

THE PUBLIC SPECTACLE OF ITALIAN MASCULINITY:  
NONVERBAL DISPLAY OF GENDER IDENTITY

by

GINO T. PERROTTE  
B.S. Grove City College, 2000

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## ABSTRACT

Italian masculine identity is examined by looking at the following influences: history and structure of Italian society, the public places used for the performance and the culture surrounding the display of masculinity. This research uses an approach similar to an ethnography of communication. Initial data and ideas were gathered through observational fieldwork and interviews that took place in Italy during July 2006 and July 2007. A methods section describes interviews that later took place with Americans in order to compare and contrast responses with ones previously collected from Italians. The data gathered from these interviews will be used to highlight and substantiate the components of cultural identity that are unique to Italian masculinity. In analyzing the research data, the social meaning model is applied to elaborate a culturally shared set of meanings for a particular nonverbal act in an Italian piazza. Finally, findings are organized using four aspects of cultural identity to understand an Italian definition of masculinity. Two contributions emerged from the research: cultural sense making and cultural change. Cultural sense making provides a context for Italian masculine behavior, and cultural change describes the transformation of Italian ideology between the generations in regards to gender roles.

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## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

### Introduction/ Overview

The most basic human activities are influenced by culture. From walking down the street to looking at others, culture influences how a person performs an activity and how others view it. Culture provides the framework or conceptual map through which people interpret the world. Particular cultures influence their society in particular ways. These peculiarities, shared by members of a culture, come to form a communal identity. This cultural identity enables one to recognize others that are members of its society and distinguish those that are not.

Identity is shaped by many factors. Among these, the place or setting of one's life and the storyline or narrative of that life are critical components in constructing a sense of self (Sarbin, 2005). Culture provides both the setting and narrative for its members. The members then enact or reflect the values of the culture, sustaining a communal identity. In fact, more than 200 studies suggest through their findings that features of communication are culturally specific (Carbaugh, 1990, p. xvi). For example, Philipsen (1990), in his essay titled "Speaking "Like a Man" in Teamsterville," studies the cultural contexts of a blue-collar, low-income neighborhood near the south side of Chicago. The members of this community share an understanding for the value of speaking despite the fact that the cultural rules are not written down. The men of Teamsterville know that their verbal social performances will often be critiqued against these rules in regards to their manliness (p. 12). A shared identity, specific to their culture, allows members of Teamsterville to perform, evaluate and judge each other. Philipsen recognizes the diversity of speech communities within America, thus suggesting that the environment of Teamsterville itself promotes the culturally specific role enactment of manliness. Therefore, the setting of

Teamsterville promotes a narrative or script for the cultural identity of men within the community. Such cultural influences can be seen within Italian culture as well.

The storyline of Italian culture is shaped by its environment of history, religion and politics. The resulting narrative, as seen in Teamsterville, provides a set of criteria with which Italians are able to perform, evaluate and judge a performance of masculinity. Prior research has asserted that masculinity in Italian culture is a public display of the private self. Likened to a parading “peacock,” the Italian male performs in public displays of manhood that reinforce and communicate identity (Reich, 2004, p. 34). Previous studies support this idea, indicating that Mediterranean manhood (including Italy’s) is a cultural identity sustained through public performance (Gilmore, 1990, pp. 30-36).

### Background

I chose to study Italian masculinity for several reasons. My interest in Italian culture began in 2000 when I first visited the country on a post-graduate art history tour. The history, passion and boldness of the people and their cities fascinated me. In my travel journal from this trip, I remarked at how differently Italian men dressed and behaved in comparison to the males that I had grown up with in Western Pennsylvania. The contrast was strong, and I was curious as to the reasons why. After returning to Pennsylvania, I immediately planned my next vacation. As my enthusiasm for the culture grew, so did my interest in learning the language. In 2003, I studied with a tutor to learn Italian. By 2006, I had completed several courses and participated in two study abroad programs. Given my competence in the language, coupled with my enthusiasm for Italy, this research project was a natural extension. For these reasons, I chose to study the display of masculinity within Italian culture.

## Theoretical Framework

This is a study grounded in the critical tradition of communication research. The critical tradition asserts that culture and society are structured to maintain an imbalance of power that favors some members, while oppressing others (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 317). The concepts of ideology and hegemony will be examined in relation to a particular display of Italian masculinity. Literature and research on identity, Italian culture and history, and nonverbal communication will be reviewed in order to present characteristics of a hegemonic masculinity particular to an Italian cultural identity.

Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study is to examine particular themes of Italian cultural identity produced by a particular episode in a particular context. The themes of culture, identity and hegemony will be explored through examining, comparing and contrasting cultural discourses of young adult Italians and Americans regarding masculinity. The data gathered will be used to highlight and substantiate the components of cultural identity that are unique to Italian masculinity. The context for the American portion of the study is a Southeast college campus in the United States. This is important since the desired American perspective will be relatively unfamiliar with the culture of Italy. Such a cross-cultural comparison will help to isolate elements of Italian cultural identity through culturally shared meaning. The findings of this exploratory study are intended to serve as a starting point for future research.

The central research question guiding the project is: What are the elements of an Italian masculine cultural identity as revealed through a cross-cultural comparison of Italian and American discourse? To answer this question, it was necessary to gather perspectives from both Italians and Americans in regards to the same visual representation of masculinity. Italians were



first consulted to gather their opinions of masculinity in reference to specific episodes occurring within their culture. Americans were also selected as a focal group for the research, and the same episodes used with the Italians set the scene for an American perspective of masculinity. The resulting discourse provided evidence of elements of cultural identity unique to both countries and helped to provide responses to these additional questions:

1. What are the culturally dominant traits of mainstream, hegemonic Italian masculinity?
2. What do fashion and bodily presentation communicate about hegemonic masculinity?

This study uses an approach similar to an ethnography of communication in order to address the research question. Although this study does not overtly apply Hymes' (1972) SPEAKING mnemonic to the study of the Italians as a speech community, the study does fit Carbaugh's (1988, p. 125) criteria for ethnography of communication. The four criteria for this type of research are: study of a communicative practice is conducted, a native point of view is pursued, accounts are collected for the purpose of cross-cultural comparisons, and the event is studied by a participant observer within its cultural context. Each of these criteria has been met and the methods used will be discussed in upcoming chapters. For this reason, I will refer to the approach as being similar to an ethnography of communication.

#### Preview of Upcoming Chapters

The first section of the literature review examines nonverbal communication, ideology, hegemony, cultural identity, place identity and masculinity. The importance of nonverbal communication and its use of culturally understood signs/symbols are presented to explain its relationship to ideology. Ideology is described in terms of its cultural specificity in the way that people view the world and visual representations such as signs/symbols. Hegemony is defined

and examined in order to show that the ideology of a dominant group can be accepted and promoted by a culture. As a dimension of ideology, cultural identity indicates that members of the same culture understand the specific roles established for them. These roles define, instruct and offer a method of evaluation for behavior. Two models for cultural identity are presented: the social meaning model (Floyd & Erbert, 2003) and Carbaugh's model of cultural identity (1990b). Next, masculinity is defined, explained and explored through the work of several authors. The concepts of performed masculinity, specifically within a common Italian ritual, and shared cultural meaning within community groups are explored in order to establish a basis for evaluating Italian masculinity. Following, an argument for the role of fashion in gender identity is presented. The role of spatial setting on identity formation is examined in order to explicate the link between the physical environment and the actions performed within it. Building on this idea, a physical description of the Italian town where research was conducted is provided to show how the environment influences its people and their identities.

The second section on Italian Identity examines the influence of Roman heritage, Catholicism, the Renaissance and Fascism. Roman *virtus*, or manliness, is researched in order to understand the storyline of Italian heritage and hegemonic masculine ideals of the Roman era. A review of Catholicism looks at this religion as a pervasive influence in daily life. This influence includes hegemonic values and distinct gender roles. The impact of the Renaissance and its nonverbal communication is explored through its focus on visual beauty and its model of aesthetic value for males. Fascism tapped into this model in order to physically define "Italian-ness" through a sculpted, idealized body. The literature review of this proposal will look at prior research on Italian Identity and masculinity.

The first analytic chapter looks at the Italian piazza and how it influences cultural identity in regards to ideology and the performance of masculinity. A specific episode of nonverbal communication enacted within a piazza serves as the focal point for the discourse on Italian masculine identity in this chapter. The second analytic chapter examines nonverbal communication. Having built an argument for cultural identity in the first analytic chapter, the second analyzes the values associated with the nonverbal display. These values then come together to form a hegemonic masculinity.

Finally, ideology and hegemony are explored in the discussion section through the use of an Italian fashion advertisement in order to understand its implications regarding race, class and gender. Combined with the cultural and socio-historical information from the literature review, this thesis will use the gathered data to uncover elements of Italian masculine identity that are hegemonically produced and displayed within mainstream scenes of Italian culture.

#### Justification

The concepts of masculinity, nonverbal communication, hegemony and identity formation have been explored in many projects and articles such as the ones presented in the literature review. Italian rituals and customs have also been researched, but to a lesser degree. However, there has been little, if any, published research linking all of these ideas. It has been noted that the “Italian contribution to the history of masculinity has been scarce even though recently historians have shown increasing attention” (Wanrooij, 2005, p. 278). In fact, the investigation of male identity is in its infancy. Given the fact that research on nonverbal communication indicates that physical appearance, including clothing and accessories, has a large capacity for carrying messages (Burgoon & Saine, 1978, p. 80), it is important to

understand how physical appearance is linked to masculine identity. For these reasons, this research seeks to identify the components of cultural identity that are unique to Italian masculinity through discourse produced by a particular nonverbal episode in a particular context.

### Definitions

Several key words and concepts must be explained prior to beginning the research on this thesis:

- *Public* describes space or actions for which there is no expectation or assumption of privacy.
- *Performance* denotes the effort put forth by an actor in portraying a specific image or role.
- *Hegemony* is defined by Gramsci (1971) as the largely unquestioned consent given by the majority of people within a culture to the general direction imposed on society by the dominant social group (p. 12).
- *Masculinity* refers to the manner in which a male shows in Italian society that he is a man.
- *Passeggiata* roughly translates in English to the noun *stroll*, which indicates a leisurely walk (Lazzarino, Aski, Dini & Peccianti, 2000, p. A-36).
- *Fare Bella Figura* translated to English means *to look good* (Lazzarino et al., 2000, p. 159).

This list defines how these terms are viewed and applied within this research project.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Nonverbal Communication, Ideology and Hegemony

This chapter outlines the previous research conducted on hegemony and display, rituals and customs, and provides the link that allows for the connection between the two. The method of study will be outlined in chapter three, and the results analyzed in chapters four and five.

Discussion of the results will take place in chapter six.

It is the nonverbal communication of males that is being examined through this research. Nonverbal communication relies on signs and symbols to transmit messages. According to Burgoon and Saine (1978, p. 7), communication involving symbols must involve three things: a socially shared coding system, an encoder who makes something public through that code, and a decoder who interprets that code systematically. The code must carry shared meaning within a culture or society in order for an act to be considered communication. Shared meanings develop from an ideology.

Ideology, an important concept in the critical tradition, refers to a system of representations that form the basis of how people see the world (Hall, 1986, p. 66). These representations, embedded within culture itself, are the way that people make sense of and give meaning to the world around them. Further, meaning arises because of a shared framework that social members share together. Ideology and power seek to fix the meanings of images and language so that they are interpreted according to the dominant group's standards (Jhally, 1997).

Hegemony is closely linked to ideology. Hegemony refers to the process by which one group's ideology becomes dominant over another's. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci was the first scholar to develop the concept of hegemony as the means by which to evaluate and

elaborate alternative versions of Marxism, which focus mainly on economic effects and class struggle (Mumby, 1997). In contrast to Karl Marx's beliefs that the oppressed classes could find freedom through changes in the ownership of capital, Gramsci's concept of hegemony focused on intellectual adoption of the dominant group's ideas by the subordinate group. Gramsci (1971) describes the subtle nature of hegemonic control as:

The "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (p. 12)

The concept of hegemony can be applied to research on gender identity. In his book *The Hegemonic Male*, Miguel Vale de Almeida (1996) examines masculinity in a Portuguese Town. He defines hegemonic masculinity as, "an ideal central model which, unattainable by practically any single man, exerts over all men a controlling effect" (p. 5). This central model dictates behavioral guidelines which are known to everyone, supposed to be performed by everyone, but are sometimes rejected or ignored by particular men (p. 165). By rejecting the hegemonic model of male domination, monogamy, heterosexuality and reproduction, these rebellious men turn their backs on the values associated with the hegemonic identity of their culture.

### Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is composed of patterns, situations and uses of communication that are unique to a community (Carbaugh, 1990a, p. 1). It has three basic roles within a culture: definitive, instructive and evaluative (p. 2-4). It defines who has the right to be considered as a member of the cultural group, it instructs participants on how to properly act within the culture

and it provides a standard for evaluating the actions of others. In analyzing the data gathered from the proposed interviews, I am considering two models: the social meaning model (SMM) (Floyd & Erbert, 2003) and Carbaugh's (1990b) model of cultural identity.

The SMM predicts that there will be consensually recognized meanings for nonverbal behavior within a given social or language community. The model suggests that everyone understands the actors and actively interprets the meanings. By contrast, the nature of hegemony suggests that it is a subtle process with people being coerced into supporting the interests of a dominant group (Gramsci, 1971). While the SMM model is contrary to a critical perspective which seeks to identify power imbalances within society, critical theory recognizes that hegemony can exist without people knowing about it. This is especially true for the dominant group to whom everything seems normal. However, marginalized groups, often underserved by social institutions, have the opportunity to more easily identify the oppressive nature of hegemony since they have a more difficult time fitting the standard of "normal." Therefore, critical theory calls us to search for an explanation of the "normal" (Kronsell, 2005, p. 283). Perhaps the predictive power of the SMM indicates a shared cultural identity or ideology, which allows members of the culture to accurately interpret the behavior of other members. Such a concept is important to this research because it indicates that cultural members (Italians versus Americans) should view a communicative act (display of masculinity) in a similar manner. Therefore, it can be argued that the SMM suggests that Italians and Americans will view the same nonverbal display in a different way due to different cultural identities or ideologies.

Carbaugh's (1990b, p. 157) model of Cultural Identity provides a framework for understanding the cultural codes that go into an interactional encounter. The four aspects

involved in the coding are: a cultural model of personhood, targeted goals, loci of motives, and social relations. These aspects allow us to unravel the variation in coding due to context. The cultural model of being a person focuses on the core social concepts used by an individual for communication performance. Essentially, this aspect of cultural identity reveals the broad themes employed during communication that come to be oriented within an identity. For example, the American who openly talks about his or her individual preferences displays the cultural identity of individualism. The second aspect of cultural identity requires that the performers act toward a targeted goal that is often culturally coded. An example of this is seen when the individualistic American prioritizes speaking the truth over protecting the needs of the group. The third aspect involves the application of basic moral identities. For instance, the American believes that he is justified to act on his own thoughts and feelings instead of the consensus of the group (p. 158). The final aspect of cultural identity deals with social relations and involves power and distance. Carbaugh explains types of systems for power and distance. A deference-based system minimizes power and increases distance. It respects distance and differences. A solidarity-based system minimizes both power and distance, thus promoting commonalities among people. Americans, for example, often use a solidarity-based system. This type of system is commonly seen in teacher-students relationships, where the person with the greater power (teacher) is accessible to those with less power (students). Consistent with an ethnography of communication approach, I will apply Carbaugh's model of Cultural Identity to the data gathered from my research in order to elaborate an Italian identity of masculinity. The work of Gerry Philipsen demonstrates how to apply an ethnography of communication approach to research on masculinity.



Philipsen highlights the shared cultural meaning of masculinity held by community groups in his essay *Speaking "Like a Man" in Teamsterville* (1990). Philipsen notes, "To know how to perform, or present oneself, "like a man" in Teamsterville as elsewhere is to be privy to implicit understanding shared by members of the speech community, i.e., it is to have access to the culture" (p. 12). Although Philipsen's study is not a critical one, from a critical lens we can see him referring to an ideology shared by the members of the society. The group interprets the communication in a similar manner, thus giving cultural meaning to the action. It is reasonable to extend this idea beyond the culture of Teamsterville, USA to Italian communities as well.

### Masculinity, Italian Style

This section explores the concepts of masculinity and social roles, examines the performance aspect of social identity within a common Italian ritual and considers the influence of physical space on identity. After providing a general discussion on these subjects, the specific circumstances of Italian culture and the physical setting of the city where research was conducted are presented in order to explicate their impact upon, as well as define, Italian masculinity. A case is presented for a cultural identity and ideology shaped by Roman heritage, Catholicism, the Renaissance and Fascism. As a result of this ideology, the hegemonic values of Italian masculinity are revealed.

Before examining masculinity in the context of Italian culture, it is necessary to define the concept in general. Masculinity is a set of role behaviors that men frequently enact (Kilmartin, 1994, p. 17). To break it down further, a role is composed of situational behaviors. Situations are produced within a cultural context; therefore, the type of situation calls for a specific social role. For example, the role of employee includes the expectations that the person

will report to work on time, complete projects and adhere to workplace regulations. A gender role is a type of social role. Within cultures, men and women are expected to behave, think and feel according to their gender role. Beginning in childhood, men are constantly reminded of gender. Messages tell them what it means to be manly and what the expectations are for their role. Thus, the masculine role or identity carries specific norms for its performers (p. 18). These norms serve a dual purpose: they instruct men on how they should behave, as well as how they should not be. The norms of gender roles are most apparent when they are violated (p. 21). Behavior traditionally seen as unmasculine, such as homosexuality, can be socially punished. Gay men, for example, are subject to verbal abuse, stigmatization and physical violence (p. 11). Conversely, those who can best perform the masculine role are socially rewarded.

The notion of roles implies that they must be performed. In fact, Evans (2005) asserts that *“not only must gender be done, but it must be seen to be done, again and again – it must be iterated and, performed within a social space”* (p. 201). Thus, it is through others within our society that we know whether or not we are performing our roles properly. Our society rewards men for masculine behavior. In time, a man can become so well acquainted with the cultural standards of the masculine role that he is able to define his own boundaries for proper behavior in order to avoid social punishment (Kilmartin, 1994, p. 22). When a man accepts this masculine ideology without question, it becomes for him the measure of his worth. He will then judge the performance of others against this ideology.

In Mediterranean societies such as Italy, gender roles are publicly performed. Public life is male territory; it is the main stage of masculine sociability (Vale de Almeida, 1996, p. 88). If public space belongs to men, then the natural counterpart in a dualistic culture is for women to be

bound to the private. Cultures that adhere to the adage “a woman’s place is in the home” are reflective of a male-privileged society (Hall, 2005, p. 157). To discover the hegemonic values of masculinity within Italy, it is necessary to first examine male behavior. Behaviors are segregated according to gender roles, and males are responsible for initiating the romantic interest. Italy has a strong sexual division as exemplified by the honor/shame dichotomy. Predatory sexuality is expected from men in general, and from young single men in particular (Vale de Almeida, 1996, p. 38). In terms of sexuality, men try to be a “conquistatore” or lady-killer. Even the Italian language seems to encourage this role division by gendering words as either masculine or feminine.

*La Dolce Vita* and other Italian films are the grounds for Reich’s (2004) research on masculinity. Reich asserts that Italian masculinity, influenced by ancient Rome, Renaissance sculptures and the notion of the Latin lover, has stood as an ideal of masculinity within Western culture (p. 1). According to Reich, this ideal is Western, bourgeois and modern (p. xiii). Through an examination of the traditional representations of Italian masculinity, Reich adopts the notion that masculinity itself is culturally and publicly created. Thus, public space serves as a proving ground for manhood in the Italian culture. Closely related to this sense of public performance is the very Italian ideal of *fare bella figura* or looking good. This ideal represents the “manifestation of the private self in the public arena” (p. 2). A form of nonverbal communication, a man uses the notion of *fare bella figura* to have his outward appearance reflect inward moral characteristics such as worthiness and honorableness. Reich explains that the *passeggiata* is often the ideal setting for displaying this notion:

In Italy, this spectacle occurs in the main piazza or the main street of a town or city when the Italian male literally puts on a show for an admiring public. The time of display is more often than not the evening passeggiata, when Italian citizens traditionally congregate after work to discuss politics, sports, local gossip, and other events of the day, as well as, once again, to see and be seen. (p. 4)

Reich further suggests that fashion becomes the costume of the passeggiata performance enabling the man to display both individual and national identity for the community to see.

Clothing, a form of nonverbal cue, is used to make an identity statement about the ways in which a man or woman understands his or her gender roles (Crane, 2000, p. 16). The importance of clothing in relation to identity is that it offers a method of “presentation of self in public space” (p. 17). Most people use clothing as the main method of communicating their social identity (Burgoon & Saine, 1978, p. 79). For males, that identity could be influenced by popular culture. Perpetuated by the media, the hegemonic masculine ideals of physical power and control, heterosexuality, job success and patriarchy appear “natural” to men. Based on these standards, men are driven to exemplify hegemony in their behaviors in support of the privileged position (Crane, 2000, p. 17).

In their study of a traditional southern Italian town, Del Negro and Berger (2001) examine how the Sassani townspeople use the ritual of passeggiata to present their social identities in public. The study by Del Negro and Berger goes on to briefly explore the human body as a site of social expression. Specifically, they examine such controllable bodily representations as deportment, costume, gait, gaze, facial expressions and proxemics. These bodily performances are interpreted by observers who then connect them to internal qualities of

the actor's character. Del Negro and Berger note that, "The body and its linkages are seen as a potential source of insights into the essential nature of others in the promenade" (p. 10). The researchers assert that this character interpretation is an ongoing element in the passeggiata. Such findings are consistent with the idea of physical appearance as a category of nonverbal communication. Physical appearance is an important aspect of nonverbal communication, as it is often the first nonverbal code to have an impact on the message receiver (Burgoon and Saine, 1978, p. 73).

Del Negro conducted qualitative research using videotape of the public ritual. After gathering the video data, Del Negro conducted feedback interviews with selected participants. The participants watched the footage of the passeggiata and began to apply moral values based on the visual images to the different people they saw in the video. The researchers observed the participant reactions. However, as interesting as the findings of this study are, they fail to seek the intended image of the performers. For example, observers may interpret a person's performance in the passeggiata as arrogant whereas the actual performer was trying to display confidence and self-assuredness. A more complete study must examine the intended message as well as cultural reasons for the accurate or incorrect translation of the individual's passeggiata performance. Del Negro's study is similar to the research conducted for this thesis. Both seek to understand observer interpretation of nonverbal communication.

### Place Identity

In gaining an understanding of human performance such as the ritual of passeggiata, one must look at the action, the setting of the action, the actor, the method of delivery, and the intention of the actor. Sarbin (2005, p. 203) argues that identity is advanced through participation

in interpersonal dramas. Within the scene or setting of the dramatic encounter, the actor engages in narratives which construct that person's sense of self and place. Therefore, Sarbin proposes that identity is largely formed by the person's physical surroundings, narratives, and the imagination. Perhaps the most critical aspect of Sarbin's concepts is that of the physical environment.

Place identity is often the beginning of personal identity. As one moves through a space such as a city, a person must ask her/himself, "where am I?" Upon formulating an answer to this question, the actor can now understand the role or social identity ("who am I?") that s/he must adopt. Spradley (1980), in his definition of ethnographic methods, also identifies that every social interaction can be identified by three primary elements: a place, actors, and activities (p. 39). In addition to these three, he further elaborates to give a total of nine major dimensions of every social situation: Space, Actor, Activity, Object, Act, Event, Time, Goal, Feeling (p. 78). It is important to note that the place setting or the stage is the first mentioned dimension. The physical space of the activity influences all of the other dimensions. The influence of space and setting upon identity formation can be applied to the enactment of masculinity. Therefore, the public space of the piazza, according to Sarbin's idea of identity, influences the enactment of the masculine gender role within it.

#### Physical Description of Bergamo/ Description of Prior Research Setting

Considering Sarbin's theory, it is important to understand the geography of the town where participant observation and additional previous research were conducted. Bergamo is a characteristic northern city in the Lombardy region of Italy. Located 31 miles northeast of Milan, the city of Bergamo is divided into two sections, thus creating two cities. Città Alta (high city),

perched on a hilltop above Città Bassa (low city), is fortified by more than five kilometers of encircling town walls. Città Alta's long history is greatly colored by Roman and Venetian rule. The high city was finally made accessible in 1887 when a cable car began operating between Città Alta and Città Bassa (Eyewitness, 2004, p. 6). The Venetian influence, stretching for four centuries, can easily be seen in the architectural style of Città Alta. The winged-lion emblem of Venice is set within the façade of the Palazzo della Ragione which faces prominently into the main square Piazza Vecchia. Città Alta has winding Medieval and Renaissance alleyways and, at its heart, is Piazza Vecchia (Eyewitness, 2004, p. 6). The piazza is framed by Palazzo della Ragione, the city bell tower, the public library, a bank and several cafes with outdoor seating. Behind the Palazzo della Ragione, the rooftops of three Catholic structures are visible. The Duomo, Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore and the Colleoni Chapel exemplify some of the town's greatest architecture and represent a "very religious area" around the Cathedral Square (Provincia, 2005, p. 4). Città Bassa is the modern city and is where one finds the train station, hotels and commercial centers (Porter & Prince, 1998). This section of town bustles with the activities of any city of today: automobile traffic, hectic lunch hours and chain-store shopping. In summary, Città Alta (Piazza Vecchia in particular) is highly influenced by Rome, Venice and Catholicism.

The high city of Città Alta has a long history of wealth and a tradition of defense (Porter & Prince, 1998, p. 537). In order to protect its wealth and citizens, Città Alta was strategically fortified with town walls by the ruling Venetians in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to safeguard the city from the nearby State of Milan. The high city also has a fortress and a castle which rests at its highest

point. The bell tower in Piazza Vecchia still tolls 100 times at 10:00 p.m. every night as a reminder of the days when, as a protection for its population, the city gates would close.

It is important to know about the history of the city in order to understand its people. Città Alta was isolated from its neighbors by the geography of the city and its fortifications. The effects of the isolation can still be felt today as the people of Città Alta remain suspicious of strangers and lack the warm friendliness that is often associated with Italians. Bergamo is a hard working city. One informant, an Italian who attends the city's university, says that the lifestyle is fast paced. According to him, the people are working six or seven days per week. Money is important and status symbols such as designer clothing and expensive cars are commonly seen in Bergamo. Such symbols are a form of nonverbal communication revealing ideology and identity. In the next section, Italian history and culture will be examined in order to understand its influence upon the identity of its people and their ideology.

#### Italian Identity in Relation to Roman Heritage, Catholicism, the Renaissance and Fascism

The influence of the Roman Empire left a lasting impression upon Italy. In many cities beyond Rome, structures such as roads, aqueducts, coliseums and ancient ruins remind Italians of their glorious past. It has been said that it is difficult to dig a shovel of Italian dirt without unearthing something of an archeological interest. According to Sarbin (2005), identity is largely formed by a person's physical surroundings. Therefore, a look into the Roman world and its concept of masculinity is necessary to better understand its influence on the modern Italian male identity. The concepts of manliness, physique, gender roles, aesthetic standards, fashion and virility are examined in relation to the male identity.



Roman *virtus*, or manliness, was a shared cultural value that was publicly displayed, tested, won or lost (McDonnell, 2006, p. xiii). *Virtus* was displayed visually through the togas that each citizen wore. Thus, it would be easy for a visitor to distinguish the social hierarchy of the city through observation: senators wore special robes and purple-striped tunics and others such as priests and highly accomplished military wore distinctive costumes (p. 143).

*Virtus* represents the hegemonic masculinity of the Roman times practiced by the economic, social and political elite. Concentrated with those who control the resources and power of the time, the elite have the means to communicate their standards on a larger scale. Thus, those who were wealthy enough could commission artists to preserve their images and stories for future generations. For those who were common, their life stories perhaps had less opportunity to survive. Therefore, it is hegemonic masculinity that is being examined.

What was the hegemonic standard of Rome? Given the fact that women, children and slaves were excluded from *virtus*, it seems clear that this value is one of hegemony (McDonnell, 2006, p. 167). Multiple studies acknowledge that this standard is elitist, public, socially performed, and scrutinized, as well as judged, by others. Thus, it was possible to evaluate men on the manliness of their gender performance. They also identify that a reputation for sexual prowess was a central element to the hegemonic masculinity of Rome (p. 166).

This standard was written on the male body. Education was focused on preparing young men to fight and display their *virtus* in battle. As a result, this type of training required physical strength and the athletic physique that are often celebrated in statues of the time period. While this physical ideal does not seem to be associated with sexuality, it was certainly anatomical and critical to the hegemonic male identity (McDonnell, 2006, p. 181).

Religion has always played a pivotal role in the lives of the Italian people. It permeates the cultural life despite the fact that the number who practice the faith is dwindling. Vatican City, home of the Roman Catholic Church, is today an independent country surrounded by Rome. Most modern popes have been of Italian birth, and Italy dominates the church's hierarchy. Catholicism is engrained in Italian politics, customs and language. It is common to see a crucifix or religious statue in homes, restaurants, businesses, banks and schools. National holidays center around religious celebrations, and just about every town honors its patron saint with a holiday. Religious icons including saints, God, Jesus and Mary have been worked into everyday emotional expressions (*Dio Mio!* or My God!) of impatience, surprise, anger, disappointment and excitement. At the center of most Italian cities is the piazza with the town's church towering over the square. It is evident that the Italian people go about their daily lives within the shadow and influence of the omnipresent church (Costantino & Gambella, 1996).

Perhaps the greatest influence of the church is its quest to achieve and uphold hegemony within the Italian society. Thus, the Catholic Church is in a constant struggle "to control and influence Italian cultural life" (Pratt, 1996, p. 130). Included in the hegemonic culture are distinct gender roles. The distinct separation of members between the clergy and laity divides the church and assigns specific roles to each category. Only men can hold the highest clergy positions beginning with the priesthood and continuing onward with Bishop, Cardinal and the Papacy. Sermons and other teachings legitimized the culture's patriarchal structure by invoking Biblical examples of man's "natural" authority over women and the family. Female identity was equally forged by the church. The influence of the figure of the Virgin Mary, as well as structured beliefs

regarding virginity, marriage and motherhood, provided an ideal of love, devotion and sexuality for women to live up to (p. 133).

Despite the growing secularization of the nation, it is important to recognize how religious traditions have helped to shape Italian culture and society (Seidler, 2006, p. 7). The body reflects its environment. Christianity has taught a disdain for the body due to its sexual nature. Sexuality, framed as “sins of the flesh” became something to be controlled. The idea of sinful nature has also shaped gender relations within Christian cultures. Eve, the first woman, was tempted by the serpent Satan into sinning. As a result, evil entered the world through her, and she used her womanly charms to tempt Adam against his better judgment (p. 10). This Biblical story sets the scene that women cannot be trusted and intimate relations within Italy and other Mediterranean cultures reflect this theme. It can be “dangerous for men to listen to women, for women needed to be controlled and traditionally were seen as subject to the possession and authority of the father” (p. 10).

Catholicism also teaches feminine virtue and idealism through the model of the Virgin Mary. Therefore, men hold the dualistic “mother/whore” view of women: Men are attracted to women, yet women cannot be trusted. As men learned to distrust women, they also learned not to trust the feminine within themselves (Seidler, 2006, p. 67). Therefore, traits traditionally thought of as feminine such as “soft” and “weak” are negatively associated with men and attributed to marginalized male identities such as homosexuals (p. 81). Mainstream or hegemonic masculinity, as defined by Vale de Almeida (1996, p. 5), is synonymous with power and control. Catholicism teaches purity, and masculinity avoids contamination by excluding all that is “unmanly.” Within patriarchal cultures,

Often there is a sharp distinction between public and private spheres, so that within a Catholic moral culture there is greater emphasis on how people are supposed to behave in public. There are codes of behavior that people are expected to conform to, whatever their feelings. (Seidler, 2006, p. 74)

Catholic Italy has an honor/shame role for the sexes. Men are charged with the active public role of bringing honor to the family by providing and defending; they must constantly prove themselves in the public arena. Conversely, the behavior of women is closely guarded as they must avoid bringing shame, traditionally associated with sexual virtuousness (Filippucci, 1996, p. 55). For this reason, women are often not allowed to go out in public alone (Hall, 2005, p. 175).

Nonverbal communication relies on visual elements (signs and symbols) to transmit messages. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the signs and symbols that influence Italian life. The Church became a master at visual propaganda and communication. At a time when literacy was not necessarily common, the messages of the church were disseminated through works of art. Up until the Renaissance, the focus of art was largely religious. This was partly due to the cultural climate of the times, but also because of patronage: the Church was the largest patron of fine art. Remnants of this legacy are still clearly visible throughout Italy today, littering the countless churches, museums and piazzas. Italians are surrounded by an environment of Catholic messages and propaganda.

Italy is the birthplace of the Renaissance. This period during the 15<sup>th</sup> century shifted focus from the afterlife and religion to a greater appreciation of humanity itself. Artists such as Michelangelo began depicting the human form with extreme detail to aesthetics. Portraits

displaying individuals as the focus began to appear. The body and art, especially in the Venetian Renaissance, became something to be seen in public and appreciated for its own beauty (Porter & Prince, 1998, p. 40). Given Bergamo's 400 year domination by Venice, it is reasonable to assume that the visual ideals of the Venetian Renaissance would influence the culture of Bergamo.

The appreciation of the human form was not a new concept in Italy. Roman art openly copied and honored the Greek nudes. Perhaps the Renaissance, born in Florence, gave rise to the greatest aesthetic celebration of humanity. The male form figured prominently in the art of the time. Michelangelo's *David*, perhaps the most recognizable symbol of the Renaissance, was acknowledged even in his own time as having surpassed the highly respected Greek and Roman models. He was able to perfectly communicate heroism, ideal beauty and inner tension in visual form (Harris, 1995, p. 12). Visuals truly played a large part in the communication of Renaissance values.

Fascism tapped into this existing aesthetic value. The regime used the male body as a visual representation of its ideals. It reasoned that a well-structured mind correlated to an equally well-structured body. Therefore, the Fascist regime perpetuated classical masculine beauty in order to gain compliance for its plan to make Italians virile. In a way, the classical sculpted form became a prototype of "Italian-ness." This became the hegemonic standard for the nation. Benito Mussolini, leader of Fascist Italy, personified the idealized male for this period of the nation's history. During the Fascist era, it has been estimated that up to 30 million postcard pictures of Mussolini circulated around the country (Gori, 2000, p. 47). The muscular, bronzed physique of Mussolini was the center of the Fascist propaganda promoting the new Italian style. Mussolini

used the cinema and media to perpetuate an image of himself as “the eternally young and powerful male” in order to transform the mass of Italian men into the idealized virile, dynamic and bellicose form (Mangan, 2000, p. 9). The image of the virile man became engrained in a society that was already traditionally patriarchal. Specifically, what did the word “virile” embody to this regime? An Italian dictionary elaborates that the term describes proper behavior of a man and then lists nouns that might be described by the word such as: sex, appearance, beauty, nature... (Spackman, 1996, p. 2). It is apparent that physical beauty is an important concept in Fascist masculinity, and the regime reinforced its masculine ideal through visual communication.

Fascism perpetuated its hegemony in order to create a nation. Italy is only about 150 years old. Comprised of extremely diverse regions, dialects and people, the country has struggled with a sense of national identity. Oftentimes, Italians are most loyal to their hometown and region. However, the Fascist regime during World War II (WWII) worked hard to establish a unified nation. To do this, it had to create something that all citizens could look to as a model of how one is to be “Italian.” It had to create a national identity; this was accomplished with fashion (Paulicelli, 2002). The regime required that fashion draw inspiration from ancient Rome, regional folk costumes and the Renaissance; Mussolini even created a National Fashion Office in charge of promoting an Italian style (Steele, 2003, p. 12). Also, the period following WWII saw an increase in cinema within Italy. Italians could now see and buy their identities (Gundle, 2002). Therefore, the regime created hegemonic standards and communicated them through visual displays.

Virility was an important concept in the hegemony of Fascism. The virility of the male body was a critical element in the reconstruction of the ancient and glorious Roman Empire,

which Mussolini hoped to perpetuate at the national, then European and finally the international levels. In fact, the young and powerful Fascist male was often contrasted with the ugliness of the “others.” The Jew with the large nose, the Negro with overly prominent features, and the overweight, flabby bourgeois were obviously not Italian due to their contrast with the Fascist physical ideals (Gori, 2000, p. 39). In essence, the body of the Italian male was a flag for his nationality. It was mutually reinforcing: Italy was what it was because of the young, virile male body, and the male was visibly Italian because of his appropriate bodily form.

Why was virility so important to the Fascist regime? Simply put, males were seen as being more pure and superior to females. Thus, the term virility belonged to a man just as femininity was the property of the woman. The two were to remain separate, and women were to be excluded from the public, political arena since it would “masculinize” or “sterilize” them (Spackman, 1996, p. 17). Likewise, allowing a woman to enter a purely virile world could introduce a harmful contaminant that would weaken the nature of masculinity. The fascist regime’s power seems to rest on the concept of virility. And the regime’s narrow definition of the term excludes all those not meeting the classical standards of physicality idealized during the Renaissance. Thus, Fascism worked vigorously to expel all that was foreign (linguistically, literarily, cinematically) in order to maintain the purity of the culture (p. 75).

Measures such as the ban on words from foreign languages and dialects and dubbing all films into Italian still resonate today. Words created during this era, such as “bistecca” for “beefsteak,” are an Italianized form of the English version since the latter foreign term had been banned. Likewise, the Italian dubbing industry remains among the most sophisticated and professional in the cinematic industry. Use of the polite form of address for the pronoun “you”

was contested because it is identical to the pronoun for “she.” “Lei” is only distinguishable from the context of the sentence as to whether the speaker is addressing someone in the polite form or the feminine form (Spackman, 1996, p. 76). Considering the Fascist obsession with virility, it is understandable that a man would not want a verbal address directed at him to be associated with femininity. From this, it is apparent that Italian women, who obviously contrast physically to the Fascist virile standard, were seen as foreign.

In summary, my research views masculinity as a social construction resulting from a culture’s identity or ideology. This study of masculinity seeks to identify and understand the ideology behind the hegemonic values enacted nonverbally by Italian males. By examining Italy’s past including the Roman Empire, Catholicism, the Renaissance and Fascism, it is possible to understand the framework or lens of an Italian ideology. The next section describes how prior data gathered through observation within a traditional piazza and from interviews focused on male behavior were used to conduct interviews with Americans.



## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

In this section, the methods used to conduct research and analyze data are discussed.

Ethnographic approaches such as participant observation and interviews, as well as an emic/etic approach are presented. The concept of reflexivity, or turning back the experience of the researcher upon himself or herself (Salzman, 2002, p. 807), is examined in order to provide an understanding of researcher influence on the data collection process. Finally, a description of the research conducted in Italy and the U.S. is presented.

This study uses an approach similar to an ethnography of communication in order to address the research question. The four criteria for this type of research are: study of a communicative practice is conducted, a native point of view is pursued, accounts are collected for the purpose of cross-cultural comparisons, and the event is studied by a participant observer within its cultural context (Carbaugh, 1988, p. 183). Each of these criteria was met during this study. The communicative practice of nonverbal behavior within Italian culture was studied. Italians were interviewed regarding this behavior. An American perspective was solicited for comparison with the Italian standpoint. And finally, I studied the nonverbal act within its Italian context. While conducting this ethnographic study of communication, emic and etic methods were used to collect and analyze data.

### Emic and Etic Approach

The emic approach tries to describe the events of a culture by using the terms specific to that culture. Emic structures must be discovered. On the other hand, the etic approach describes the culture by using criteria decided upon and imposed by the researcher (Davidson, Jaccard, Triandis, Morales, and Diaz-Guerrero, 1976, p. 1). These approaches are valuable for analyzing

cultural behavior. Emic study provides an understanding of how a culture is constructed, as well as how individuals act. An etic approach equips a researcher with a broad knowledge of a subject so that he or she may interpret and categorize behaviors quickly. In fact, a researcher analyzing a foreign culture has no other way to begin the study than beginning with an etic description that will later be refined by emic research (Pike, 1967, pp. 40-41). Therefore, the emic and etic research approach to this study is logical and appropriate.

My research can be divided into five distinct stages: etic-1, emic-1, etic-2, emic-2, and etic-3. During the etic-1 stage, I conducted an initial literature review to gain an understanding of Italian history and culture. Reviewing background on the ritual of passeggiata, I formed an idea of what to expect during observation. The emic-1 stage was conducted during July 2006 in Bergamo. I observed behavior of masculinity during the ritual of passeggiata and in the Italian media/ commercial centers of Città Alta and recorded my findings. The findings from this initial observation did not match the literature review as I had expected. Therefore, I sought explanations for what I had observed.

The etic-2 stage consisted of a more specific literature review focused upon the observations of emic-1. During this phase, I developed new criteria for observing masculinity and defining hegemony. These criteria became the basis for the interview questions of the emic-2 stage (Appendix A). During July 2007, I went back into the field to make additional observations and seek answers to the previous year's findings. The emic-2 stage enabled me to more thoroughly examine the culture and identify specific elements of interest. Finally, after returning from conducting fieldwork in July 2007, I focused the framework further during the etic-3 stage, by examining communication theories, the role of fashion, as well as perspectives on masculinity

through interviews with Americans. Repeating both the etic and emic stages allowed me to refine my research questions. Instead of using *a priori* assumptions, I allowed the events of the culture to guide my research and the criteria. Therefore, the thoroughness of my research adds to the richness of the data gathered. Certainly there were limitations to the research. These will be discussed later.

### Participant Observation and Interviews

Participant observation and conversational interviews are the qualitative techniques used for data collection. For the interviews conducted in Italy during July 2007, I obtained the participants' permission to audio tape our conversation so that we could have a more natural flow as opposed to note taking during the interaction. The informants range in age from 18 to 30 and are both male and female. Using Geertz's (1973) method of *thick description*, which seeks to capture as much ethnographic description as possible, I directly observed the passeggiata and other behaviors in the piazza of Bergamo, Italy and recorded findings with notes and digital photographs. The bulk of my observation research took place in the month of July 2006 with a few additional observations in July 2007. Both of these studies received IRB approval.

The information gathered from these observations was then used to conduct seven conversational interviews during the month of July 2007. Using a similar technique to the videotape method employed by Del Negro (2001) in her passeggiata research, I showed a photograph from my observation to gather feedback during my interviews (Appendix C). The photograph of a young man I call BMW Boy (edited in this paper for anonymity), was taken in July 2007 in Piazza Vecchia, Bergamo, Italy. Ten American interviews were conducted on a south-eastern university campus during the months of October and November 2007. Five men

and five women between the ages of 18 and 30 were audio taped during the 10 to 15 minute interviews. The American interviews were conducted in order to provide a comparison with the Italian data. Based on the information gathered from the Americans, it is possible to identify the cultural elements that the Italians used to interpret a nonverbal display. The specifics of these interviews will be discussed shortly in the U.S. Research section.

### Reflexivity

Salzman (2002, p. 807) explains that reflexivity allows researchers to understand biased position within the context of the study. Through this understanding, it is necessary to examine how our position influences data collection. Therefore, it is helpful to consider my position and its influence on the research. My father's heritage is Italian, and I look very much like my father. The similarity of my appearance to native Italians was helpful in gathering data. I seemed less out of place while conducting participant observation. I believe that my familiar physical features put my informants at ease initially, and made it less difficult for us to establish a rapport. When I would tell them that my name is Gino, they would ask if I was Italian. After offering a very brief explanation of my family tree, they seemed pleased. In some ways, being a foreigner was helpful. It seems that my informants were forgiving of my openness and directness during the interviews. Also, as a foreigner it was easier for me to successfully play "dumb" when asking seemingly simple questions. If I were a native Italian, I believe that they would have expected me to know the answer to the question that I asked. Answering my own question would, of course, defeat the purpose of gathering the points of view of the informants. Being male seems to have some advantages within the culture. It is common for men to be aggressive and talkative. Therefore, it was not odd for me to begin a conversation with a potential informant.

On the other hand, not being a native Italian also had some disadvantages and limitations such as the language barrier. I do speak Italian. However, my proficiency level is not good enough to properly conduct scholarly research. Therefore, interviews were conducted with English-speaking Italians. Being male also has some disadvantages when interacting with females. It would be suspicious for me to approach a solo woman in a social situation.

### Italian Research

This section presents how participant observation and interviews were conducted in Italy. Prior to conversation, interview participants were given an Informed Consent form in Italian, which had been translated by a native speaker. The form was also available in English. In keeping with the standard of the IRB, there were no participant risks associated with this research. However, the benefits included a greater understanding of self-behavior through discourse. There was no compensation for interviews as participation was completely voluntary. Interview questions covered the following topics: gender behavior, clothing, role models or icons, gender roles, and popular culture (Appendix A).

For my sample, I sought out males and females ranging in age from 18 to 30. As I had learned from my research in 2006, my informants had to speak enough English for us to conduct an interview. Previously, since I am somewhat fluent in Italian, I had attempted to interview in Italian. The language difference, along with the normal background noises picked up by the voice recorder, made transcription excruciatingly difficult. Therefore, in order to record accurate and helpful information, I sought out a narrowed sample of English-speaking Italians.

Once I had chosen my target group, I began searching for informants. This satisfies Carbaugh's second criterion (a native point of view is pursued) for an ethnography of

communication approach. I decided to go to the local university and wait outside of the main doors where students go to take a smoke break. This space is set up for socialization since there are benches and it opens into a piazza. In this setting, I was able to interview four male students in my target group. The conversation was conducted as a group interview since the students were on a smoke break during one of their classes. A few days later, I went back to the university and spoke with a female student who was working in the photocopy center.

Indeed, the university proved to be a great place to gather data. University students, often used in research due to convenience, proved to be an interesting sample in regards to their perspectives on the topic of this thesis. The student population is more aware of identity formation and gender display than the general population. In fact, the male students that I interviewed were mass communication majors. Therefore, they are predisposed to view the matter from a critical perspective since the nature of their studies teaches them to identify power structures within society.

Admittedly, the sample also has some inherent limitations. First, none of the informants live in Bergamo. Each of them either attend school there, have visited often or live nearby. Therefore, they might differ in their mindset and opinions as compared to a native of Bergamo. However, their understanding of the city is revealed in the interview data. Also, it could have been beneficial to speak to a wider population of people.

In addition to data gathered at the university, the train seemed to be another ideal place to do an interview based upon my past experiences. People are more open to conversation with strangers when they are traveling alone. My American female friend and I found a good train car

and sat down by a young female. She was a native Italian who spoke English well, and she agreed to be interviewed.

In all, seven informants were interviewed: four males in person, two females in person and one male via email once I returned to the U.S. Each of these informants was shown the picture of BMW boy. The method of data collection varied upon availability of informants. The limitations of mixing methods (group interview, single-person interview, email interview) will be discussed in the Limitations section of this paper. Based on the information collected from these interviews, I have sought out the native Italian view in regards to this specific display of masculinity. The findings of this research will be discussed in the upcoming chapters.

#### U.S. Research

This section presents how interviews were conducted in the U.S. As with the Italian interviews, I used the qualitative technique of audio taped conversational interviews. Appendix E lists the questions asked to informants. The focus group for the interviews was five men and five women ranging in age from 18 to 30 who have not traveled to Italy. The interviews took place on a south-eastern university campus. The age range of this group is identical to the age range used in prior interviews with Italians. The informants were either white or Latino. Their perspective is desirable in that they have an American cultural identity relatively uninfluenced by an Italian experience. The interview participants were given an Informed Consent form (Appendix B) prior to the conversation.

Using a similar technique to the videotape method employed by Del Negro in her *passaggiata* research, I used two photographs from my prior observational research in Italy to gather feedback on nonverbal communication. The first photograph (Appendix C), edited in this

paper for anonymity, was taken in July 2007 in Piazza Vecchia, Bergamo, Italy. I used this same photograph during my prior interviews with Italians. Therefore, it is possible to contrast the cultural perspectives regarding this one photograph.

The second photograph (Appendix D) is of a billboard for Italian fashion designers Dolce & Gabbana. Italian males during my prior research had discussed the importance of such ads in creating fantasy for the public. They had indicated that when a girl sees that a guy's underwear band is from Dolce & Gabbana, the imagery from the ad is invoked. The Italian females interviewed did not agree with this statement. Therefore, the billboard seems to reinforce an identity or model that Italian males share amongst themselves. The image seems to present a message that Italian men can identify with.

All ten interviews were completed within one week. Five of the interviews were single-person and one was a group interview consisting of five individuals. Mixed interview methods were used due to availability of students. The limitations of such methods will be discussed in the Limitations section of this paper. Also, the findings of the interviews will be presented in the upcoming chapters.

#### Data Reduction Techniques

After collecting the research data, I began to organize them for analysis. First, I sorted through the observational data and chose those that address my research questions dealing with the piazza and hegemonic masculinity. Then, after gathering interview data, I made detailed notes from the audio recordings. Next, I did a cross-cultural comparison of the Italian and American interview comments. During the comparison phase, I searched for common themes that emerged for each cultural group, which suggest an ideology or cultural identity.



## Data Analysis Techniques

Using a slightly adapted version of the social meaning model (SMM) for nonverbal behavior as an organizational tool, I sorted through the interview information. The SMM states that some nonverbal behaviors have consensually recognized relational meanings within a given social community. According to this perspective, interpretations of encoders, decoders, and third-party observers of the same nonverbal behavior should be congruent (Floyd & Erbert, 2003). That is, some nonverbal behaviors "comprise a socially shared vocabulary of relational communication" (Floyd & Erbert, ¶ 5). Thus, all observers of a given behavior within such a community should similarly interpret the relational meaning of some nonverbal behaviors. Understanding this, I organized the informant's comments in order to reveal similarities or differences in their responses.

The SMM predicts that there are consensually recognized meanings for nonverbal behaviors within a given social or language community. The model suggests that everyone understands the actors and actively interprets the meanings. This is congruent with Hall's findings on ideology (1986, p. 66), which says that people see the world through a system of representations embedded within culture itself. The SMM is also similar to Philipsen's (1990) findings on the shared cultural meaning of masculinity held by community groups in his essay *Speaking "Like a Man" in Teamsterville*. The members of the Teamsterville community share an understanding of how to present themselves "like a man" (p. 12). This suggests a shared cultural ideology or identity. Thus, if the Italian informants apply the same meaning to the nonverbal display, this suggests (according to the SMM) that the similarity of their responses is due to shared social meaning within their community. Carbaugh (1990a) uses the term cultural identity

to describe shared social meaning and reports that it must be continually and convincingly performed (p. 3). The performance and audience interpretation depends upon four aspects: a cultural model of personhood (identity), targeted goals (hegemony), loci of motives (basic moral identities), and social relations (power and distance) (Carbaugh, 1990b, p. 157). These aspects will be examined further in the upcoming chapters in order to elaborate an Italian identity or shared social meaning used to interpret a nonverbal display.

According to Floyd & Erbert (2003), the SMM involves three aspects. First, the range of meanings that are attributable to a given nonverbal behavior need to be identified. Second, encoders and decoders should be similar in their interpretations of a certain behavior. Finally, the correspondence between the perspectives of participants and observers must be examined. The SMM states that because behaviors have shared social meaning within a given community, non-participant observers should interpret nonverbal behaviors similarly.

I apply the SMM from the perspective of the third-party observers of the nonverbal behavior. To gather feedback, I showed the informants the photograph of BMW Boy. This method is an adaptation of the SMM since this technique does not take into consideration the intended image of the performer in the photograph. Without speaking to the encoder (BMW boy), I cannot ascertain that the decoders (my informants) are similar with his own interpretations of his nonverbal behavior. However, considering the information gathered in the literature review of this paper and the four aspects of cultural identity, I believe that it is helpful and accurate to apply the SMM to the information gathered in my interviews in order to elaborate a cultural identity/ideology.

Therefore, in analyzing this information, I apply two of the three aspects of the SMM. First, I seek to uncover the range of meanings that are attributable to the BMW boy image and other public masculine behavior through interviews. Second, I examine the correspondence between the perspectives of observers/informants. The consistency of responses from my informants (both Italian and American) indicates a shared cultural identity and ideology. It also suggests that they employ a shared social meaning or cultural identity for decoding nonverbal behavior.

### Summary

Up to this point, I have presented information on the historical and cultural aspects of Italy, as well as introduced the concepts of masculinity, ideology, hegemony and cultural identity. Then I summarized my methods of data collection, as well as the reduction and analysis techniques. In the next two chapters, I will describe my findings in the following ways. First, the chapters are organized to cover two topics: the piazza and nonverbal behavior. In each chapter, I will apply two aspects of Carbaugh's Cultural Identity to show that the Italians interpreted a nonverbal display according to their cultural context. For the piazza, I will present the findings according to the aspects of the cultural model of personhood (identity) and targeted goals (hegemony). Finally, the aspects of loci of motives (basic moral identities) and social relations (power and distance) are applied to the interview results.

## CHAPTER 4: THE PIAZZA AND PLACE IDENTITY

This chapter examines the role of the piazza as a setting for behavior. The research findings are compared to two aspects of cultural identity: the cultural model of personhood and targeted goals. Through this comparison, aspects of an Italian cultural identity will be examined. As mentioned earlier, cultural identity has three basic roles within a culture: definitive, instructive and evaluative. It defines who has the right to be considered as a member of the cultural group, it instructs participants on how to properly act within the culture and it provides a standard for evaluating the actions of others. Interview data from both the Italian and American informants are examined in order to see how cultural context shapes identity and how behavior is evaluated. Looking at the data in this manner will help to elaborate the coding process that makes up an Italian masculine identity.

### Cultural Model of Personhood

The cultural model of personhood focuses on the core concepts used for communication performance. Essentially, this aspect of cultural identity reveals the broad themes employed during communication that come to be oriented with an identity. For example, previous studies suggest that Black Americans model interaction as performers, placing a high value on the performance of verbal communication itself (Carbaugh, 1990b, p. 158). Italians seem to place a similar emphasis on the public performance value of nonverbal communication. The Italian interview informants indicated that a man should be strong in personality, tone of voice and gestures. They stated that physical size is not as important for displaying strength as the man's personality. One informant stated, "fashion shows [that] the man is more normal in size." Another added, "the figure of men is not only big with muscles. This is because the stylists have

changed a little the idea of men that we had in the past.” While this seems to contradict the masculine ideals of Rome and Fascism, an Italian explained that this new image is “a reaction to the male figure in the past dominating Italy. We were a very traditional macho Italiano [society]. Now [this] clashes with reality.” As for personality and performance, the informants indicated that a man should be friendly. Italian men can act “stupidly” in public and no one will think it odd. But for girls it is different. An informant explained, “if the girls do something crazy, people will think they are a bit macho. Not lesbian, but not behaving properly.” These descriptions indicate that men are expected to be social, interactive and performers. Therefore, it seems that Italian masculinity has the theme of public performance for the cultural model of personhood. Having reviewed the influence of the Roman Empire, Catholicism, the Renaissance and Fascism, it is not surprising to see how the cultural context of the country influences personhood.

The Americans indicated a different way of displaying masculinity. They said that a man should be quiet and direct. He is to be strong. However, the American informants seem to connect strength to body size. The informants believe that a masculine man is stereotypically tall and muscular. The theme that repeatedly came up was that of action: a man solves problems and works hard. The strong, muscular body can be equated to the ability to work hard.

The performance of masculinity in Italy is enhanced by the use of costumes or fashion. In shops located in both Bergamo and Milan, I observed that fashion fit for younger men highlights small waists and broad shoulders. Simple button-up style shirts are tailored to accentuate these body characteristics. Men’s shirts in Italy feature a tailoring technique which produces a curvature over the rear. Called a “dart,” it is used to shape the garment to the lines of the body (Callan, 1998, p. 78). Darts tailor the item to fit closely to the waist without excess material.

Therefore, the idealized male form is highlighted and performed through the style of clothing. Men's clothing is also colorful in Italy. In various shop windows, shirts, pants and underwear were displayed in bright colors such as red, orange, yellow and pink. During passeggiata, I observed men of various ages wearing brightly colored clothing walking around the piazza.

The American informants said that a masculine man wears conservative, dark colors and is most concerned with comfort. He does not really care about his style. This description is very different from what was observed in Italy. This difference could be due to cultural identity and the cultural model of personhood. Italians are oriented as performers and Americans as workers.

During a discussion on fashion, some Italian informants referenced the advertisements of designers Dolce & Gabbana. They said that, "the designer is important for the imagination. If a girl sees you wearing Dolce [& Gabbana] underwear, it is the fantasy in the ads." Appendix D shows an underwear ad for Dolce & Gabbana's 2006 collection. It features several well-known soccer players. This ad was chosen to represent the reference by the informants because it was prominently displayed in Milan during my research visit in July 2006. The Italians acknowledged the sex appeal of such ads, but did not apply moral judgments to them. This type of ad, as referenced by the informants, shows a clear and visible male sexuality. Given the cultural theme of performance previously described, it is understandable why the Italians relate to the sexuality displayed in the ad.

The American interpretation of the advertisement shown in Appendix D differs from the Italians. The informants were shown this advertisement and asked what they thought about it. While acknowledging the sex appeal of the ad, the informants also described it as "controversial," "pornographic," "shocking" and a bit "gay erotic." The Americans agreed on the

masculine look of the men's bodies, but the display was not necessarily masculine. One informant commented that, it may be less controversial if it were one guy in his underwear surrounded by a bunch of women. Several informants also said that they believed that most men would be afraid to look at the ad due to homophobia. An informant summarized it this way, "I can't look at that or else people will think I'm gay." Based on these comments, it seems that Americans use a cultural theme other than performance when evaluating the message of the ad. This suggests that they hold a cultural identity that is different than the Italians.

#### Targeted Goals

The second aspect of cultural identity requires that the performers act towards a targeted goal. In this study, the goal is masculinity. According to the Italian informants, masculinity is defined by a strong personality, sociability, sexual experience and visibility. The male, according to my informants, is sexually experienced. Thought of as a playboy, he is admired for his expertise. On the other hand, a woman is thought of as a "bitch" or "whore" if she has had many men. Certainly Catholic ideals shape this thought process, but the sexual roles are assigned by gender. Perhaps for this reason just discussed, men are to be the aggressors. A female informant told me that a man should not be shy with girls. His body, his stance and his walk are to define him as male.

The goal of displaying masculinity may be the same with Americans, but the informants suggest that the definition is different. According to the American informants, masculinity is defined by a man's actions and work. While Italian men were defined above as visible, American men (according to the informants) would rather let the results of their work speak for themselves.

Therefore, despite the fact that the targeted goal is the same, cultural identity seems to influence the way that goal is pursued within a culture.

The Italian masculine goals of sexual experience and visibility are on display in the photo shown in Appendix C. It was taken as this young Italian slowly drove his attention-getting yellow BMW convertible down the mainly pedestrian narrow street. I snapped the photo as he casually glanced into the piazza as if to see whether or not anyone was watching him. This photograph was used in the interviews. The Italian male informants repeatedly called the guy (in Italian) a “fashion victim,” which suggests that he follows the styles of mass culture. The female informants took their observation a bit further by saying that he is only interested in sex and showing that he has money. Interestingly, my informants viewed the photograph and began to apply moral values based on the visual image. Their opinions will be discussed in the next chapter.

The American perspective of BMW Boy also involved money. The informants said that it seems like the young man is wealthy since he drives a nice car. In addition, they commented that he is looking for attention since it is a convertible. All of the informants, except for one, focused only on the automobile. Unlike the Italians, they did not comment on his fashion sense or style. The American informants, unfamiliar with Italian cultural themes, rely on their own cultural themes to make sense of the image. Their opinions will be discussed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 5: NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

### Loci of Motives

The third aspect of cultural identity involves the application of basic moral identities. The traditional Italian playboy, concerned with the sexuality of his physical appearance is represented by the photograph of BMW boy (Appendix C). The Italian and American informants both seem to apply a socially shared coding system to the nonverbal behavior in this photo. The consistency of their responses indicates a shared value system. Seen as a “fashion victim,” my Italian informants indicated that BMW Boy follows the styles of mass culture. BMW Boy’s display of sex and financial status didn’t sit well with the female informants. Based on his visual display, the female informants judged that he doesn’t have values, and he is a simple person. These moral identity judgments are similar to the results obtain by Del Negro (2001) when she showed footage of the *passeggiata* to her informants.

The Italian cultural theme of public performance is important in regards to these moral evaluations. As presented earlier, the ideal of *fare bella figura* or dressing well is used to display the private self in public. The goal of this presentation is to show oneself as worthy and honorable (Reich, 2004). It seems that BMW Boy’s performance displays his private self (or moral character) in a way that is neither worthy nor honorable according to the Italian informants. It is interesting to note that his display of sexuality itself was never called into question by the informants despite their critique. They admitted that it is considered a good thing if a man has sexual experience. What they were concerned about was how he was displaying himself. Therefore, the basic moral identity that seems to be employed by the Italian informants

is that of respect for intelligence: people should show themselves to be smart and educated in their actions, instead of following mass culture.

The cultural theme used by the American informants seems to differ from the Italians. They also evaluated the message sent by BMW Boy. The informants first equated the nice car to wealth, then success and finally intelligence. This evaluation seems to make sense with the cultural theme of hard work described previously. If Americans value hard work, then an expensive car is a way to display the fruits of one's labor. One informant commented that the expensive car, "gives the impression that he [BMW Boy] is successful. Men can identify with this." Therefore, the basic moral identity that seems to be employed by the American informants is that of respect for displays of wealth. Americans seem to think that someone such as BMW Boy must be smart if he has made all that money, and that he must be a good man, otherwise people would not work with him and he would not be able to become wealthy. It is interesting to note though, that if BMW Boy had used his body to display wealth instead of his car, the American interpretation may have been different. This could be due to the idea that, as one informant stated, a man's style should not be "flashy." Instead, he should wear muted colors.

#### Social Relations

This final aspect of cultural identity deals with social relations, power and distance. The moral judgments of the Italian informants regarding the nonverbal display by BMW Boy suggest that the culture uses a solidarity-based system in regards to social relations. According to Carbaugh (1990b, p. 159), this type of system promotes commonalities among people by minimizing both power and distance. Given the cultural model of personhood of public performance, the targeted goal of visibility and displays of intelligence for loci of motives, it

makes moral evaluations understandable in context of the culture. The Italian informants stated that BMW Boy is only interested in sex and showing that he has money. This clashes with the aspects of the cultural identity elaborated from this research. Since the visual display of intelligence seems to be important to the Italian informants (as opposed to wealth), it makes sense that they have a negative reaction to BMW Boy. BMW Boy's display of wealth increases the observers' perception of power and therefore the distance among cultural members. His nonverbal display is not promoting commonality through minimized power and distance as desired in a solidarity-based system. Perhaps this is why the informants said that he doesn't have values, and is a simple person.

The American informants did not apply moral judgments to BMW Boy. Instead, they interpreted his expensive car as communicating wealth, success and intelligence. An informant indicated that a man, "lets his actions speak for themselves." If Americans value hard work and displays of wealth, as mentioned earlier, it makes sense that they would respect BMW Boy's display. His action of driving the expensive car would speak of his wealth, success and intelligence. Carbaugh (1990b, p. 159) reports that the American culture uses a solidarity-based communication system, which seeks to minimize power and distance within society. Since the informants did not apply moral judgments, this may indicate that Americans identify with BMW Boy's message, and don't feel that the display maximizes power or distance. For this reason, his message could be interpreted as culturally correct from an American perspective.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

### Ideology

The research findings suggest that Italians use a cultural identity when evaluating the meaning of a nonverbal display of masculinity. Their identity for masculinity is oriented towards public performance, visibility, sexual experience, displays of intelligence and a minimization of power and distance. The American perspective contrasts with the Italian one, providing further evidence that meaning arises because of a shared framework that social members share together. Hence, Italians see the world in a certain way because of their cultural identity, as do the Americans. Ideology shares points of commonality with cultural identity. As discussed earlier, ideology refers to a system of representations that form the basis of how people see and give meaning to the world around them. These representations are embedded within culture itself. Essentially, ideology wants to understand the thoughts behind the socially constructed meanings.

The influences of the Roman Empire, Catholicism, the Renaissance and Fascism have shaped the Italian thought process. As presented in the literature review, the history and culture of the Italian people have formed an ideology that influences masculinity. Roman *virtus* and its focus on public display, Catholicism and its distinct sexual roles, the Renaissance and its attention to the aesthetics of the male body, and Fascism's obsession with virility have affected the masculine ideology within Italy. This is seen during *passeggiata* when men take great care to present their physical bodies in a pleasing way. It is evident in gender roles, where men rule public space. This ideology can be seen in fashion, through which Fascism promoted the ideals of ancient Rome and the Renaissance. What is the Italian ideology of masculinity? The literature

review reports and the research findings suggest that the concepts of visibility, sexual experience, strength of personality and performance shape how Italians view masculinity.

### Hegemony

As emphasized earlier, hegemony is closely linked to ideology. When examining hegemony, it is important to determine which group is dominant. The Dolce & Gabbana advertisement (Appendix D) used in the research seems to display hegemonic ideals. The Italian informants referred to the power of such ads in creating a fantasy for the public. This indicates that people recognize the image as desirable. What desirable, hegemonic ideals are being shown? Looking at the ad, one can see the young, strong, virile male form celebrated by ancient Rome, the Renaissance and Fascism. The models, who happen to be well-known Italian soccer players, are staring directly at the viewer, suggesting boldness. There are no women present in the ad, which seems to be taken in a locker room setting. This could be supportive of traditional Italian gender roles where men are more public and sexually aggressive. Finally, the models have a traditional Italian look with dark features and Mediterranean skin. There are no minorities displayed in the ad. It is also interesting to note that the underwear has the colors of the Italian flag running down the side stripes. So it seems that Italian masculinity is being directly tied to the visual presentation of these men's bodies. Hence, hegemonic Italian masculinity could be defined by these ideals: youthful, strong, bold, public, and traditional-looking (Caucasian skin, dark hair).

My Italian informants seemed to distance themselves from hegemony. This is most noticeable in their comments about being different from their parents and the generation over the age of 30. Several said that the young generation is making a break from the past with something

totally different in the way of fashion from their parents who dress “normal.” This generation communicates their differing values through their style of dress which doesn’t look to a particular designer. Their parents’ past is entwined with the notions and traditional values of Fascism and Catholicism. They believe that things are changing in Italy today and that the Church has less influence than it once did.

Spradley (1980, p. 10) states that a main component of participant observation entails watching what people do. During my research, I used participant observation to record both the actors and their actions in Piazza Vecchia. However, as the research progressed, it became clear that recording what people did not do could also be very informative. Also, the performances involved specific actors, excluding certain members of society that were visible during the daytime in other parts of the city such as foreigners, transsexuals and groups of women. These missing elements contribute to the story of hegemonic masculinity through social relations, power and distance.

The presence of foreigners, particularly South American, African and Arab, is fairly concentrated in certain neighborhoods of Città Bassa. Pockets of non-Italian culture show themselves in ethnic food and clothing stores, restaurants and internet points. Foreigners also use public transportation. Therefore, I was used to seeing foreign faces in Bergamo. What is interesting though is that those same faces rarely showed themselves in Città Alta. The lower and upper cities are easily and cheaply (tickets cost one euro) connected to each other by bus and funicolare. There is also a steep but manageable staircase for those not wanting to pay for transportation. So why didn’t I see these foreigners during my observation of passeggiata in Piazza Vecchia?

Perhaps the obvious answer again looks to Sarbin's theory of place identity. As previously discussed, the setting of Piazza Vecchia echoes masculine hegemonic values. Piazza Vecchia is a traditional Italian piazza which invokes the characteristic feel of the city. Also, great wealth is concentrated within the walls of the high city and old family lines, along with the Church, still own much of the residential real estate. Therefore, simply being in Città Alta implies that a person has the wealth to live, dine or shop along its streets.

The masculine hegemony displayed in Piazza Vecchia is traditional. The foreigners, confined to the poorer neighborhoods of Città Bassa, are unable to meet the demands of hegemony. Their drastically different physical appearance and lack of money do not fit the script dictated by the setting of the piazza. Similarly, transsexuals are visibly present in the lower city. However, I did not see them in Città Alta or Piazza Vecchia. Finally, women also seemed to be underrepresented. During observation of passeggiata, the number of men in a group always equaled or outnumbered the women. It seemed that males had to dominate the social situation. The fact that the South American, African and Arab foreign residents, along with the transsexuals and groups of women, noticeably did not participate in passeggiata implies a decrease in power favoring the dominant group and an increase in distance within social relations between groups. Their absence from the piazza helps to isolate and define the hegemonic masculine identity within Italy.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The concept of this study begins with the idea that masculinity is a socially constructed role specific to culture. This role must be performed over and over within a social space. Research looked at a particular gender performance and examined the social space used for the enactment. Supported by Sarbin's (2005) concept of place identity, the main piazza of Bergamo, Italy was analyzed in order to understand its influence upon the roles performed within it.

This is a study in the critical tradition of communication that uses the theories and concepts of nonverbal communication, ideology, cultural identity and hegemony to answer the research questions. An approach similar to an ethnography of communication was used to gather data. The criteria of this approach were met by studying a nonverbal display, soliciting an Italian perspective, collecting American accounts for a cross-cultural comparison, and studying the nonverbal display within its context of Italian culture. Once research was completed, the findings were analyzed according to the Social Meaning Model and Carbaugh's aspects of cultural identity.

The purpose of this study is to examine particular themes of Italian cultural identity produced by the nonverbal display of BMW Boy shown in Appendix C. The central research question is: What are the elements of an Italian masculine cultural identity as revealed through a cross-cultural comparison of Italian and American discourse? Cultural identity is defined using Carbaugh's (1990b, p. 157) four aspects: cultural model of personhood, targeted goals, loci of motives and social relations. Using data gathered from observation and interviews, the following cultural identity of Italian masculinity emerged.



For the first aspect of cultural model of personhood, Italians seem to orient themselves as performers. Related to the first aspect, the targeted goal of the Italian performance appears to be visibility; Italians want to be noticed by others. Third, Italians have a respect for intelligence as their loci of motives. They desire this quality to be displayed in nonverbal communication. Finally, Italians seem to use a solidarity-based system that minimizes both power and distance in social relations. Hence, they seek to promote commonalities among people.

Now that the aspects of cultural identity have been defined, it is possible to answer these additional questions:

1. What are the culturally dominant traits of mainstream, hegemonic Italian masculinity?
2. What do fashion and bodily presentation communicate about hegemonic masculinity?

Hegemonic Italian masculinity, as suggested by the data, is defined as: youthful, strong, bold, public, and traditional-looking. These ideals are displayed on the body through fashion. Tailored clothing highlights small waists and broad shoulders. Italian men's clothing is also widely available in bright colors such as red, orange, yellow and pink. These colors make a man very visible.

#### Contributions: Cultural Sense Making and Cultural Change

There may be some confusion as to why the literature review of Italian history and culture was so extensive. The thoroughness of the review is an important component to one of the key contributions of this research study: cultural sense making. The research and literature review presented seek to discover why Italian men behave as they do. The literature review of this paper explains in detail four main influences on Italian masculinity: the Roman Empire, Catholicism, the Renaissance and Fascism. Each of these influences has helped to shape the way

Italian culture views the male body and the male identity. A brief review of the information presented in the literature review will help to show how Italian history and culture have supported the youthful, strong, bold, public, and traditional-looking ideals of hegemonic masculinity as revealed through the research.

The Roman Empire valued public displays of manhood. The male body played a key role in defining Roman manliness since a strong and athletic body was an essential asset in military training. The idealized male form is celebrated in statues of the time period. Therefore, the Roman Empire perpetuated youthfulness and strength.

The Catholic Church strives to achieve and uphold tradition within Italian society. Included in the culture are distinct gender roles, which have been shaped by the teachings of the Church. Catholicism encourages a separation between male/female and public/private. Men are charged with the active public role of bringing honor to the family. Hence, Catholicism promotes the hegemonic masculine ideal of public displays.

Human aesthetics began to take center stage during the Renaissance. The body was now a focal point of admiration; it could be appreciated for its own beauty. The idealized male body was captured in Michelangelo's *David*. Scholars have noted that this Renaissance masterpiece communicated heroism and beauty. Therefore, through works such as *David*, youth, strength, boldness and public display were perpetuated during the Renaissance.

Finally, Fascism used the image of the virile man to engrain its values in a society that was already traditionally patriarchal. To this regime "virility" embodied appearance, beauty, and nature (Spackman, 1996, p. 2). Virility was important to the Fascist regime because males were seen as being more pure and superior to females. Physical beauty, particularly that of the

male, is an important concept in Fascist masculinity and the display of virility. Mussolini promoted his own image as youthful and powerful. His regime sought to establish a unified Italian identity and used fashion to do this. The regime created a traditional Italian look based on inspiration from ancient Rome, regional folk costumes and the Renaissance. Therefore, Fascism promoted the hegemonic masculine ideals of youth, strength and traditional looks.

The Italian cultural perspective, as presented in this paper, is an important contribution to the existing body of literature regarding the display of masculine identity. During the course of this research, no single source has taken the approach of cultural sense making in order to understand Italian masculinity. Having examined Italian history and culture, it is possible to understand the context for the performance of BMW Boy (Appendix C). Also, the reactions of the Italian informants make sense now that the factors influencing their framework or ideology have been analyzed.

The second major contribution of this research is that of cultural change. The Italian informants indicated that things are starting to transform within Italian society. Traditional gender roles and hegemonic masculine ideals are now being questioned and challenged by the young generation represented in this study. The influence of the Catholic Church is less pervasive today. Men are being less defined by machismo; they have more freedom in their choice of self expression. Women are now being judged less harshly for having multiple sexual partners. This change in generational thought was not addressed in any of the existing literature reviewed.

## Limitations of the Study

The first limitation that immediately comes to mind is the language barrier. While I do speak Italian and my informants speak English, neither of us speak the same native language. Therefore, the words chosen to explain a situation or idea may not have necessarily been the preferred word choice. Instead, the words used may have been limited to our vocabulary knowledge of the other's language. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to employ a translator. However, there was no money available for this.

Second, the demographics of my target audience influence the findings. Admittedly, the informants acknowledge that Italians under the age of 30 are from a different generational group. As a result, the opinions gathered from this research only reflect some of the views of this generation. The informants also were all college educated, and many of them were studying media. This could influence their views and create a more narrow and critical perspective of what's going on in their culture.

Third, the nature of the research itself has some built in limitations. Conducting separate observation and interviews could lead to the observers/decoders making incorrect assumptions about the performers/encoders. And this could produce inaccurate results. However, during observation, it would be highly unusual and very strange for me, a foreigner, to randomly approach someone in the piazza to ask him or her about his or her behavior. During the daytime, people are busy moving from one place to the other. While during the evening, the pace is more leisurely. Despite this relaxed state, people do not seem to stop and talk with one another. Instead, interaction amongst people is largely nonverbal. Additionally, it would be unlikely that the person observed would speak English well enough to conduct an interview.

Fourth, mixed research methods were used to collect data. Some of the interviews were one-on-one, others were group interviews and one was conducted through email. While this is not the most desirable circumstance for consistency of qualitative research, the methods used were practical given the constraints of time and money. I had to focus on the availability and access of the informants.

Finally, the observations of this research are confined to one particular town in Northern Italy. It is well documented that there are large cultural differences (and sometimes tension) between the North and South (Costantino & Gambella, 1996, p. 103). Therefore, there is a chance that the behaviors observed in Bergamo are specific to the city itself and not capable of being extrapolated to Italian males in general.

#### Avenues for Future Research

Future research should repeat the method of participant observation and interviews in the piazzas of several Italian cities. This would produce a more accurate view of the hegemonic ideals displayed by the country as a whole. It would also be helpful to observe behavior in the piazza with a native Italian man. The conversation produced by the different performances should be very enlightening as to what actors and behaviors are the most or least significant. Also, it would be helpful for the Italian man to speak English so that he could also serve as a translator.

The results of this research are suggestive of muted group theory. Future research could further examine the role of women outside of the home in relation to power and distance. Such findings could shed additional light on the hegemony of gender relations within the country and

culture. A thorough examination of mass media and its messages would be necessary to fully understand the scope of male dominance in this patriarchal society.

One contribution of this study is cultural change. Future research could look at the types of cultural change, the methods of displaying new identity resulting from the changes, and how these changes influence communication between generations. To do this, it may be helpful to investigate the role of mass media and globalization. Also, a broad age range of informants should be interviewed in order to gather generational perspectives.

The research presented used American interviews to highlight the contrast between Italian and American perspectives of masculinity. Future studies could take a deeper look into the differences and similarities of gender identity between the U.S. and Italy. Such research could examine the historical and cultural roots of each culture and then elaborate their influence on the development of the masculine and feminine identities within each country.

Finally, another interesting offshoot from this project would examine marginalized groups within Italy such as the handicapped, transsexual and foreign populations. Studying such things as discrimination, restricted areas, limited opportunities and social hierarchy would further reveal the structure of hegemony within Italy. Such results could help Italians to position their political objectives to be more adaptive to the emerging modern European and global economy. This could result in greater benefits for the country and its diverse residents.

## APPENDIX A: ITALIAN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your idea of how you should behave or act as a man?
2. Do you do passeggiata here?
3. The clothes are very different for the style of the men, why?
4. Is there a designer that's very important for young people to follow?
5. Is it important for a man to have a lot of sexual partners?
6. What age group do you think of as "i giovani" (the young)?
7. Do you have any role models such as calciatori (soccer players)?
8. Is the gym popular in Italy?
9. Fare bella figura is important to an Italian man, why?
10. Why don't I ever see more girls than guys in a group?
11. What behavior shouldn't a man do?
12. How do you describe "cool"?



## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

DATE, 2007

Dear Study Participant:

I am a graduate student at the University of Central Florida. As part of my coursework, I am conducting a conversational interview, the purpose of which is to learn how Italian men communicate and nonverbally portray masculinity. I am asking you to participate in this interview because you have been identified as a useful informant for this subject. The conversational interview will last no longer than 15 minutes. You will not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. With your permission, I would like to audiotape this interview. Only I will have access to the tape, which I will personally transcribe, removing any identifiers during transcription. The tape will be erased after transcription is complete. Your identity will be kept confidential and will not be revealed in the final manuscript. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

There are no anticipated risks, compensation or other direct benefits to you as a participant in this interview. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate and may discontinue your participation in the interview at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me at (407) 249-1920. My faculty advisor, Dr. Sally Hastings, may be contacted at 407-823-2850 or by email at [hastings@mail.ucf.edu](mailto:hastings@mail.ucf.edu). Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Questions or concerns about research participants' rights may be directed to the Institutional Review Board Office, IRB Coordinator, University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246. The telephone number is (407) 823-2901.

Sincerely,

Gino Perrotte

- I have read the procedure described above for the interview.
- I voluntarily agree to participate in the interview.
- I agree to be audiotaped during the interview.
- I do not agree to be audiotaped during the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Date

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator Date

## APPENDIX C: BMW BOY

Photograph shown to informants during interviews – face edited for anonymity.



APPENDIX D: FASHION ADVERTISEMENT

Italian designers Dolce & Gabbana 2006 underwear campaign featuring popular Italian soccer players. Photographed in the Milan Malpensa airport, July 2006.



## APPENDIX E: AMERICAN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I am studying culture and masculinity and I would appreciate your honest responses to the questions below. I will ask about your ideas of masculinity and ask you to respond to a couple of pictures featuring men. Your thoughts and comments are important to this research. Since you have never been to Italy, your insights will offer a unique perspective on this topic.

1. Describe what you think of as a “masculine” man for the following attributes:

- What does he look like?
- How does he act?
- What does he wear/ What is his style?
- How does he show his intelligence?

2. This is a billboard advertisement for Italian fashion designers Dolce & Gabbana (show picture in Appendix D).

- What do you think about it?
- What message is Dolce & Gabbana trying to convey?
- Who do you think is the target audience for this ad?
- What do you think about it being displayed above the escalator in an international airport?

3. What do you think about this guy (show picture in Appendix C)?

Thank you for your help and participation! Your contribution has enabled me to complete my thesis research. If you are interested in reading the completed thesis, please email me at [ginogym@yahoo.com](mailto:ginogym@yahoo.com).



## APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Notice of Expedited Review and Approval of Requested Addendum/Modification Changes

From: UCF Institutional Review Board  
FWA00000351, Exp. 5/07/10, IRB00001138

To: Gino Perrotte

Date: October 09, 2007

IRB Number: SBE-06-03442

Study Title: The Public Spectacle of Italian Masculinity

Dear Researcher:

Your requested addendum/modification changes to your study noted above which were submitted to the IRB on 10/08/2007 were approved by expedited review on 10/9/2007.

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.110, the expeditable modifications were determined to be minor changes in previously approved research during the period for which approval was authorized.

Use of the approved, stamped consent document(s) is required. The new form supersedes all previous versions, which are now invalid for further use. Only approved investigators (or other approved key study personnel) may solicit consent for research participation. Subjects or their representatives must receive a copy of the consent form(s).

This addendum approval does NOT extend the IRB approval period or replace the Continuing Review form for renewal of the study.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 10/09/2007 03:40:36 PM EDT

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janice Turchin".

IRB Coordinator

Internal IRB Submission Reference Number: 001287

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