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Boys to Men — A Revealing Angle from the World of Advertising

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The “Sunday Styles” section of *The New York Times* is often a useful barometer of the culture. On October 17, that section featured a front-page spread entitled, “From Boys to Men,” and the article is a sign of something larger than mere fashion and advertising.

Reporter Guy Trebay explains that advertisers have shifted their images of male identity from the “skinny skate-rat” of recent years to real and recognizable men. Trebay credits Hedi Slimane of Dior men’s wear for inventing the boy image so prevalent in recent culture. Images of skinny youths with slightly (or more than slightly) androgynous appearances have dominated. Trebay describes this pattern as “designer subversions of age and gender expectations.”

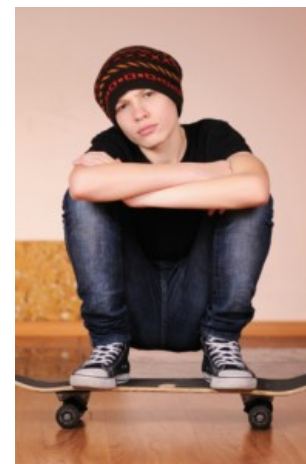
But now, a far more masculine and traditional model of manhood is showing up in advertisements and media images. Joe Levy, editor in chief of *Maxim*, a magazine that skirts the edge between the traditional men’s magazine and pornography, attributes the shift to economic factors. In other words, when unemployment threatens, skinny skate-rat images bring no comfort. Instead, men who look like they might actually hold a job are back in style.

You will love how Trebay describes the trajectory of the new man-in-demand: “You lose the T-shirt and the skateboard. You buy an interview suit and a package of Gillette Mach 3 blades. You grow up, in other words.”

That is a classic statement that deserves great prominence. The crisis of delayed manhood for so many boys and young men is now well documented, and the larger culture reflects this phenomenon. Advertising does not rule the world, but it is a powerful indicator of the cultural direction. Advertisers make it their business to know where the culture is headed. This new trend can only be seen as good news, even if it does not yet represent any profound recovery of sanity in the society.

One important aspect of this report ties directly to a vital aspect of biblical masculinity — the reality and value of a man’s work. These advertisers are not shifting merely to older and more rugged males, but to men who look like they just might be able to hold a job and do it well.

That is a healthy and promising dimension of this new development. One statement from this article deserves to be imprinted on the male brain: “You grow up, in other words.”



Guy Trebay, “[From Boys to Men](#),” *The New York Times*, Sunday, October 17, 2010.

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