

# Missing males

A whitepaper by Kleber & Associates



K&A

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## Overview

Traditional advertising has focused a great deal on the purchasing power of women in the home. Women continue to be considered responsible for some 80 percent of all household-related purchasing decisions. Men, on the other hand, are granted little influence in modern-day households among marketers and mass media. Even fathers of recent generations — who actually spend a greater amount of time in the home and with their families — have been virtually ignored in product development and marketing.

This white paper will discuss the data behind the ‘missing males’ phenomenon, including revealing the history of men’s roles in the household as portrayed by marketers and the media. Until recently, advertisements created around men have followed a singular narrative tone of **male-ness**. They have been mostly perceived as silent observers or **do-ers**, carrying out responsibilities out of fatherly duty and nothing more. The way men have been traditionally portrayed in marketing and media plays a significant role in a one-sided adaptation of gender equality, noticed worldwide. It is easy for advertisers to fall into clichés and gender stereotypes that don’t necessarily reflect the current reality when illustrating the **masculinity of men** in their ad campaigns. In their capacity to create and implement change within the household, men have been ‘**missing**’ — or rather left out of the conversation.

In this paper, we’ll showcase the relevance, buying power and purchasing habits of this **unexplored and unattended** target market, specifically for home and building products. Most importantly, the white paper will offer strategies to building product manufacturers illustrating how they can increase their bottom lines by listening to and effectively marketing to this widely overlooked group of consumers.

## The History of Men

A perennial debate in marketing is whether an advertisement is a reflection of society or whether it helps shape society. Obviously, advertising is closely linked to our economy and culture. As such, it can be considered both a mirror of the current times as well as an iconic art form from which we take our social cues. Have men and society really transformed?

America has walked slowly from the 20th to the 21st century. During this time, there has been a shift in societal focus from occupations to families. American culture in the mid-to-late 1900s removed fathers from child-rearing activities and inserted them into income-producing roles that often stoked fear or indifference in children. Mothers were looked upon as a better parent and fathers as the timely source for moral reprimand, as necessary. Fathers were dominant, overbearing and too superior for conversations on equal footing, which consequently made deeper paternal involvement both difficult and rare.

*How did these cultural expectations impact the advertising world?* In early television sitcoms, fathers were presumed to be the holder of all that was wise and good. And while the watchdog dad reigned over the entire household, the mother was always well dressed, proper, devoted and ready to serve even while being under the father's constant scrutiny.

This narrow and restrictive conception of fatherhood was later capitalized on by marketers and advertisers who intentionally brought females (mothers and wives of busy husbands) to a more superior position of making better purchasing decisions. At home, women were given the importance they were denied in society, which ultimately shifted the balance scales of marketing toward women. The change in advertising strategy created a contemporary concern and confusion around both fatherhood and fathers' ability to make buying decisions.

## The Misconception of Modern-Day Men

The representation of men in advertisements has shifted. Men traditionally have been typecast as strong, in control, confident, successful and autonomous lone warriors. This focus on hyper-masculinity has been unnecessarily prevalent in a number of cultures for centuries. Men are expected to stand firm, tall and resolute. They are expected to rely on strength to generate income for the family and be capable of mitigating all dangers, known and unknown. They are not told, but have been expected to, resign entirely to locking away their feelings and dedicating themselves entirely to the advancement of their family's societal status.

While the role of men in the home is being reexamined, this has taken place alongside a rise in feminism. This trend has had a drastic effect on marketing, as advertisers seek to stamp out 'toxic masculinity' as a way of reaching new customers. The befitting concept of feminism is moving more towards "man-hating" and "bra-burning" rather than creating inspiring ads of women empowerment. Celebrities with large social followings and an uninformed understanding of feminism often jump on the man-hating bandwagon. This surface activism on social media from brands isn't necessarily benefiting the feminist cause but is instead creating a virtual divide between men and women. Companies like Wrangler, with its **#Morethanabum**<sup>1</sup> promotion, and KPMG with its contradictory feminist messaging, are guilty of exploiting feminism today. Why and How?

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<sup>1</sup> Body Bespoke for Wrangler—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAddrQ5jcvv>

**#Morethanabum:** Created in response to the cry against female stereotyping, *#morethanabum* was aimed at moving the cultural conversation away from the *symbolic* notions of women. The three-minute advertisement included women saying the word “bum” multiple times and were further seen sharing their opinion about feeling sexualized at all times, be it at home or work. Shortly after the ad was released, numerous people flocked to the Internet, especially on Twitter and Facebook, to denounce the ad as “cringeworthy”<sup>2</sup> and “anti-feminist.” By focusing on male-bashing, Wrangler got sidetracked from the actual concept of feminism and unnecessarily put men in the shade, which was not required to be relevant.

**KPMG’s feminist campaign misses the mark<sup>3</sup>:** In 2018, KPMG became a subject of \$400 million class action lawsuit, in which it was found guilty of following a continuous pattern of gender discrimination. This came as a shock to many, as KPMG was consistently launching ads that were feminist in a very dangerous way. As observed, many KPMG ads were responsible to suppressing feminism to a dumb hashtag<sup>4</sup>

Katie Martell, chief marketing officer of Boston Content, brings attention to this ongoing disarray in advertising, by saying: *“Profiting from these ideals while embodying or perpetuating the opposite is not clever. It’s exploitation. I call this ‘faux-feminism’. It’s the exploitation of feminism by advertising. What this does is to redefine feminism in a dangerous way – diminishing it down to a tagline. It masks the underlying core problem.”*<sup>5</sup>

Even savvy, well-funded companies like Verizon have been trolled tremendously over the past decades for ad campaigns that miss the mark on men.

**Backlash on Verizon (How the outburst on Stupid Dad<sup>6</sup> Advertisement changed the historical perception of fatherhood)** Ten years ago in an advertising bid, Verizon created a shallow commercial in which a father was determined to help his daughter in her homework but ended up disappointing her. What appeared to be simple math bewildered the aloof father, inspiring the daughter to bypass Dad and ask Mom instead. The frown shared by both mother and daughter raised countless protests, even incurring the wrath of men’s rights activist, Glenn Sacks. Protests were held, arguments were made, and cases were filed against Verizon, which was blamed for questioning the ability of men to raise children.

There was a broad disconnect in the accusations and the intended meaning of the commercial. The commercial only highlighted how fathers are traditionally restricted to being responsible for only child admonishment rather than child development. The intellect of the father was not in question, but the father’s ability to have a meaningful relationship with their child, was. The widely adverse reaction to this marketing strategy is worth significant attention.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lieffcabraser.com/2018/08/female-kpmg-employees-seek-class-certification-in-gender-discrimination-suit/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2016/09/124387/wrangler-feminist-bum-advert-backlash>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=5&v=fXNORLNdTao](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=fXNORLNdTao)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2019/03/04/marketing-s-faux-feminism-problem-international-women-s-day>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpgeACOMS9o>

From what it looks now, history repeats but only with a different tagline. Feminism is used as an agent of societal correctness and men are consequently reduced to the masculine faults 'of their nature.' Despite living in an era of political correctness, the misrepresentation of men seems to be on the rise in popular media.

The evolution of television programming, media portrayal, marketing and advertising to the general American public has pigeonholed the men of current times to portray an outwardly trivial presence in today's households. Men are being cast under their female counterparts' shadows, oftentimes irrationally and under false pretense.

### **Ads with favorable depictions of men**

Despite all the negative approach surrounding male-stereotyped advertisements, several brands are closing the gap in between the real and the advertising world by projecting inspiring and reasonable ad campaigns. New attention toward shattering tired gender stereotypes is creating huge branding opportunities for many companies.

Brands are slowly picking up effective storytelling concepts for men and women which have garnered significant attention. For example, some revolutionary manufacturers and designers are incorporating gender variations into products and designs that embody the entire family. Some designers have added features like "His" and "Her" prep sinks and multi-functional kitchen designs that incorporate "homework" areas, and dual home offices embedded into the overall kitchen design, allowing both women and men to participate in significant parental activities like helping the kids with homework, etc. Several ad campaigns have intelligently initiated a movement to reconstruct the image of men today:



***Gillette Campaign on Toxic Masculinity***<sup>7</sup>: Using satirical masculinity in its branding, the ad campaign pokes fun at the trope of masculinity in a way that appeals to both men and women. It may be a twisted interpretation of what Old Spice has been doing for ages, but the purpose of the ad is fulfilled, as it is extreme to the point of humor. The ads are both humorous and purposeful.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0>



**Father's Day Advertising Campaign by Dove<sup>8</sup>:** Dove is known for its “Beauty is for everybody” campaign, which focuses on beauty found in different types of women, but this candid portrayal of children of all ages calling out to their fathers at different moments offers a heartwarming way to bring men into the conversation. The ad is effective, well-balanced, sentimental and emotionally gripping.



**Gillette-Go Ask Dad<sup>9</sup>:** A renewed perspective of a father's and child's bond, choreographed beautifully by Gillette, distracts attention from popular search engines and highlights the usefulness and resourcefulness of fathers. Simple life hacks answered best by dad, is a restoration of the emotional connection we sometimes overlook and forget to nurture.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Jpb2\\_YdxYM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Jpb2_YdxYM)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RRAAkFM\\_cw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RRAAkFM_cw)

**Incredibles 2**<sup>10</sup>: Movies are often known for creating gender balance. The aggressive promotion of female superheroes, like Marvel’s “Captain Marvel” and DC’s “Wonder Woman”, has raised the stakes for other Hollywood studios. “Incredibles 2” focuses on “feminist triumph” and gives men the backseat who are not accustomed to having their status challenged, but Bob/Mr. Incredible in the movie complies gracefully. The movie brilliantly shows the truth of American households in which men are often ambassadors of child rearing at home. The presentation of household men in the movie is not depressing but is inspiring, as it presents real-world gender dynamics in its purest form in a way that is encouraging to men and women. With less-dramatic moral challenges represented in the movie, the collective on-screen narrative of gender equality is easy, positive and realistic.



### **How advertisers create a connection in between advertising story line and product-to-market?**

Building relationships is the main ingredient to reach a strong and more permanent audience amidst hoopla around the scattered perceptions of men, changing social dynamics and heavy competition. Persuasive and informative advertising that is constantly able to remind viewers about the hidden potential of men is a formative technique waiting to be explored. Advertisers can create effective marketing strategies by shifting their focus on qualitative dimensions (traits like dominance and masculinity) to quantifiable dimensions (the amount of time spent in child-rearing activities). We’ll explore how men — with all their various personas — can be identified, approached and converted into returning customers.

### **Men as an overlooked opportunity**

Despite common belief, many men actually enjoy shopping and making household purchasing decisions. In fact, according to the National Association of Realtors’ “Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers 2007,” first-time homebuyers make 39 percent of home purchases and account for 43 percent of all home sales.

This yields an opportunity to reach an untapped market segment in categories other than that of cars, beer and electronics. Although women hold a wealth of considerable influence and buying power in the home environment, men are not far behind.

It’s important to note that today’s couples are navigating and negotiating equality far more than ever before. In today’s time-starved, fast-paced culture, it is not about what gender is making the decision for the couple, but more about who has the time to do it. The “traditional” idea of men as breadwinners and heads-of-household, or the pseudo-feminism conviction that women control all decision making in the home, both fail to successfully define the modern-day home environment. Today’s household culture is more of a democracy than it is a dictatorship.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/06/201555/incredibles-2-bob-parr-stay-at-home-dad-jokes>

Adding more to the selling point of a man's efficiency to make equal decisions at home: The majority of men born between 1961 to 1981 — both married and single, from urban to suburban — have cooked and shopped more than their fathers have, according to a survey conducted by [Gen Xers](#). The survey concluded a pragmatic fact that many American men are capable of home cooking, which also means the kitchen is the new 'man cave.' With men shopping more, they are more likely to be receptive to smart, purpose-driven male advertising.

As men become increasingly involved in their home lives, companies should invest far more in men-centric advertisement strategies and tap into the vast market and its corresponding dollars.

### **Men Persona's Redefined**

Now that we know who the modern man is and who he is not, the next step is determining the most effective ways to sell to them. Consider the values and habits of today's male consumers, as identified by the following personalities and marketing needs:

#### **Solo Pilot**

He's doesn't want to be called a metrosexual, but this guy dresses, cooks his own dinner and buys beauty products — or at least shower gel and cologne anyway. As the chief purchasing officer in his domain, he enjoys shopping and making buying decisions. Typically an upwardly mobile power-seeker, he prefers browsing the Internet when researching and buying products.

#### **21st Century Bachelor**

As a growing number of males play dual roles as single men and fathers, the bachelor pad is getting a makeover. This man is increasingly concerned with the number of rooms and amenities in his home as he considers both his personal life and the needs of his children. Appealing to his paternal emotions and providing the opportunity to connect with his children are important marketing strategies.

#### **Domestic Techie**

The 'man cave' may become an endangered territory as this man comfortably migrates to other parts of the home. Trends such as molecular gastronomy are spiking his interest in cooking and turning other formerly female domains into level playing fields. Speaking to him in the scientific language he prefers will maximize opportunities for promoting high-tech products and methods he craves.

#### **Practical Papa**

By being more involved in his home and recognizing his important position as a father and husband, this man is the reality between stereotypical extremes of authoritarian and jokester husbands. He has feelings and emotions, especially concerning his children. He needs authentic role models in advertising that speak to his interests and values rather than those that contrast the emphasis he places on family.

#### **The Boss Man**

The "Philanthropist" carries both strong ambitions and high emotional intelligence. This kind is usually color-to-clothing coordinated and has priorities defined clearly. Their preference is styling a space that reflects instrumental designs that are well-adjusted with purpose in every



corner. Perfection is their taste and presenting a matured structure with customizable options is recommended.

### **The Millennial Man**

The Entrepreneurial spirit has crossed all barriers of societal imposed values and demands. The Millennial Man is driven with this mindset, and is basic in his needs, smart in his choices, quick in his approach, and is aggressively dedicated to making a bend in the society with righteous change. They often aim at placing themselves in a simpler yet thriving environment. A space that remains as significantly fulfilling as their entrepreneurial intentions, is something that they would be interested in.

### **How to best reach the audience**

With so many presumptions attached to men from all generations, it can be difficult to determine the most relevant marketing tactics for all types of men.

#### *What can be done?*

- Instead of creating stereotypical “*bachelor pads*,” home developers and designers should look at creating customizable, and highly personalized open floor plans that can easily meet the needs and match the style of today’s *at-home husbands* or *work-from-home men*.
- The emergence of gastrosexuals signifies a strong male demographic to engage with and explore as they are likely ambitious and opinionated about drafting their recommendations on kitchen designs, products and amenities.
- At-home industry professionals who are equally engaged in managing their work while attending their kids, represent another unattended and untouched market.

Apart from this, well-informed marketers should continue to recognize that children hold the power to their parents’ wallets. In fact, the 41 million children in the U.S. between the ages of five and 14 have a direct buying power of more than \$40 billion and influence \$146 billion worth of expenditures every year. When marketing to men, remember to also market to their children.

*What should be noted while creating marketing strategies for this sector?* Keep your inquiries simple and centered on understanding the relationships kids have with their fathers. Inquire about their personal lives, what their children are interested in, and what they are looking for in terms of space, number of rooms, amenities and product attributes, especially in kitchen appliances.

As you create marketing campaigns, make sure, your presentation displays:

- **Affection** for the neglected men
- **Solutions** for their scattered problems/multi-tasking
- **Attention** to their ignored needs
- **Compassion** for their standing
- **Familiarity** for their suppressed focus

Following these five parameters will help men connect on a personal level with your product’s functionality, familiarity and practicality. With that said, there are still potential differences to take into account when marketing and selling to men and women.

## **The reality of today's men**

Like many of today's consumers, men respond to interactive media and marketing. The advent of the Internet has created a new way to communicate, thereby creating a fresh platform where consumers can reach information easily, quickly and on their own time schedule.

### ***Men's Shopping Habits:***

In fact, one of the largest consumer groups persuaded by online advertising is men. A recent poll conducted by Hall and Partners found that of the 500 men between the ages of 18-34 surveyed, nearly 70 percent use the Internet daily for entertainment and purchasing products. What's more, men are more likely to purchase products seen online rather than from a television or print advertisement. The majority of the men also noted that they use their mobile phones to access the Internet. Generally speaking, men surf the Web for four distinct reasons: networking, information (for both news and products), career building ideas and shopping.

### ***How Men are comparatively better in shopping than women?***

1. Their shopping experiences are simple and straightforward i.e. frequent transactions.
2. They tend to buy products immediately if they like it.
3. They buy expensive products that promise longevity.
4. Their purchasing decisions are driven more on logic.
5. They are least interested in sales, discounts and coupons.
6. They research more before making a buying decision.
7. They require feature lists and detailed reviews on products they are interested in buying.

The Internet has brought the men closer to the home in a way no one expected. An increasing amount of men are now telecommuting, allowing them to play an intricate role in daily family life. Like their female counterparts, modern-day men have taken on domesticated roles within the household including cooking, child rearing, grocery shopping and involvement in their children's school activities.

All these analyses boil down to one crucial question? Why have marketers not at least made more of a concerted attempt to target men or become gender neutral in their advertising for the home? The answer is simple, women are still perceived to dominate the home product market and a majority of the advertising campaigns are built by women for women.

It could be said that men need to fall in line or fall behind and the same can be expressed about the home products market. Getting to know the new modern-day man is essential for marketers strategizing for success. Missed opportunities mean missed revenue potential. And the missing men of the world are begging to be noticed.

## **About Kleber & Associates**

Founded in 1987, Kleber & Associates is the established leader in brand development and integrated communications for clients in the construction and building products industry. The Atlanta-based agency works in partnership with a variety of client brands that market products for both residential and commercial construction applications targeted to consumers, architects and designers, as well as developers, builders, remodelers and contractors. The agency addresses its clients' needs through a strategic, disciplined brand development process, combined with customized communications programming and an in-depth knowledge of the marketplace.

Agency Founder, Steven Kleber, is the current president of the National Remodeling Foundation (NRF) and the immediate-past president of the Center for Kitchen & Bath Education and Research (CKBER). He serves on the board of trustees for the Home Projects Council as well as on the Global Opportunities Board of the National Association of Homebuilders.

Visit <http://www.kleberandassociates.com> for more information.