinity “retrosexual” from today’s point of view and describes it as: “Effortless. Unselfconscious. Dated. It tastes just like your... *dad*”⁴⁸. Furthermore, they are not exactly sure what is expected of them in the frame of the present society. That way, the confusion originates not only in the opposition between the old and the new ideal of masculinity but it is made more complicated by the controversial images and expectations within the present socio-historical continuum which are combining the two sets of norms.

⁴⁷ Kimmel, M., “The Contemporary “Crisis” of Masculinity and Beyond”, In *Manhood in America: a cultural history*, New York: Free Press, 1996

⁴⁸ Simpson, M., *Retrosexual*, <http://www.marksimpson.com/blog/category/metrosexual/> (last accesses 18 May 2008)

This controversy is well illustrated in Susan Bordo's "Gentlemen or beast? The double bind of masculinity"⁴⁹, where the author argues that the present day culture expects from young men to combine the exclusionary opposite roles of being a "gentlemen" and at the same time being an "animal"⁵⁰. That is the core of the "double bind of masculinity", which is best personified in the character of the Beast from "Beauty and the Beast" story⁵¹, who is "raw" and aggressive on the one hand, but simultaneously he is sensitive and civilized. That way the ideal of masculinity becomes almost impossible to fulfil and the confusion that this creates encourages young men to focus on what they can easily control and reshape – their outer appearance. However, it seems that those two opposite sets of normatives are actually constructed in different socio-historical moments – the vision of men as rough and aggressive is remains from the previous model of social organization in which the physical strength of masculinity served as a visualization of its power over women. But the new situation of changing significant aspects of this gender order instills the figure of the gentlemen, who is more of an equal partner, than a leading figure in the relation. Still, both of those understandings exist in the present situation.

Generally, metrosexuality appeared in the globalizing Western world from the intersection of the consumer society and the shifts in the gender order. On the one hand, it managed to subvert previous understandings about what is "manly" and what is not. Moreover, it abolished sexuality as a primary marker of formulating identity. On the other hand, however, this form of masculine identity established a new set of social expectations towards young men, made them narcissist and easy target of consumerism which again puts them into new, but still somewhat limiting categories.

⁴⁹ Bordo, S., "Gentlemen or beast? The double bind of masculinity", In *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private*, New York: Farrar, Strarus and Giroux, 2000

⁵⁰ Ibid, 234

⁵¹ Ibid, 247

Furthermore, since the specific meaning of masculinity depends on the cultural and historical contexts and varies across them, it is important to explore each specific context in which a tendency, such as metrosexuality, develops. In order to understand better those interrelated processes and to be able to establish the significance of each for the formulation of the masculine identity of metrosexual men in Bulgaria, first the grounds on which those new meanings develop have to be investigated. This is the task of the next chapter, which will focus on the state socialism and the gender legacy it has left to the contemporary generation of young Bulgarian males, with special attention on masculinity.

Chapter 2 - Post-state socialism context in Bulgaria and its implications on masculinity

The specificities of the Bulgarian context, in which the present day generation of young men has to formulate its masculinity, are largely determined by the communist past of the country. The gender legacy left by the regime presupposes great difficulties formulating male identifications, since the normatives have shifted significantly from the time before the establishment of the regime and within its system. Moreover, the political agenda used masculinity as a key tool for grounding its ideology and because of that it insistently instilled ideals of male identity which served its needs the best.

2.1 “Hegemonic masculinity” and social organization

Generally, a patriarchal social order is built upon male’s domination over women. Nevertheless, in each historical moment and specific contextual circumstances, masculine supremacy is won and affirmed through various mechanisms⁵². The organizing center of the gender order in a smaller group or in a totalitarian society, as the Bulgarian one during the state-socialism, is the idealistic model of masculinity, which R. Connell has labeled as “hegemonic”⁵³. In his terms, it is defined as having “embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men”⁵⁴. That way the “hegemonic masculinity” is normative, which of course can be achieved by a small number of men because of its high standards; however it influences and subordinates all the other existing forms of masculine identifications as well as the meanings of femininity.

⁵² Carrigan, T., Connell, B., Lee, J., “Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity”, In P. Murphy *Feminism and Masculinities*, Oxford University Press, 2004, 151-156

⁵³ Connell, R., Messerschmidt, J., “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept”, In *Gender & Society*, Vol. 19 No.6, December 2005, Sociologists for Women in Society, 2005

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 832

Furthermore, together with the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” inevitably goes the notion of “emphasized femininity”⁵⁵, which is the culturally constructed form of femininity that satisfactorily reflects the needs of the dominating masculine identification⁵⁶. Moreover, since the “hegemony” is in a constant process of affirmation, its position is constantly constructed and sustained on three basis – persuasion through culture, division of labor between men and women, which is one of the main markers of defining gender order in a society, and the state ideologies which operate in each specific context and legitimize the existing practices⁵⁷ – which are deeply intertwined, especially in the framework of a strong state authority.

One of the main forms of “persuasively” instilling ideals is through constructing and consistently presenting role models, who serve as a visualization of the desired success. Those images reach the collective social imagination most easily when they are dispersed and presented through culture. In Bulgaria, during the 45 years of communist rule, the state defined the official models of gender normativity and its representation in culture. Moreover, since it was in charge for all mass medias, it was easy to censor and silence the unwanted messages and to spread the models which served the best the purposes of building the socialistic society.

2.3 Forms of hegemonic masculinity, instilled by the Bulgarian communist state

2.3.1 The rough partisan fighter

During the first year of communism, one of the main aims of the new regime was to reshape the society. In pursuing this, the previous cultural and political elites were destroyed

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 830

⁵⁶ Connell, R., “Sexual Character”, In *Gender and Power*, Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 187-188

⁵⁷ Carrigan, T., Connell, B., Lee, J., “Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity”, In P. Murphy *Feminism and Masculinities*, Oxford University Press, 2004, 156-157

and by 1960s a “new party-state elite had been established”⁵⁸, which inevitably determined the “hegemonic”⁵⁹ form of masculinity in the context, which was the normative based on which the other forms of masculinity were defined together with the notions of femininity. In the Bulgarian case, the new elites were constructed from the partisans, who had fought against the fascism. They were dominantly from peasant origin, born into poor families⁶⁰. Usually, they were male figures, who were supported by *jatak*, a helper of the partisan⁶¹.

This masculine identity was constructed on the basis of rejecting the previous dominant male ideal that had been operating before the communist regime and who was represented by the bourgeois elites in the beginning of the 20th century. During that time, “masculinity came to stand for a strengthening of will, for the ability to transcend all bodily passions, including preoccupation with sexuality, in the interests of self-control and independence”⁶². For bourgeois men, the individual development, understood both intellectually and physically, was the main marker of masculinity.

The centrality of the masculine identity of the partisans fighters, as a key tool for restructuring the society, which was insistently constructed by the communist state, is particularly visible when compared with one of the marginalized, oppressed forms of masculinity: the sons of the former bourgeois intellectual elites, most of whom were executed

⁵⁸ Vodenicharov, Petar, “Fighting Masculinity in a Communist State? On the Discourse of Real Socialism in Bulgaria”, In Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (eds.) *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspective on Womanhood and Manhood in 19th and 20th Century*, Graz : Institut für Geschichte der Universität Graz, 2002, p. 196

⁵⁹ Connell, R., Messerschmidt, J., “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept”, In *Gender & Society*, Vol. 19 No.6, December 2005, Sociologists for Women in Society, 2005, p. 832

⁶⁰ Vodenicharov, Petar, “Fighting Masculinity in a Communist State? On the Discourse of Real Socialism in Bulgaria”, In Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (eds.) *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspective on Womanhood and Manhood in 19th and 20th Century*, Graz : Institut für Geschichte der Universität Graz, 2002

⁶¹ Vodenicharov, Petar “Restructuring Gender to Preserve Nationalism: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Memory Politics of the Bulgarian Totalitarian State in the 1960s and 1970s”. Karl Kaser and Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch, (eds.) *Gender and Nation in South-Eastern Europe*. Anthropological Yearbook of European Cultures. Vol. 14 (2005), p. 84

⁶² Vodenicharov, Petar, “Fighting Masculinity in a Communist State? On the Discourse of Real Socialism in Bulgaria”, In Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (eds.) *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspective on Womanhood and Manhood in 19th and 20th Century*, Graz : Institut für Geschichte der Universität Graz, 2002

during the “People’s court” in 1945. Because their fathers were killed as enemies of the “People’s republic”, those young men were stigmatized due to their class belonging. That meant that they were excluded and hated by the regime, thus deprived from property and social benefits. Furthermore, they stood as an example of the previous ideals in which they were educated through “the image of the bright, self-assured man, a charming gentleman, typical of the popular city culture of the 1930s”⁶³. This imagery was completely incompatible with the communistic ideals, in which’s value system the individual activism was undesirable. Because of that, this form of masculine identifications became marginalized and presented as the worst alternative to the promoted by the regime form of masculinity, personified in the heroic, willing to sacrifice for the collective, fighters against fascism.

Built upon the dismissal of the image of the self-made intellectual, the partisans became the role model for the truthful way of living according to the socialistic state and this image was persistently instilled in the society. The general myth described the partisans as having grown up in poor villages, where they were either without a father or he was marginalized in the local community, since he was working as a craftsman or servant⁶⁴. Their mothers were strong, hard working women, who were taking care “of the farm and the house and told her children heroic tales of the people’s fight against the “people’s oppressors””⁶⁵. These future heroes decided to leave school at early age, led by the deep believe in the wisdom of the Marxist ideology, which was the only thing worth to be studied, and to join the guerrilla combat groups in the mountains. Through this image, they were clearly presented as belonging to the heart of the oppressed social class - the “proletariat”. Moreover, this pattern of constructing the narrative about the partisans became a canon.

⁶³Ibid, p. 205

⁶⁴ Vodenicharov, Petar, “Fighting Masculinity in a Communist State? On the Discourse of Real Socialism in Bulgaria”, In Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (eds.) *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspective on Womanhood and Manhood in 19th and 20th Century*, Graz : Institut für Geschichte der Universität Graz, 2002, p. 197

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 197

The partisan's biographies, structured according to this standardized form, were the core of the memoir campaign that was launched in the 1970s⁶⁶. Of course, most of the partisan fighters were men and most of the memoirs were written about male figures, which once more reaffirmed the centrality of this form of masculinity for the grounding of the party ideology in the country. The official state's explanation for the purpose of this initiative was that: "One of the most important tasks of the memoirs is to succeed in promoting moral purity, idealism and the heroic life of fighters as a leading model for the new generations"⁶⁷. That way, the communist regime wanted to tighten the youth to the socialist ideology in order to prevent possible uprisings, as the ones happening during the same time in Czechoslovakia and Poland. With the intention of doing that, it mobilized all possible means of spreading the desired image. During this time, the appearance of memoirs was pronounced to be "spontaneous", however, the youth were encouraged, through the youth organizations, such as *Pioneers* and *Komsomol*, to gather those narratives⁶⁸. Furthermore, official instructions were issued about how to collect the stories. At that time, the Bulgarian Institute of Folklore was established, together with a new form of museum – the birth houses of the partisans⁶⁹ – where school children were taken on organized field trips. In addition to that, the characteristics of the partisans, like honest patriotism, readiness for self-sacrifice in the name of the Party and idealism, were also instilled through culture with the aid of intellectuals – writers, film directors, artists and musicians⁷⁰.

⁶⁶ Vodenicharov, Petar "Restructuring Gender to Preserve Nationalism: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Memory Politics of the Bulgarian Totalitarian State in the 1960s and 1970s". Karl Kaser and Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch, (eds.) *Gender and Nation in South-Eastern Europe*. Anthropological Yearbook of European Cultures. Vol. 14 (2005), p. 77

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 78

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 78

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 79

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 79

2.3.2 The intellectual men

Of course, there was no possibility for official culture to exist and to be given strong voice in the society if it was outside what was approved by the totalitarian state and those intellectuals, helping the promotion of the memoir campaign, were supported and allowed to become popular by it. Others, who tried to be critical, were censored and silenced by the regime and had to work in the undergrounds. However, in the 1960s the figure of the intellectual began to be represented as the natural continuum of the partisan fighter and his successor in the position of hegemonic ideal of masculinity⁷¹ by the state authorities. One possible explanation for this shift might be that, since the state authority was already established and grounded, its ideology did not need the rough male warrior anymore, but the “man of passion, imagination and experimentation”⁷². The active participation of the state-promoted intellectuals in the memoir campaign and the glorification of the partisans served as a proof for their admiration for the masculine qualities of the fighters and their inner relation with them. That way, men of circles of intellectual life, or the *intelligentia*, implicitly have built their image upon the one of the partisans and ensured the coherence of the ideal, which was instilled by the state and which served as its tool for grounding and exercising its authority.

Generally, normatives for defining the “hegemonic masculinity” during the state-socialism varied from rejecting the image of the gentlemen, living in the city in the 1930s, through the heroic, rough partisan warrior in the 1950s, who gradually began to evolve into the passionate intellectual fighter in the 1960s. These constant shifts in the official definition given to masculinity created soil for uncertainty in making individual choices. Still, those

⁷¹ Vodenicharov, Petar, “Fighting Masculinity in a Communist State? On the Discourse of Real Socialism in Bulgaria”, In Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (eds.) *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspective on Womanhood and Manhood in 19th and 20th Century*, Graz : Institut für Geschichte der Universität Graz, 2002, p. 208

⁷² Ibid, p. 208

ideals were established, legitimized and supported by the state. That significantly eased their representation and instilment. Furthermore, the consistency of their construction grounded their essential characteristics – roughness and dedication to society - significantly in the mentality of the generations of Bulgarians, growing up during this period, whom are the parents of the present day young men, defining their own masculinity.

With the fall of communism, the strong center of social hierarchy disappeared and that led to new reshaping of the society. Inevitably, that meant that fresh definitions of what masculinity and femininity would mean needed to be given. Moreover, with the end of the regime, ideas and role models began easily to enter from different directions and to coexist with the already established normatives in the country. Still, the popular culture remained the leading medium of constructing role models but the sources spreading those images were not state controlled any more.

Generally in this situation of incoherent views coming from various tracks, it appeared that it is hard for young men to formulate their masculine identities. Metrosexuality emerges as a possible formulation of masculinity in this context. However, in order to establish itself, it needs to first construct role models, visualizing its values. That is why, next chapter will analyze the image of one of the most popular Bulgarian metrosexual man – the soccer player Valeri Bojinov – and will compare it to the Western symbol of this tendency – David Beckham.

Chapter 3 – The appearance of metrosexuality in Bulgaria: the new role models

After the fall of the Berlin wall Bulgarian society began to undergo significant changes at many levels. This period is often described as a “transition” by Western scholars⁷³, between communist regime and capitalistic free market. However, it is characterized by dramatic social changes and economic difficulties for most of Bulgarian society. As Kristen Ghodsee claims, “everyday survival had become increasingly difficult”⁷⁴ because of the turbulent social conditions. The most serious social problem in the country has become poverty, social inequality and stratification⁷⁵.

On the ideological level, with the opening of the markets, many Western goods became available, and their previous lack made them even more desirable, not simple as products, satisfying needs, but as symbolic entities, signifying the change. However, the financial crisis meant that they were accessible to a small portion of the society, which was primarily the newly emerging social class, which can be described with the term used by Ol’ga Vainstein with regard to Russia – “nouveau rich”.⁷⁶ The people from this emerging class quickly gained their wealth and were determined to demonstrate their new social status through strategies, such as “dressing up”⁷⁷.

Of course, as Susan Gal and Gail Kligman note: “women and men are differently located in the emerging economics”⁷⁸. From a gender perspective, the formal communist rule

⁷³ Susan Gal and Gail Kligman offer some very insightful arguments against this label, primarily because it is Westerncentric and suggests teleological assumptions - Gal, S., Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 10-12

⁷⁴ Ghodsee, K., *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism and Postcolonialism on the Black Sea*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2005, p. 37

⁷⁵ Emigh, R., Szélenyi, I., *Poverty, Ethnicity and Gender in Eastern Europe during the Market Transition*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999, p. 33-37

⁷⁶ Vainshtein, O., “Female Fashion, Soviet Style: Bodies of Ideology”, In *Russia, Women, Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 72

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 72-73

⁷⁸ Gal, S., Kligman, G., *The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 3

enforced a generally coherent “gender order”⁷⁹ which was suitable for the overall political course. Nevertheless, with the end of the socialism in the country, as many new opportunities opened, appeared greater number of possible gender identifications. However, the socialistic ideology, which had been persistently constructed and affirmed in the consciousness of several generations of Bulgarians, did not completely lose its influence but became one of the factors in formulating new identities, together with the ideas coming from outside, as the values of metrosexuality.

In the Western context, metrosexuality translates into a young, narcissist, male mass consumer, for the formulation of who’s masculine identity sexuality is not determining. This is well illustrated in the figure of David Beckham who is equally admired by straight and homosexual men and women. However, in Bulgaria, due to local specificities, such as the present socio-economic situation and the understandings of gender positioning, constructed during the state-socialism, metrosexuality has different meanings, which color it in other symbolic nuances. The similarities and the differences in the motivation behind the development of metrosexuality in the Western and Bulgarian contexts become clearly visible when compare the role models of this social tendency, who present a condense image of its ideology.

3.1 Comparing and contrasting the role models of metrosexuality

3.1.1 The image of David Beckham⁸⁰

The ultimate personification of the metrosexuality worldwide is the public image of the English soccer player David Beckham. He began his career in age of 17, when in 1992 he signed a contract with the soccer team Manchester United. After that, as his popularity grew, each step of his career and life was followed with great interest by the media. However, what

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 5

⁸⁰ Photos of David Beckham can be seen in appendix 1

is specific in Beckham's image is that, to the general audience, he is not that well known for his sport achievements but more for his look and fashion choices. That is why, Simpson⁸¹ describes him as the "most famous and photogenic soccer player in the world" who is "a sporting star who wants to be a model"⁸².

David Beckham has successfully transformed his image into an "advertising phenomenon"⁸³, who manages to interest and attract not only soccer fans but many people who are not interested into the game. Moreover, his image is appealing to various social groups – in 2003 "Europe's largest survey into "cool" recently found that Beckham was the "coolest" male, according to both young women and men"⁸⁴. In 2002 he posed for a gay magazine in Britain which was expected to bring a public outcry. However, that did not happen. Beckham stated that he is straight, but still he does not mind to be a gay icon⁸⁵. This shows that his image is stretchy enough to integrate different roles but what is more, it proves that sexuality is not among the essential markers of constructing the masculine identity of the metrosexual man. What matters is the way one looks and the products being consumed.

Mark Simpson underlines that "Beckham is the biggest metrosexual in Britain because he loves being looked at and because so many men and women love to look at him"⁸⁶. Of course, he successfully manages to translate his vanity into a profitable market strategy, by making "David Beckham...a superbrand"⁸⁷. He was the first soccer player who received "image right" payment, as well he brand his numeral – "7", thus he promotes sports wear, perfumes, sunglasses, clothes, etc. Even his tattoos – the name of his son Brooklyn and a

⁸¹ Simpson, M., *Meet the metrosexual*, <http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/feature/2002/07/22/metrosexual/index.html> (accessed 18 May 2008)

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Simpson, M., "Beckham, the virus", http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/beans_the_virus.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

⁸⁵ Simpson, M., *Meet the metrosexual*, <http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/feature/2002/07/22/metrosexual/index.html> (accessed 18 May 2008)

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Simpson, M., "Beckham, the virus", http://www.marksimpson.com/pages/journalism/beans_the_virus.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

“guardian angel” – stand as accessories, when “his uniform comes off at the end of a match – as it usually does, and before anyone else’s – the tattoos help him to stand out instantly, and mean that he is never naked: He’s always wearing something designer”⁸⁸.

David Beckham’s image is predominantly constructed by focusing on his outer appearance and the products he uses. It seems that he even uses the soccer field as a catwalk, where he can show himself. His narcissism goes hand in hand with individualism and certain degree of selfishness and as Simpson ironically comments: “in the era of soccer that will come to be known as B.B – Before Beckham – the sport was a team game”⁸⁹. No doubt, that this image turns out to be a profitable strategy of attracting advertisement companies. As a matter of fact both benefit from it – the companies need people like Beckham who are popular worldwide and he successfully has transform his name and his appearance into a commodity.

What is most notable in Beckham’s metrosexuality is that this image is appealing to many young people around the world, both men and women with different sexual orientation. The values he instills – male vanity, taking oneself as a primary love object and investing a great deal into indulging – are admired and embraced by many. And as Simpson exclaims: “The 27-year-old, tongue-tied, surprisingly shy working-class boy from London’s East End has succeeded in turning the mass, global sport of soccer into a mass, global promotional vehicle for himself, reproducing his image in countless countries.”⁹⁰

3.1.2 Beckham’s equivalent in Bulgaria – Valeri Bojinov

In the Bulgarian context, there are several key public figures, who construct their image according to the values of metrosexuality. One of them is a pop-singer – Rushi Videnliev⁹¹. In fact, he is the one who introduced the image of the young male, who takes

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Photos of Rushi Videnliev can be seen in appendix 2

great deal of care for his outer appearance and demonstratively wears clothes from certain brands to Bulgaria. The others who classify as metrosexuals are singers, actors, models who present themselves as good-looking, self-assured and self-sufficient men. However, the most obvious example is the soccer player Valeri Bojinov⁹². Both, Rushi Videnliev and Valeri Bojinov are among “the most wanted not-married men” in Bulgaria, according to a survey, published recently in a popular magazine⁹³.

Valeri Bojinov began his career in year 2002 with the Italian team Lecce, when he was only 15 years old. At present, he is a player of the English Manchester City as well as the Bulgarian National team. Still, what is most discussed about him in the Bulgarian media is not his performance on the ground, but rather his personal life and more specifically, his lifestyle. Bojinovs popularity grew tremendously after he begun a love affair with a Bulgarian pop-folk singer – Alisia, who gave birth to their son at the end of 2007. As a matter of fact, the two met during the shooting of a video towards a song of Alisia in which Bojinov was acting.

Most of the articles about the couple are published in the so-called “lifestyle magazines”. Generally speaking, the genre of the lifestyle magazine, as “a way of acting”⁹⁴, tries to include on its pages various aspects of the everyday living – from popular culture, through religion, food and recreation, to the shopping habits for instance. However, due to this core of “mixing” different texts, each of which normally belongs to a separate genre, the lifestyle magazines might be categorized as a “hybridize genres”⁹⁵. Nevertheless, those types of magazines are very popular, especially in the nowadays situation of globalization and fast going everyday living where speed is an essential possession, especially with regard to information. Those magazines “digest” for their readers the most important information thus

⁹² Photos of Valeri Bojinov can be seen in appendix 3

⁹³ Rozali online magazine, available at <http://spisania.rozali.com/ot-bliasak/p2917.html>

⁹⁴ Fairclough, N., *Analysing Discourse*. Routledge, 2003, p. 26

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 34

combine several functions – they are not only informative but also entertaining and educational. Even though generally the printed media have been marginalized with the development of the television⁹⁶, the genre of the lifestyle magazines is one of the most popular one among the readers and still quite well presented on the media market. Generally the lifestyle magazines as a genre are meant for upper-working class readers, with high possibilities for consumption, having a dynamic everyday life, who need easily accessible summaries of the reality rather than deep and complete information for each event.

Nevertheless, many other social groups and classes can find something for themselves in those magazines since their basic quality is the diversity of events and aspects of living discussed. This is possible, since “readers exist as both consumers of magazines and of the products they advertise...”⁹⁷ As a matter of fact, with this core, the lifestyle magazines satisfactory answer the need of the complexly organized modern societies for networking by mediating the communication⁹⁸ with regard to many levels. They offer enough choices for identification for their diverse audience. Furthermore, those magazines construct role models for their readers and indicate the markers of what it means to be successful in the present society.

The image of Valeri Bojinov is insistently constructed on the printed pages and the online versions of such magazine in Bulgaria. The key words which are most often used to describe the soccer player are “handsome”, “beautiful man”, “man who has proved his masculinity” and “women-chaser”⁹⁹. In the survey about the most desired Bulgarian men he was introduced as follows: “beautiful...rich...a soccer player – this are three conditions for a

⁹⁶ McRobie, A., “*More! New Sexualities in Girls and Women’s Magazines*” in J. Curran et al (eds.) *Cultural Studies and Communications*, Arnold, 1996, p. 173

⁹⁷ McRobie, A., “*More! New Sexualities in Girls and Women’s Magazines*” in J. Curran et al (eds.) *Cultural Studies and Communications*, Arnold, 1996, p. 179

⁹⁸ Fairclough, N., *Analysing Discourse*. Routledge, 2003, p. 30

⁹⁹ <http://www.bulpress.net>

man to be able to have almost any woman”¹⁰⁰. There is a special accent put on his success among women, which in most articles is underlined with a short list of women with whom he is supposed to have slept with, which inevitably includes names of popular Bulgarian models and singers. There is even an interview with his mother, claiming that her son has had a long relationship with a woman, fourteen years older than him¹⁰¹. All of that shows how important is the image of potency and heteronormativity for the construction of Bojinov’s image. Moreover, those stories undoubtedly signify him as straight in his sexual orientation.

The same article finds it necessary to explain that what the soccer player has had in common with his previous girlfriends, as well as with his present one is “shared interests” which include: “money, cars, clothes, common places where they go out”¹⁰². This list illustrates the entities that have greater social value in the present day Bulgaria. In addition, what the reader learns about Bojinov is that he likes to go out to different clubs and his hobby is to collect designer shoes. Another piece of important information included in those articles is that he is among the best paid Bulgarian soccer players and he drives a brand new jeep “Porsche Cayenne”¹⁰³. All of those goods insistently present Bojinov’s ability and willingness to consume and visualize the circle of lifestyle choices he makes.

When describing the life together of Alisia and Valeri, most magazine’s article emphasize that they are living in a house, costing 1.6 million GBP, while Bojinov’s weekly salary is 33 thousand GBP. Their home is situated in the prestigious neighborhood “Hale Barnes”, near the other Bulgarian soccer player’s house¹⁰⁴. They have two plasma TV’s put one over the other in the living room. In illustrating the lifestyle of the couple, a special attention is given to the fact that they travel a lot between Sofia, Italy and England. The social

¹⁰⁰ <http://spisania.rozali.com/ot-bliasak/p2917.html>

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ <http://life.dir.bg>

mobility is an essential possession in the time of globalization and it is as well a signifier for belonging to the upper-class, the new elites, as Zygmunt Bauman puts it: “In the post-space-war world, mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor; the stuff of which new, increasingly world-wide, social, political, economic and cultural hierarchies are daily built and rebuilt”¹⁰⁵.

Last but not least, Alisia always claims that “their family is like a dream come true” and they want more children. As an integral part of Bojinov’s image is his role of a good father, which is proven by his beloved, who says that “he is helping her a lot with the baby and even changes his pampers”. This aspect of Bojinov’s public image, as a good husband and father, is especially important and targeted towards the Bulgarian audience. Due to the communist legacy, Bulgarian society is still quite patriarchal and heteronormative in its organization, and because of that, it needs to see confirmation of those values in the adored role models. At the same time, however, the underlining of Bojinov’s being a good, helping father reveals important aspect of metrosexuality as a general trend – openness to feminist ideas and desire to renegotiate the existing gender roles and norms. This tendency appeared as well in the interviews with young Bulgarians, which are analyzed in the next chapter.

3.3.3 Comparing and contrasting the images of Beckham and Bojinov

Looking at the media images of the two soccer players – the English David Beckham and the Bulgarian Valeri Bojinov – there are several basic similarities which they have in common in the image of masculinity they are presenting. Those are the unified characteristics of the metrosexual man, which transcend local boundaries. Nevertheless, there are as well a few differences, and qualities which are insistently underlined in Bojinov’s image, which reveal the specificities of the Bulgarian social context.

¹⁰⁵ Bauman, Z., *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, Polity Press, 1998

What the two role models have in common is that they are physically attractive, taking a lot of care for their appearance and openly admitting it. They are presented as self-assured young men who enjoy their lifestyle, which allows them to consume designer products, to live in expensive neighborhoods in big cities and to freely travel around the world. All of those entities which are considered important for the construction of this public images, allow metrosexuality to be described as a form of a “habitus”, which Pierre Bourdieu¹⁰⁶ defines as: “not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure” that is “internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions”¹⁰⁷. Of course, Bourdieu’s study of the “space of life-styles” focuses on the French cultural context and does not look at more general forms of gender and class intersection. As the comparison of the representation of the role models of metrosexuality shows, this junction functions at two levels – national and transnational since part of Bojinov’s lifestyle choices are similar to the ones of Beckham, but others are specifically meaningful for the Bulgarian context of application of this Western trend.

The traces of entities, which are important for Bulgarian society, that stand together with the values of the Western normative of metrosexuality in Bojinov’s public image, are the demonstrative consumption, nuances of the previous normative of masculinity, built upon success among women, plus the confirmation of him playing the role of a family man well, in a contemporary way. In the case of the representation of the patterns of consumption of the Bulgarian soccer player, it is not seen as a simple mean of indulging oneself, as it functions in Beckham’s image, but it is rather a tool for demonstrating financial status and belonging to prestigious social class to society. This specific necessity of demonstratively consuming,

¹⁰⁶ Bourdieu, P., *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London, 1989

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 170

signified through the image of metrosexuality, appeared in the interviews with young Bulgarian males as well.

In addition, Ol'ga Vainshtein's concept of "dressing up" helps to get insides in this ideology. In her article "Female Fashion, Soviet Style: Bodies of Ideology"¹⁰⁸ the author discusses the changes that have occurred in the way of dressing and consuming with the appearance of the "nouveau riche" class after perestroika in Russia. She describes them as people with "financial means, but no knowledge of the ideological language of fashion", who use clothes and other expensive objects as "a condensed image of wealth"¹⁰⁹. This observation is valid for the public image of Valeri Bojinov and his girlfriend. What is more, this vision of demonstrative consumption seems to be wanted and expected from the Bulgarian audience, reading the articles about their live. For instance, the image of the two big plasma TV screens, placed one over the other in the luxurious house of the soccer player seems to validate his success. Moreover it sets a desired quality of living for ordinary people.

What distinguishes the form of consumption implied in the image of Bojinov from the one promoted through the figure of Beckham is the level and the target of the narcissism included. In the case of the Bulgarian soccer player, the marked consumption is not so much for the purposes of own pleasure and indulging but rather it has become type of "collective narcissism", exciting the society as a whole. This tendency can be explained with the restriction imposed for around 45 years of communist regime in the country, when a narrow number of choices were open and most of the brands and the technical gadgets produced on the other side of the Berlin Wall were prohibited. Those restrictions add a significant degree of symbolic dimension in consumption, especially in the possibility of using Western goods.

¹⁰⁸ Vainshtein, O., "Female Fashion, Soviet Style: Bodies of Ideology", In *Russia, Women, Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 72

Furthermore, the generation of young men like Valeri Bojinov, are the children of parents who have spend their entire youth under the communist regime. They, themselves have a longing for a different way of living, which they have educated in their children. In addition to that, the difficult economic situation in which the poverty and stratification are among the most serious problems¹¹⁰, allow to a very tiny proportion of the population to afford this dreamed lifestyle today. However, those products are ideologically more accessible today, though not financially, but still that makes them to appear to be closer and they can always be imagined through the condense images of happiness, personified in the lifestyle of young men like Bojinov, constructed on the pages of glossy magazines.

Besides the demonstrative type of consumption, visualized in the public image of the Bulgarian soccer player, there are two other important aspects of his masculine identity, which are specifically emphasized in the Bulgarian context of constructing his image, which are not given such an importance in the representation of Beckham. On first place, this is his straightness and his potency as a male, who has been with many women. At present, he can not be a role model in the Bulgarian society if he does not clearly reaffirm the heteronormativity of the patriarchal organization. In order to achieve that, to his metrosexuality is added up a dose of rough machismo, typical for the figure of the partisan fighter, promoted by the state-socialism, which shows how influential are the traces of the previous dominant models of masculinity in the context. Furthermore, this insistence on heteronormativity shows that the implication of metrosexuality in Bulgaria does not allow as much flexibility of sexuality as it does in the Western context, where Beckham can be photographed for a gay magazine, without this to harm his image.

Last but not least, another important point of reference in constructing this new masculine ideal is showing him as a good husband and father. This feature of the new role

¹¹⁰ Emigh, R., Szelényi, I., *Poverty, Ethnicity and Gender in Eastern Europe during the Market Transition*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999

model is progressive and at the same time reaffirming the heteronormativity. As a larger trend, it signifies the openness of the values of metrosexuality in defining gender roles, which is an implicit answer to the feminist critiques of the patriarchal gender order and the prescribed roles it formulates. At the same time, however, in the Bulgarian context, the insistence of Bojinov being a family man also can be read as confirmation to previous normatives. As Kornelia Slavova explains: “in the communist years the family was one of the few zones where both men and women felt relatively free from the surveillance of the state, and could resist the collectivist pressure”¹¹¹. This notion of family as a shelter is still influential in Bulgarian society, especially in the present turbulent times of economic instability. That is why, it has an important role and significant amount of symbolic meaning. Since the unit of the family is given such an importance, it is crucial that the new men satisfactorily plays his gender role in the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, Bojinov is presented as a good father and husband in a contemporary way, because he takes equal part in the care for the child, since both he and Alisia have successful careers outside the home. Once more, this requirement proves that the Bulgarian society in many aspects is still a traditional patriarchy, but the new ideas, coming from outside contexts, like metrosexuality, manage to modernize those understandings, by enriching them with new values and initiating changes in the specific meanings of the prescribed gender roles.

Generally, the role models present a condensed image of the ideology which stands behind certain identity. The public images of David Beckham and Valeri Bojinov, who are representatives of the views of metrosexuality visualize the common grounds of this form of masculine identity as a overarching social tendency in the contemporary world. Furthermore, they allow distinguishing the slight differences in the construction of the image of the

¹¹¹ Slavova, K., “Looking at Western Feminisms through the Double Lens of Eastern Europe and the Third World”, In Jasmina Lukic, Joanna Regulaska, Darja Zavirsek, (eds), *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe*, England: Ashgate, 2006, p. 256

metrosexual, which can be used a key for understanding present social situation and gender organization of Bulgarian society.

Generally speaking, both soccer players categorize as metrosexuals, since they openly admit their concern with appearance and enjoy being looked at, that is why they often pose as models¹¹². Still, while Beckham successfully unites people with different sexual orientation, for the construction of the image of Bojinov being heteronormative is crucial. Beckham can pose for a gay magazine and that does not harm his image at all, but even makes him more popular, because the markers of his masculinity which are looked at are the appreciation of style, fashion, beauty and the self-esteem of openly admitting the enjoyment of vanity. At the same time, in Bulgaria context, Bojinov's straightness has to be constantly reaffirmed through lists of women he has been involved with.

As well, the form of consumption and narcissism, represented through his figure, has different symbolic meaning, which are reflected and discussed as well in the interviews with young Bulgarian men, than the ones promoted by Beckham. Furthermore, while Beckham is loved, admired and openly serves as a role model for the youth in the West, Bojinov provokes controversial reaction among young people in Bulgaria, which will be part of the subject matter of the next chapter together with the further investigation of the specific meanings of masculinity and the motivation of using male vanity in the context.

¹¹² For good theoretical study of male posing when being photographed and presentation in popular magazines, look at: Dyer, R., "Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-up", in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, Routledge, 1992; Dyer, R., "The White Man's Muscles", in *Withness*, Routledge, 1997 and Neale, S., "Masculinity as Spectacle", in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, Routledge, 1992

Chapter 4 – Why young men in Bulgaria chose metrosexuality as a masculine identity

Bolo¹¹³ café/bar/restaurant promotes itself¹¹⁴ as “the different club in Sofia, club for new image, new design, beauty, comfort, cozy place, fashion”. This description illustrates the qualities which are most appreciated and looked for by a large portion of the contemporary young generation Bulgarians. Those values are reflected in the appearance of metrosexuality, as one sets of codes, used by young men to signify their masculinity. Bolo club was the place where most of my interviewees chose to meet, because this is the type of place they like to be seen during the day, together with the two glossy shopping malls in Sofia – Sofia Mall and City Center. The night, however, belongs to night clubs, such as Brilliantine, where retro music plays from the 80’s and 90’s.

Bolo, as well as Brilliantine, are both very stylish and expensive spots for going out. These clubs invest a lot in their design and appearance which is an ideology they share with their most frequent visitors. What is more, as Bolo exemplifies, they try to combine several functions – a coffee place, bar, restaurant. The “different club in Sofia” is situated in the very center of the capital of Bulgaria and it entirely occupies a renovated old building with several floors. On each of them, there is a combination of at least two sectors – bar and restaurant or coffee corner and bar. Most of the visitors seemed to know each other and they were definitely familiar to the staff of the club.

Judging by those first impressions, it seems that the new ideals, visualized by those places and their visitors, focus the attention on the level of the superficial, the cover and not the content. However, when questioned and studied further, the vanity of the young metrosexuals appearing in Bulgaria might instead be read as a survival strategy, masking deep inner conflicts, caused by several controversial forces, acting at the same time, determining

¹¹³ Photos of Bolo can be seen in appendix II

¹¹⁴ Bolo café/bar/restaurant web site, available at <http://boloclub.net/en/index.htm>

confusing social requirements towards young men which they struggle to fulfil. One of the sources of the difficulties of constructing masculine identity is the coexistence of influential traces of models of masculinity, constructed and implemented during the communist regime in the country with the new ideals, coming mainly from the West. This controversy is exacerbated by the gradual shifts of gender positioning in the society and the empowerment of women which complicates the understandings of gender roles.

Generally, it seems that in Bulgaria the emerging tendency of young males being concern with their look is still in what Mark Simpson labeled as the stage in which metrosexuality is “in the closet”¹¹⁵. What he is referring to is the time in the 90’s when metrosexuality had become very influential in the West, but still most young men would admire it secretly in fear not to be categorized as homosexuals. That was one of the main reasons why Simpson invented the term “metrosexual man” to make this new phenomenon more visible. In contemporary Bulgarian society, this tendency also has become quite visible, but most young men would not admit to be influenced by modern vanity and even are embarrassed when the term “metrosexual” is mentioned.

All of my interviewees admitted that the way a young man looks is very important in every aspect of life: day-to-day interaction, finding job, building relationships; so they have to pay a lot of attention to their appearance. Still, even though they enjoy it, they are left with the impression that vanity is not a “manly” characteristic, so that creates an inner controversy. The significance of the way a young man looks which is given in present day Bulgaria is even more visible when looked at from outside. A popular internet blog for travelers published an

¹¹⁵ *MetroDaddy speaks!*, an interview with Mark Simpson, http://dir.salon.com/story/ent/feature/2004/01/05/metrosexual_ii/index.html (last accesses 18 May 2008)

account of a foreigner, visiting the country, which is entitled “The Invasion of the Metrosexuals”¹¹⁶, which notices:

I am sure you have all heard the term metrosexual, used basically to describe guys who are really into their looks and take the time and spend the money to look good. Well, Yalta¹¹⁷ was PACKED with them and I am not exaggerating at all. In fact, I don't think I saw one "regular-looking" guy, apart from the guys from work. It was pretty ridiculous. The clothes, the hair, the sunglasses... even the moves on the dance floor. It was a bit too much.

The author continues by the observing that:

What I found amazing though in thinking about this is that this type of phenomenon did not exist a few years back. Bulgarian guys prided themselves on looking macho and being "manly" so to speak. In fact, they would have reacted with disgust to seeing such men amongst themselves. Times change I guess.¹¹⁸

This observation show how influential this tendency has become in the Bulgarian context, as well as the fact that young men are so dedicated to follow suit with metrosexuality, that it seems they are exaggerating it. Moreover, the claim that this has become such a popular masculine identification over a short period of time means that there are factors which are pushing this fast development and make this set of norms seems as a suitable expression of masculinity to young men.

Still, even though the tendency of metrosexuality is becoming more influential, and traces of its normative can be seen in the construction of the masculine identity in almost every young man, my interviews showed that the idea of the possible existence of male vanity appears to be generally still at phase of rejection. Besides the natural reaction of not accepting the presence of something new, which is conflicting with the still influential image of a more rough masculinity, there is one more possible explanation about this rejection in the Bulgarian context. Generally speaking, the Bulgarian society is still pretty traditionally patriarchal in its

¹¹⁶“Diarios De Una Vida Normal” blog <http://viajarporviajar.blogspot.com/2007/06/invasion-of-metrosexuals.html>

¹¹⁷ Yalta is a popular, fancy night club in the capital;

¹¹⁸ “Diarios De Una Vida Normal” blog <http://viajarporviajar.blogspot.com/2007/06/invasion-of-metrosexuals.html>

organization. Moreover the previous models of masculinity, especially the norms and the social expectations of gender order defined during the communist regime and consistently spread within the system, are still very influential. That is why, the dominant discourse of masculinity claims that the “real man” has to be rough, protective and willing to sacrifice, as the figure of the partisan fighter was constructed during the state-socialism. Furthermore, as Kristen Ghodsee observes “patriarchal traditions have made a comeback since the early 1990s”¹¹⁹ in the country. This can be read as a defensive reaction of a society in a difficult economic and historical moment, when the centralized political system has collapsed and many aspects of social organization had to be significantly restructured. Because of that, the society closed itself and tried to stick to the well known models. Inevitably, this visible return to traditional patriarchy reinforced the old ideas of gender roles. Moreover, this was the time of childhood of the present generation young men, so it definitely marked their perception of masculinity.

As an illustration of the heteronormative schemes, dominating in Bulgarian society today can be seen that the main issue discussed about the metrosexuals is their sexuality, though worldwide this is not so essential as a marker of identity. However, since this tendency is becoming more and more popular, there are many debates about it. It is noticeable that all of them are taking place on the pages of popular magazines. There are quizzes “Are you a metrosexual?”¹²⁰ and many articles, one of the most recent ones “Metrosexual men”¹²¹ and “Metrosexual men – fashion, step in evolution or unnecessary vanity?”¹²². The online

¹¹⁹ Ghodsee, K., *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism and Postcolonialism on the Black Sea*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2005

¹²⁰ Magazine for men, fashion and lifestyle, available at http://spisanie-za-muje.blogspot.com/2007/07/blog-post_23.html (accessed 18 May 2008)

¹²¹ Lilova, M., *Metrosexual men*, available at <http://mihaelina.com/blog/2008-01-22> (accessed 18 May 2008)

¹²² Medi's blog, available at <http://medito87.blog.bg/viewpost.php?id=192946> (accessed 18 May 2008)

“Fashion and Lifestyle Magazine” also published a long article entitled “Metrosexuality – A Deviation from the Masculine Norm or a New City Etalon”¹²³.

All of those publications follow a similar model of talking about metrosexuality – first and for most, they insistently explain to the Bulgarian audience that to be metrosexual does not mean to be homosexual. They draw on the definitions of Simpson and describe the metrosexual men as narcissist young man living in a big city, who enjoys taking care of himself. Last but not least, those articles provide a list, with photos, of Bulgarian and foreign men who can be considered as metrosexuals. In those catalogs there is always a photo of David Beckham and Brat Pitt, as well as Valeri Bojinov and Rushi Videnliev.

Besides the articles, explaining the sexuality of the metrosexuals, another interesting type of publications appears in the Bulgarian popular media, exemplary of which is the article “Things that men do not admit they are doing”¹²⁴. Those pieces are usually written by a man, who reveals to other men that even though they might consider certain practices embarrassing, as a matter of fact many males do them. In his article of this kind, published on the popular web site about the body¹²⁵, Aleksandar Obretenov observes: “There are certain things which the Bulgarian man does not admit he is doing. Most are a strange fusion from left behind post-state socialism stupidity mixed with the new, modern understandings about life...”¹²⁶. In the list provided, the author pinpoints nine things, like having waxing done, visiting solarium, enjoying shopping and watching TV series, which he claims most men enjoy doing but are embarrassed to talk about¹²⁷. Still, in the overall social perception those practices would not be labeled as “masculine” which is essential for their recognition. If they

¹²³ Evgeniev, N., *Metrosexuality – A Deviation from the Masculine Norm or a New City Etalon* available at Online Fashion and Lifestyle magazine site, http://www.fashion-lifestyle.net/subculture_broi2 (accessed 18 May 2008)

¹²⁴ Obretenov, A., *Things that men do not admit they are doing*, <http://razkazi.tialoto.bg/article.php?id=1661> (accessed 27 May 2008)

¹²⁵ The Bulgarian address is www.tialoto.bg which literally translates in “the body”.

¹²⁶ Obretenov, A., *Things that men do not admit they are doing*, <http://razkazi.tialoto.bg/article.php?id=1661> (accessed 27 May 2008)

¹²⁷ Ibid

are not seen as something proper to be done by man that would mean that the male who is doing it is not masculine enough. Even though there is no one clear definition of masculinity in the present context of Bulgaria, still no man wants to be named as not “manly” because that would lead to possible exclusion from many social circles. Together with the abovementioned practices which are clear expressions of vanity and desire for self-indulging, there is one more aspect included which is quite telling about the status of masculinity in Bulgaria at the present moment – the legends that men tell about themselves, which include “I am the best driver”, “I can have sex for longest period of time” and “I have slept with many beautiful women”¹²⁸.

The second part of this list visualizes the key pillars on which the traditional model of masculinity is built, presenting men as physically strong, potent and rough, and which still plays a vital role. Bulgarian men feel obliged to be the best at what is socially agreed to be a “male” thing, like driving a car for instance. Furthermore, this shows the strength of heteronormativity and the central role which sexuality has in constructing masculine identity. Those expectations are still valid in the present as traces of the past, which coexist with the new normative and this creates a deeper uncertainty for the young men in configuring their masculine identity because they have to answer to two sets of normatives – the strong remains of the old understandings in combination with the silenced, yet emerging new ones.

All of the discussions about the meaning of metrosexuality, taking place in the popular magazines, show that even though most young men do not admit it openly, metrosexuality is gaining speed as a set of normatives, determining masculinity. This inner controversy became clear from the in depth interviews that I made with young men who clearly appeared to be concerned about their look and enjoyed all this effort to be appreciated by people around them, which is one of the basic characteristics of metrosexuality, as defined by Simpson. My interviewees were between 19 and 25 years old, enrolled in a higher education program or

¹²⁸ Ibid

already graduated from one, who besides their study are working and enjoying spending their spare time in places like Bolo club and the big shopping malls.

All of them stated that the way they look is very important to them, but it seems to be even more important to the society they are living in. Deqn, a 23 years old web creator, working for a big company, said:

If you are good looking it is a big plus. That way you attract people's attention and they respect you more. Furthermore, if you have a nice body, that increases your self-esteem, which is the most important factor for success in your job and in you communication with the opposite sex.

This statement casts light on the motivation behind the concern of young males with their look in Bulgarian society. It is not so much about self-indulgement, as it is understood in the West, but as Deqn's answer shows, it is important because if one is a good-looking young men that increases his chances in the social structures and relations. The expressions "people's attention" and "respect you more" signify the importance given to the collective in defining masculinity and using metrosexuality as the template of expressing it.

Nevertheless, at first my interviewees tended to pretend that their appearance comes naturally, without much effort put from their side. However, after asking specific questions about certain types of cosmetics, brands of clothes, sport facilities, my respondents ultimately revealed that they use a lot of cosmetics, are careful and deliberate about the food they eat and regularly practice some sport in order to be in good shape. This reluctance admitting their masculine vanity can be read as a reflection of the struggles between different views about what is "manly" and what is not in the context.

Moreover, when asked about their opinion about the role models of metrosexuality in Bulgaria – for instance Valeri Bojinov and Rushi Videnliev – the automatic response I was getting was: "Aren't they homosexuals?" and my interviewees normally thought that this is enough as an answer. That once more emphasizes the importance given to sexuality in defining masculinity and further explains the reason why when Bojinov's image is

constructed in Bulgarian popular magazines his heterosexuality and his image of “women-chaser” is so insistently underlined, as the previous chapter showed. What is more, the fact that despite all those efforts of the popular media to construct Bojinov’s image as straight man, my respondents questioned first and foremost his sexuality, seems as a defensive reaction from their side, which once more pinpoints the uneasiness with openly admitting that they consider those new ideas in their construction of male identity. When questioned further, Christian, a 23 years old musician explained, that “I do not think that a real man should look like this. It is good to take care of yourself, but you should not overdo it!” Bogdan, a 19 years old, whom is just accepted in university, told me that: “I do not like those guys, but still I know many of my friends who are trying to imitate them”.

Christian’s answer shows that in his view, there should be a normative about how “a real man should look like”. Furthermore, both responses visualized the inner confusion of my interviewees and the lack of self-reflexivity, since they think of the practices there are doing as a completely different category and do not want to be perceived as similar to the Bulgaria versions of the role models of metrosexuality, because that would questioned their sexual orientation and overall positioning as men in society.

Moreover, my interviewees pinpointed that they realize that the society, meaning their closer relatives and the more general circle of people around them, has certain expectations of them, since they are men. The most often mentioned ones were “high achievements in what I am doing”, “finding a well paid, and prestigious job”, “to be energetic and well educated”, “self-sufficiency”. All those replies revolve around the traditional view that the men has to be successful in the public sphere which in today’s situation translates into having a well paid, prestigious job. Stoqn, a 24 years old student of Psychology, who works part time in a casino, underlined that “what everyone expects from me is to be able to take care of myself, to be financially independent and responsible”. This insistence on responsibility and financial

security is a trace of the traditional patriarchal understanding that man has to be able to support himself and his family. However, since the overall economic situation of Bulgaria is unstable due to the shift to a free market economy, there are no guarantees for young, educated people that they will manage to find a well-paid job which will ensure the financial stability. This uncertainty reflects greatly on young men since the society expects from them to make a career and to be financially stable.

Probably because of this turbulent social conditions and major expectations of men, when asked what it feels to be a young man in Bulgaria today, the answers I received pinpointed that my interviewees do not feel at ease defining their masculinity: Christian described it as a “great challenge”, Boyan metaphorically portrait it “as not having time to sleep” and for Bogdan it meant “to become responsible”. These responses emphasize a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty in my respondents. The lack of one stable model of masculinity, who can be openly admired, deepens the confusion and makes the formulation of maleness to be a constant process of reaffirming one’s belonging to that category. Obviously, the young Bulgarians clearly feel this social requirement towards them as one of the key characteristics of masculinity. However, there are several other conditions which complicate the situation.

During the interviews several main group of reasons for this uncertainty appeared – the obsolescence of the model of masculinity of the fathers of those young men, the communist past of Bulgaria, the present day empowerment of women, the new requirements coming from the Hollywood productions, one of the most influential media forms, propagating the emphasis on the physical appearance.

When discussing the ways of formulating and expressing masculinity of the generation of the fathers of today’s young men, all of my interviewees believed that the situation has changed tremendously. Christian explained that “when my dad was my age, everything was so much simpler and easier. He did not have to prove his masculinity in any way, he was a

man and that was clear. There were no expectations towards him whatsoever”. Deqn further noticed that: “the difference is in the position – before if you were standing high in the social hierarchy the expectations towards you would have been greater, but today if you are a man there are those huge expectations of you, no matter if you are a construction worker or a principle of a big company”. What is noticeable in this answer is the observation that the fastly developing male vanity transcends social class and becomes a normative at any level. The good-look is not a luxury for upper-class with spare time, as it used to be, but rather it has become a mass requirement. Furthermore, my interviewees believed that masculinity formulation was not an issue for their fathers because there was one stable set of codes, known and recognized by each member of the society which is not the case anymore. That is why their father’s form of masculinity is not adequate to the present situation. However, this generation gap in definitions of masculinity exists in the Western context as well, as Simpson emphasizes by naming the model of the fathers of the present generation of young men “retrosexuals”,¹²⁹.

Stoqn’s response to that issue further explains the logic of this understanding by adding that: “today there is so much information coming from everywhere, that each young man can opt out of many options about how to develop his masculinity”. What is striking in this answer is that it appears that the accessibility to information makes the confusion greater, because it visualizes the many possibilities, but still each individual can only choose one to follow during his lifetime. Moreover, this answer implicitly visualizes the fact that there are competing ideas and models of masculinity, coexisting in the same time in the country.

Another issue, tightly related to the question of the previous generation’s definition of masculinity is the context in which it was formulated – namely the communist regime in

¹²⁹ Simpson, M., *Retrosexual*, available at <http://www.marksimpson.com/blog/category/metrosexual/> (accessed 18 May 2008)

Bulgaria. However, what was surprising was that my respondents generally hesitated to analyze this subject matter. Even though they claimed that the situation has changed significantly between their father's generation and their own, they did not want to look for links between the two contexts. At first, all of my interviewees said that communism is in the past and can not influence the present. On reflection, however, Stojan said that actually there are many traces of this time in people's mentality today in Bulgaria, so probably there is a relation with the formulation of masculinity as well but he could not tell what it is. He also added that for him: "the most visible legacy of the regime is that even today you still have to have the right connections, to know the right people and even when you have put many efforts into something if someone else has those acquaintances, he can easily be praised for your work". This response shows how unstable my interviewee feels in his situation in the social context, because there are old schemes operating, which are opposite to the officially proclaimed logic of social organization, which should ensure coherence and stability. This is definitely one of the distinguishing features of Bulgarian context in which the Western metrosexuality is applied.

Despite the lack of interest to discuss the past, my interviewees were more than willing to talk about today's formulation of role models. All of them underlined the importance of the media and Hollywood movies for instilling norms of masculinity. However, their opinion differed in the evaluation they gave to its role – whether it is positive or negative. Christian thought that Western movies are setting a good example, because "as a matter of fact, I believe that there is a lot to be learnt from the Western productions about how a man should look like and how he has to treat the people around him. Unfortunately, in Bulgaria there are many males, especially among the elderly people, who do not take proper care for the way they look". His answer again marks the generational difference in the perception about how much care a man should take about his appearance. And of course, the

elderly people he was referring to are from the generation of his father, who's ideas of masculinity were shaped during communism. Through this statement, this young metrosexual is criticizing the norms of masculinity, defined mainly during the state-socialism, by clearly naming them obsolescent from his standing point in the present. What is important in his view is the belief that the better examples of masculinity can be found and directly traced from the Western context.

At the other end of the spectrum were Deqn's observations that: "Media and the western productions, that are flooding our everyday live, are most influential for us, the young people. In them many people find their dreamed images of masculinity". Stoqn claimed that: "Media has the greatest influence in formulating wrong stereotypes" and Boqn's answer further explains the argument: "What we see in the Western movies are good examples of how a man should look. But those productions do not set any examples about the masculinity a man should follow in real life". In this answers, the question of reality emerges as a border between the actual life and the polished images, presented in the Hollywood movies. As a matter of fact, this group of respondents distinguished themselves from those normatives by labeling them as superficial and that shows that they have their own motivation in being concern with their look, which is different than the values instilled in the movies. Nevertheless, it is notable that my informants were significantly more interested in talking about the present context and the Hollywood movies than they were about state-socialism, which can be explained with the fact that they are more familiar with the contemporary situation. At certain points, my respondents were even critical of the images presented in this media form, however they still could not situate themselves adequately in relation to those models, implemented through the movies.

Besides Western movies, there was one more issue that was popping up naturally in each conversation and of course I questioned it further specifically – the situation of changing

gender order with the empowerment of women and generally the role of women in defining masculine identity. All of my interviewees categorically stated that society has changed tremendously and this is creating confusions for them as men.

Stoqn told me: “It is obvious that men are losing their dominating position in the relation to women. Gradually, but categorically, the stereotypes about the macho attitude are demolished and women are gaining the right to express their opinion and emotions. Of course, the controversy between the old, deeply rooted understanding of men as a tough guy and the new idea of men as gentlemen and equal partner of woman confuses us about what kind of attitude should we adopt. Because of that, many men feel endangered, rejected and uncertain in their relationship with women”. What is most notable in this response is the usage of adjectives like “endangered, rejected and uncertain” to describe men’s relation to women, which puts an accent on the shift of power relations with changing gender order and illustrates their uncertainty and sense of losing stability in this form of relations. Stoqn’s further explanation of this insecurity was that on the one hand there are many young women who enjoy being independent and even perceived it as discrimination of a man is protective to them. At the same time, however, there is this other category of young women who still expect men to be financially stable and to take care in any sense of them. He exemplified this second category by saying that he recently bought a car and suddenly girls who would never looked at him before become more interested in flirting with him. Stoqn noted that it is hard to distinguish those two types of women, probably because the border line between them is not strict, and bitterly exclaimed: “I am not sure if you, the women know exactly what you want from us!” Since in the Bulgarian context sexuality and relation to women are still among the key determinants of masculinity, this controversy among women inevitably reflects on the formulation of male identity.

However, what seems to be a positive feature of metrosexuality, both in Bulgarian case and worldwide, is that metrosexual young men appeared to have become more flexible and willing to establish their masculinity on the basis of reciprocal relation with the definition of femininity, as the answers of my interviewees showed. Moreover, the young men I interviewed had some understanding about the reasons why many women are protesting against the norms of the patriarchy. As Christian put it: “Women are tired of being told what they should do or not. Now, when they have the possibility, it is only natural that they are becoming more independent”. This easiness with accepting women’s right of being independent seems less likely to appear in the previous models of masculinity, for instance the partisan fighters during the state-socialism. In their perception, what came naturally was women being at their disposal and helping them, but not being self-sufficient. Fortunately, in the contemporary situation of difficult material conditions, metrosexual men are more open and willing to negotiate gender roles.

There is one possible explanation for this greater level of tolerance in the understandings of metrosexuals about the contemporary gender order, which appeared in Boyan’s claim that: “Honestly, I think that we are living in such a time when everyone, no matter of the sex, had to prove his or her self at any level – the outer appearance, managing personal life and successful career”. From this statement, it appears that since the overall social conditions are becoming more complicated and demanding from individuality, the genders appeared to have become more open-minded towards each other.

Looking specifically at the construction of masculinity among young men in Bulgaria and the motivation behind the appearance of metrosexuality in the country, the interviews left me with the impression that there is a significant level of inner uncertainty about their masculine identity, which young men in Bulgaria experienced. It is related to the uneasy intersection of various normatives of masculinity, influencing their identity formulation,

which come from different directions: the communist past of the country, combined with the new role models instilled through influences coming from the West in the overall climate of dynamically changing gender order. Because of this situation, it appears that each young man has in front of him somewhat of a puzzle which he has to solve by picking up pieces from different models and constructing his own masculine identity. Moreover, in the situation of economic instability and overall turbulent social conditions, this identity should be the one that best sells on the labor market as well as in all the other areas of life. Because of that, narcissism and male vanity becomes mainly a survival strategy, working in two directions – first, one's appearance is the most easily controlled entity, which can be worked out through different cosmetic practices, and second it turns out that the good look is a key to social success.

Of course, there are patterns common for the Bulgarian case and the overall Western context in which metrosexuality appeared. Among those is the situation in which the model of masculinity of the fathers of today's young men have become old-fashioned and dysfunctional. In addition to that, as a tendency, transcending local borders can be seen general situation of shifting gender order which determines uncertainty in masculine roles. Because of that, metrosexuality appears as a masculine identity which is significantly opened about the meanings of femininity in both contexts.

Generally, metrosexuality has become an important set of norms, influencing the formulation of masculine identity of young Bulgarians. However, the communist past of the country and the present social conditions determined different nuances of ideological meanings, hidden by the implementation of vanity. On the first place, what differentiates metrosexuality in Bulgaria from its form in the West is the significance given to sexuality. In the Western context, the question of sexual orientation is not that essential and it is more negotiable. In Bulgaria, however, it is a key issue, which plays a vital role in defining

masculinity and in the perception of the society towards the young men. In a relation to the social expectations, second distinguishing feature of metrosexuality in the Bulgarian context becomes visible – it is not matter of individual self-indulging, but rather the good look turns out to be a strategy which increases the chance of success. Those characteristics are result of the specific context of implication of this Western tendency.

Conclusions

Metrosexuality has emerged as an influential set of codes for constructing masculinity among contemporary young men. At first, it may appear as superficial male vanity; but when scrutinized closer it turns out to be a visual expression of responses to processes taking place in the present world. The ideology is formulated at two levels – first, there are general, overarching meanings that can be found in a larger context such as the Western world; second, there are specific nuances of those significations, which are determined by the local historical and contemporary material conditions, which is exemplified with the case of Bulgaria.

In the West, “metrosexual man” appeared from the intersection of consumer society, values of which are consistently spread through media and popular culture, and the situation of shifting gender positioning brought about with the advances of feminism. The emergence of this masculine identity, in this context, made several significant changes. In first place, it made young men from different walks of life mass consumers, ready to invest substantial amounts of money and efforts in their appearance. Secondly, by legitimizing male vanity, metrosexuality clearly showed that gender roles are socially constructed and entities that are labeled as feminine can be as much enjoyed by men. What is more, this new identity abolished sexuality as a primary marker of masculinity and established other signifiers, primarily the lifestyle choices, in a position of determinants.

Nevertheless, not all of the abovementioned changes were fully transmitted to post-state socialism context of Bulgaria, where metrosexuality found its local application. The feature of the Western version of this identity what is mostly retained is the openness and flexibility towards formulating new gender roles in the society. Other key characteristics of metrosexuality, such as narcissism and consumerism, also are presented in the Bulgarian context, but are colored with other symbolic nuances.

The narcissism of the “metrosexual man” in the West is understood as self-indulgement and individual enjoyment. In Bulgaria, however, the male vanity turns out to be an elaborated strategy that young men use to answer to the complicated social demands placed on them, which leads to inner uncertainty. This difficulty originates from several opposite forces, acting together in the present moment: in first place, the state-socialism past of the country, when masculinity was used as a political tool for sustaining and implementing the party ideology and has underwent significant changes in its meanings; in second place, the current situation of economic instability; in third place, the new ideals of masculinity coming from the West and the overall shifts in gender positioning.

The meaning of the possibility to consume as well is different than the one given in the Western context. It is again determined by the communist past, when many restrictions were imposed, in combination with the present, when Western products are available on the market but not that accessible due to high costs. That makes consumption to be more meaningful in the Bulgarian context and more demonstrative, than it is in the West, as the construction of the public image of the Bulgarian metrosexual soccer player shows.

While narcissism and consumption bear certain resemblance with their functions in the Western context for defining metrosexuality, what completely differentiates the presence of this masculine identity in Bulgaria is the importance given to sexuality. In the West, the symbol of “metrosexual man” - David Beckham – can be photographed for a gay magazine without causing much public reaction. In Bulgaria, however, each young man has to clearly indicate and reaffirm his heterosexuality in formulating his masculinity. This essential difference shows the rigidity of the form of patriarchy in contemporary Bulgaria and the deeply rooted value of heteronormativity.

After investigating metrosexuality as a Western trend and researching its implication in a non-Western, post-state socialism context, it appears that the feature of this new

masculine identity that transcends contextual borders is the better understanding of gender roles as social constructs, which presupposes greater flexibility in their definition. That is why, from a feminist perspective, metrosexuality can be read as a suitable answer to the changes of gender positioning, initiated by feminist ideology. Since it manages to make gender roles more negotiable in every context, it appears that it is an important step in transforming the heteronormative patriarchal order. What is more, in the social context of the Western societies, this masculine identity has already succeeded in weakening the importance given to sexuality and there is a hope that those advances will gradually reach the post-state socialism context of Bulgaria.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Photos of David Beckham¹³⁰



Photo 1.1: David Beckham



Photo 1.2: David Beckham

¹³⁰Star pulse web site, http://www.starpulse.com/Athletes/Beckham,_David/Pictures/index.html?page=2

Appendix 2 – Photos of Rushi Videnliev¹³¹



Photo 2.1 Rushi Videnliev



Photo 2.2: Rushi Videnliev

¹³¹ Taken from <http://bulphoto.com/persons/542/>

Appendix 3 – Photos of Valeri Bojinov¹³²

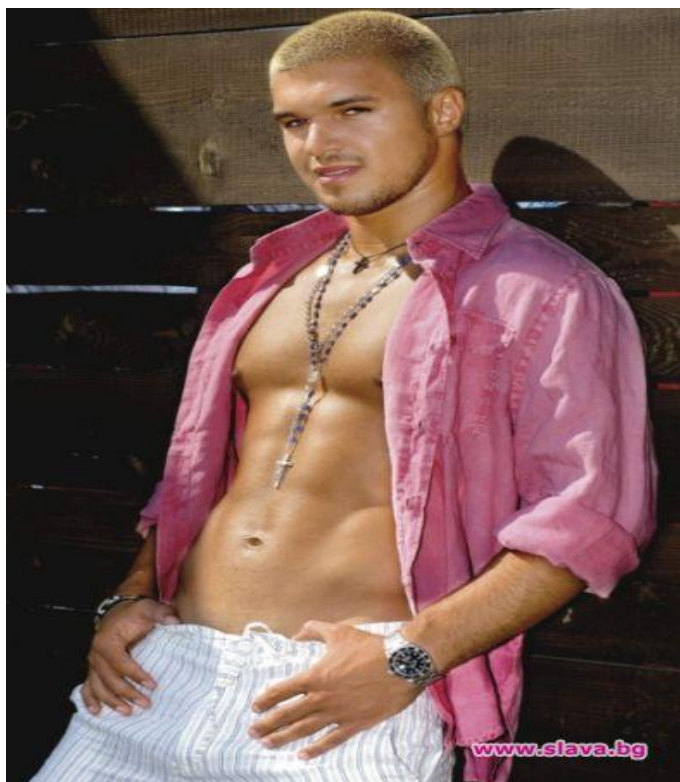


Photo 3.1: Valeri Bojinov



Photo 3.2: Valeri Bojinov

¹³² Taken from http://www.snimka.bg/album.php?album_id=52416&view=1&photo=129



Photo 3.3: Valeri Bojinov and his girlfriend Alisia



Photo 3.4: Valeri, Alisia and their new born baby, named after his father – Valeri Junior

Appendix 4 – Photo of Bolo café/bar/restaurant interior¹³³



Photo 4.1 – The interior of the second floor



Photo 4.2 – The bar on the first floor, next to the restaurant

¹³³ A;; photos are taken from the web page of Bolo, available at <http://boloclub.net/en/index.htm> (last accessed 27 May 2008)



Photo 4.3 – Coffee corner on the third floor



Photo 4.4 – Bar on the third floor

Appendix 5 – Interview questions

What does it mean to be a young man in Bulgaria today? How does it feel? Have you ever lived abroad and can you compare the experience?

Can you tell if Bulgarian society has certain specific expectations of you, since you are male?

How important is the way you look in your everyday life, job, relations? Do you enjoy taking care of your look? How much time do you usually spend taking care of your appearance? What do you do (what kind of cosmetic procedures, sports, shopping)?

Do you think that the social expectations towards men from the generation of your father were different? If yes, in what sense?

How do you feel about the communist past of Bulgaria? Do you think it felt different being a man during this time? Do you see any traces of that time in the present situation?

Do you think that women are becoming more powerful and independent in Bulgaria? If yes, does that affect your masculine identity somehow?

What is your opinion about the Western media productions and the Hollywood movies and the models of masculinity they instill? Do you think they are influential in Bulgaria?

What do you think about popular young Bulgarians, like the soccer player Valeri Bojinov and the singer Rushi Videnliev, who take a lot of care about the way they look and openly demonstrate what products and brands they are using?

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