



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 11-12  
**About the Author:** MediaSmarts

# Advertising and Male Violence

## Overview

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To make students aware of the ways in which male violence is used and promoted in advertising.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will demonstrate:

- an awareness of various violent male archetypes that are used in advertising.
- an understanding of the effects of media violence on young men.
- an understanding of the dominance of these violent archetypes in advertising that targets young men.
- an understanding of their own feelings toward these archetypes.

## Preparation and Materials

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- Photocopy the handout *Masculinity and Violence in Advertising* for class discussion.
- Ask students to bring male-oriented magazines (such as sports, video game, fitness or skateboard magazines) to class.
- Download or create overhead transparencies from advertisements representing the following themes (or bring similar ads to class)
  - *Attitude is Everything*
  - *The Cave Man Mentality*
  - *Muscles and the Ideal Man*
  - *The New Warriors*
  - *Heroic Masculinity*
  - *Censuring Un-Masculine Behaviour*



## The Lesson

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### Guided Discussion:

Perhaps the first question to be asked regarding today's class is "Why should we bother looking at the influence of violence in the media on males?" Obviously, media portrayals of violence affect us all, and female bullies and abusers exist. But statistically, it is males who seem particularly prone to violent action in our society, and because of this, it is worth taking the time to focus on this issue as it specifically relates to men.

Ask students:

- What percentage of violent crime is committed by males? (*Write down a few of their suggestions. The actual figure is close to 90%.*)
- Does this figure surprise you?
- When we look at violence in society, we tend to think of women as victims and men as perpetrators. What percentage of males are victims of violence? (*Roughly half of the victims of violent crime are male; however, men are twice as likely as women to be victims of assault with a weapon or assault causing bodily harm and three times as likely to be victims of aggravated assault or homicide. Source: "Gender Differences in Police-reported Violent Crime in Canada," Statistics Canada 2008.*)
- Why isn't more violent crime committed by females? (*One answer may be that society traditionally hasn't condoned or reinforced female violent behaviour in the same manner as it has for male violence.*)

The fact is that violent behaviour is typically labelled as "male." This doesn't mean that all men are violent, but it does mean that violent behaviour is associated with masculinity.

Write the saying "Boys will be boys" onto the board. Ask students:

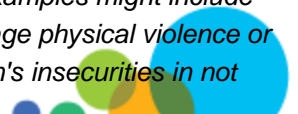
- What does this saying mean to you? (Traditionally, the process of male socialization has encouraged boys to be aggressive, strong and powerful. When faced with aggressive or violent acts, attitudes such as "Boys will be boys" are one way that male violence is condoned and encouraged by society.)

One place where this "Boys will be boys" attitude seems to be constantly reinforced is in the media. Although studies have not conclusively proven that media violence is linked to real-life violence, experts agree that constant exposure to violent acts committed by males in the media normalizes male violence, making it appear to be a part of our real-life culture.

- Ask students to brainstorm examples of violence from movies, sports, video games, rock videos and television.

One media influence that is often left out when discussing violence in the media is advertising. Yet many ads use violence to sell products. Just open up any magazine that is geared to teenage boys and you will be bombarded with advertisements that encourage aggression or violence.

- Ask students to list the ways that advertisers use violence to sell products to men. (*Examples might include the use of aggressive athletes or super heroes in threatening poses; ads that encourage physical violence or "attitude" [video game advertisements often use this method]; or ads that prey on men's insecurities in not being big, strong or tough enough.*)



Five advertising themes or archetypes that use and encourage male violence are:

1. Attitude is Everything
  2. The Cave Man Mentality
  3. The New Warriors
  4. Muscles and the "Ideal Man"
  5. Heroic Masculinity
  6. Censuring Un-Masculine Behaviour"
- Ask students what sort of images might be associated with these themes. Distribute and review the handout *Masculinity and Violence in Advertising*. Can students think of other themes to add to this list?
  - Place your advertisement example onto the overhead projector (or distribute your own advertisements). Ask students to identify which archetype or theme these ads represent, and what messages they give to consumers. (Remind them to note how the text of each advertisement also relates to the theme.)

*Attitude is Everything* — These three ads are examples of the ways in which attitude is promoted in advertisements geared towards young men.

- *Diesel: For Successful Living* — With one young man glowering at the camera and another holding his crotch while the two carry a giant hammer, this ad presents an in-your-face kind of masculinity and male sexuality.
- *Dockers: Wear the Pants* equates masculinity as the ability to stand up to punishment by presenting a man literally made up of his wounds, including some of that speak of fairly bad judgment ("chainsaw rip," "barbed wire tear," "sulphuric acid burn," "hyena bite.")
- *KnowHow2Go: Take the Tough Classes Now!* — So far as the advertising industry is concerned, even public service announcements have to be hypermasculine if they're aimed at teenage boys.

*The Caveman Mentality* - These ads feature three masculine icons from popular history. The cowboy, the boxer and the samurai are all examples of violent, rugged manhood that support the premise that man is, historically, an aggressive creature.

- *The Marlboro Man*, that icon of the rugged, solitary male, is meant to suggest that men who smoke Marlboro cigarettes are equally rugged and masculine. With the cowboy icon comes many other (often stereotypical) associations of strength, bravery and 'noble violence' — the lone cowboy using violent behaviour to protect the weak and defenseless (who are usually female).
- *Hennesy Cognac: Never Stop Never Settle* — The boxer, another icon of masculinity, is shown here representing the idea that men "never stop" fighting. Though he appears broken down and exhausted, this boxer is still determined "to fight the fights that really matter."
- *Schick Hydro: Extreme Hydration* — As with the Cognac ad, the idea that it's good for men to be able take punishment is presented here with the image of a Japanese samurai being struck in the face with a sword. These ads normalize the idea that the correct reaction to being a victim of violence is to "suck it up."



*The New Warriors* — These ads make consumers associate danger, violence and excitement with the products that are being advertised.

- *Knock-Out* uses the image of a tank inside a beer bottle not only to communicate the strength of the beer, but to connect it with ideas of strength, power and adventure.
- *Bell & Ross Vintage Original Collection* uses the speed, danger and excitement of flying fighter jets to promote a product that one might not usually associate with masculinity — a wristwatch.

*Muscles and the Ideal Man* — These ads portray a strong, muscular body with the image of ideal manhood.

- *Dolce & Gabbana Sport* compensates for the possibly un-masculine associations of cologne by presenting a model whose muscles are echoed by the rock wall behind him.
- Another *Dolce & Gabbana* ad ties muscles and masculinity even more closely together, presenting a fantasy of masculine sexuality in which the shirtless man's "fish" is so large that the other men can only gawk at it and cover their eyes.
- This *IronMan* cover equates muscles, desirability and sexuality, presenting a "harem" image as testimony to the power of muscles.

*Heroic Masculinity* — Is Hollywood's glamorization of male violence. Whether a movie hero is a noble good-guy (such as Captain America) a loutish anti-hero (like Riddick) or somewhere in between (like Thor), the ability to take and deal out punishment is universal. Even a movie about an aid worker in Africa may be sold in terms of violent heroism, as with the movie *Machine Gun Preacher*. When deconstructing these advertisements, students should note how facial expressions, text, weaponry and stance are all used to enhance this archetype.

*Censuring Un-Masculine Behaviour* — A big part of defining masculinity is also defining what it *isn't*. In this Corona ad, we see a soccer player struggling to overcome the fact that "as a child, I used to dance ballet." The expressions of the other men show that deviating from "the rules" of masculine behaviour opens you up to mockery from other men.

### Activity One

- Divide your class into small groups.
- Using the magazines that have been brought to class, ask students to find examples from each of the five themes that have been discussed.
- In groups, students will deconstruct each advertisement and present their findings to the class.

### Activity Two

- Divide your class into five groups and assign each group one of the themes that has been discussed in class.
- Each group is to create a parody advertisement, satirizing their assigned theme.
- Ads can be presented in print format, or they can be acted out.
- Students will present their satirical ads to the rest of the class.



### Activity Three

- Each student will look for an advertisement that promotes a more positive or realistic image of masculinity.
- Students will submit their ads, with a written explanation of why they selected that particular advertisement, to the teacher for evaluation or
- Students can present their ads and explanations orally to the class.

### Activity Four

- Boys can write journal entries regarding the effect that violent masculinity in advertising (or the media in general) has had on their own perceptions of what it takes to be a "real" man.
- Girls can explore this issue in the context of how their expectations of men have been affected by these images.

### Evaluation

- Group ad deconstruction assignment
- Group parody ads
- Individual assignment or presentation
- Journal entries



## Masculinity and Violence in Advertising

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Violent behaviour for men, including its rewards, is encoded into mainstream advertising in numerous ways. Some common themes are:

### Attitude is Everything

- This theme appears most often in advertising geared towards young men.
- The message of these "attitude" ads links the flaunting of authority to being a rebel — with "attitude" packaged as a cool, desirable male trait.
- Although these advertisements don't necessarily promote violent activities, they encourage "in-your-face" behaviour in teenagers which can easily escalate into real life violence.
- Taken to its extreme, attitude can also include advertisements that depict a mean and nasty world, where vigilante violence is touted as a means of survival.

### The Cave Man Mentality

- The "Cave Man Mentality" is the use of violent male icons or heroes from popular history to demonstrate masculinity in advertisements. Roman centurions, pirates, ancient warriors and even cowboys are used in this context.
- The message of these ads is that men have always been brutal and aggressive, that this is a part of their nature that they cannot change.
- In these ads, advertisers seek to associate the product with manly needs and pursuits that have presumably existed throughout time.
- Another negative aspect of these ads is that they often include dominance of women as a biological fact.

### The New Warriors

- "The New Warriors" represent an advertiser's use of military or sports figures to enhance the "manliness" of their products.
- These ads depict uniformed soldiers and players, complete with weapons and gear, to target young boys and adolescent males.
- The message here is that violence is cool, suave and acceptable, as consumers are presented with an adventurous, aggressive and violent image of manhood.
- Usually these figures appear in ads for traditional male products, such as beer, running shoes or deodorant, but they are also used to enhance the masculine appeal of more feminine products such as "lite" beer.

### Muscles and the "Ideal" Man

- Throughout this century, a rippling, muscular body has been associated with an image of ideal manhood. Size and strength are traits that are valued by men across class and racial boundaries.



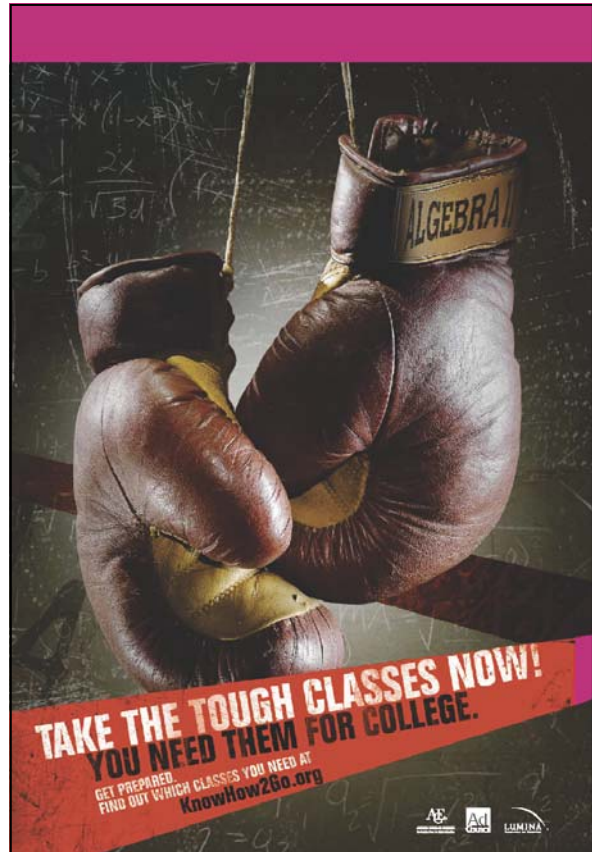
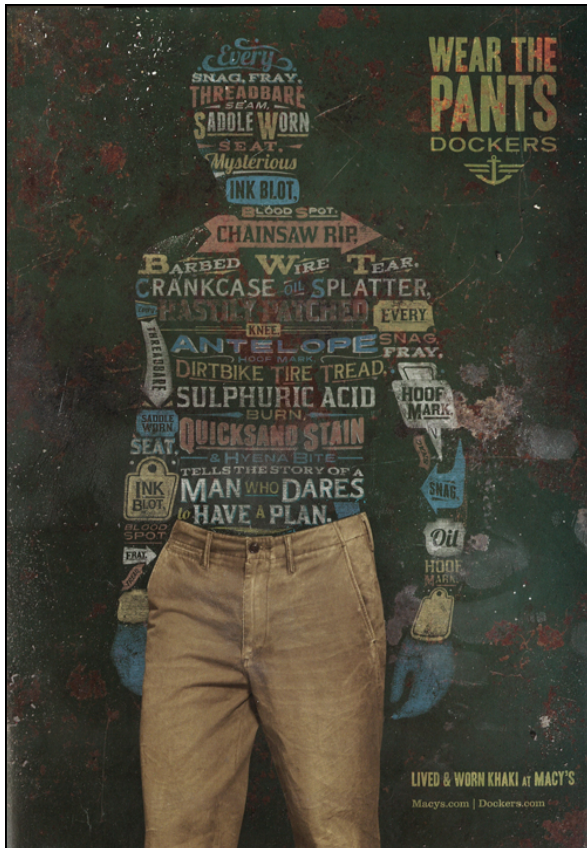
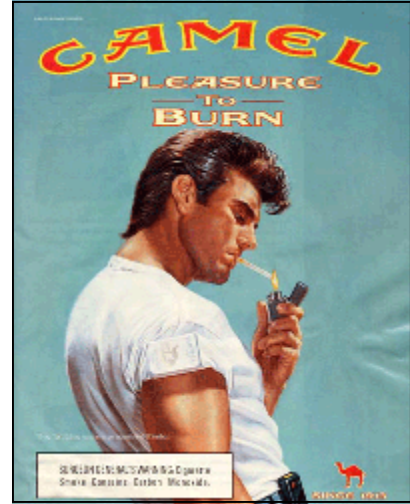
- A muscular man in an advertisement associates dominance and control with the product being sold. Women who appear in such ads are usually depicted in a fawning manner.
- Sports and other magazines with a large male readership are filled with ads for muscle-enhancing products — often equating muscles with violent power.
- Often, images of physically rugged or muscular male bodies are used to sell more abstract forms of power, such as financial institutions or cars.
- A more insidious form of violence that this archetype promotes is self-violence, with men using drugs and extreme exercise in order to attain this "ideal."

### Heroic Masculinity

- The equation of heroic masculinity with violent masculinity is a by-product of Hollywood action movie promoters. Often, more people see the advertising for a given film than the film itself, and the highlights used to sell the film often include the movie's most violent and sexually titillating scenes.
- Often, in advertisements for these films, guns and other (often futuristic) weapons are used to signify the virility and power of the male characters.

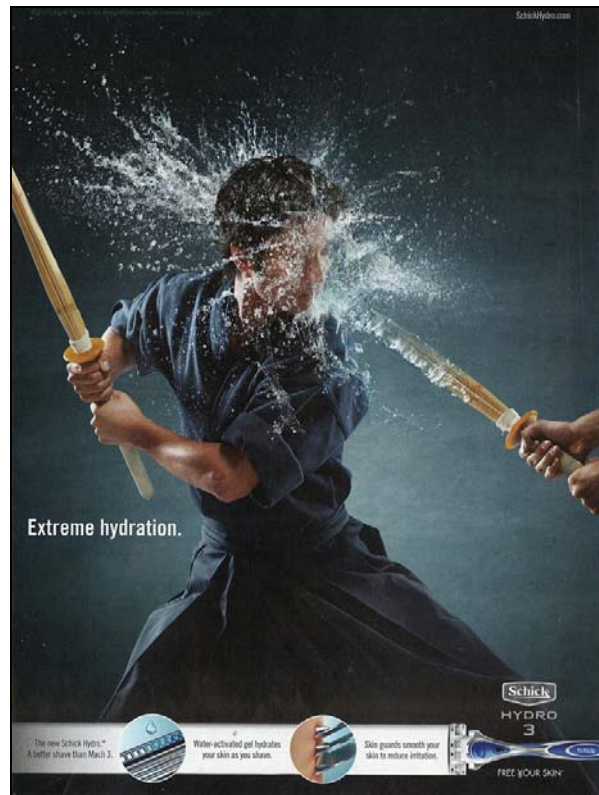
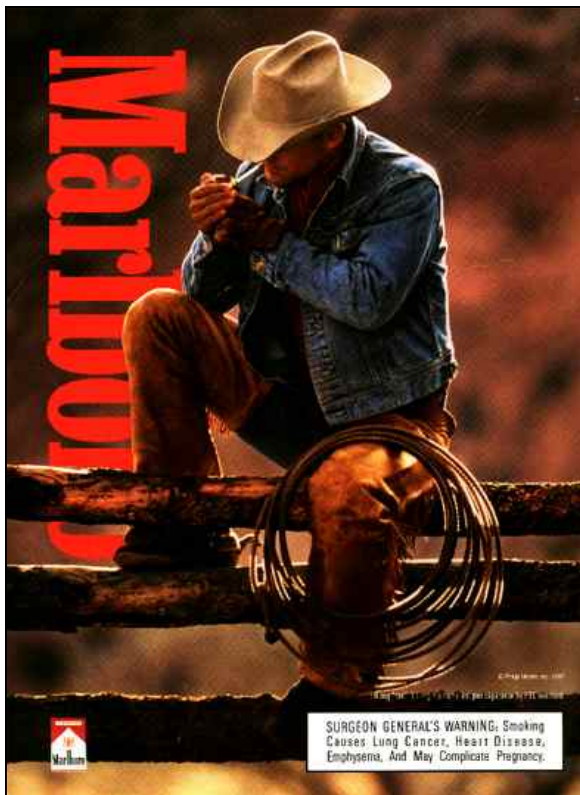
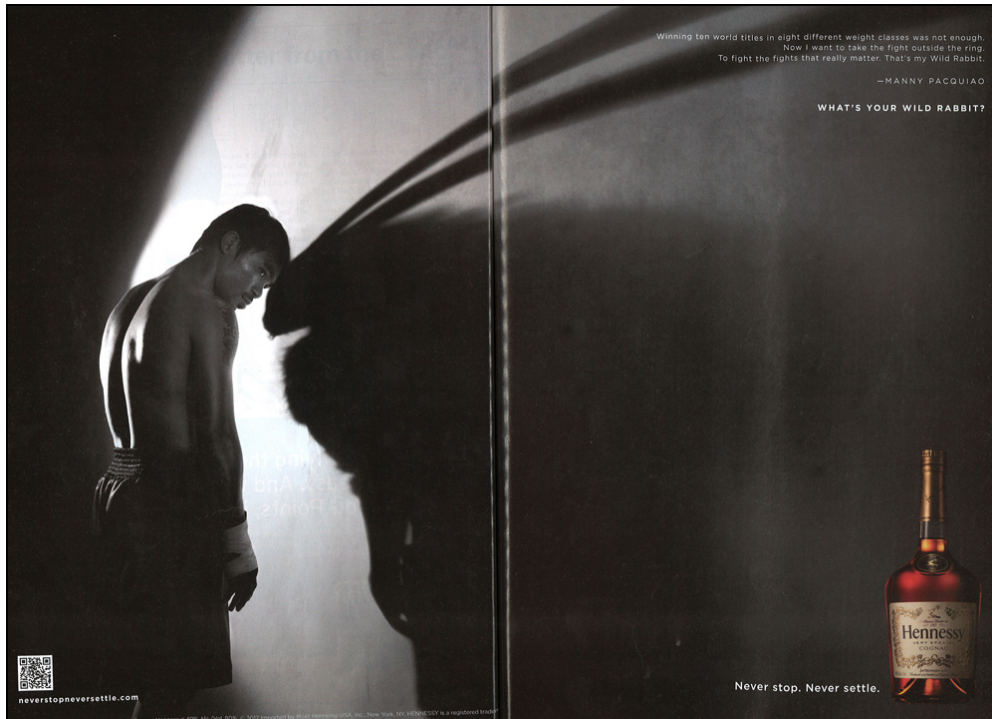


## Attitude Problem? : Advertising and Male Violence





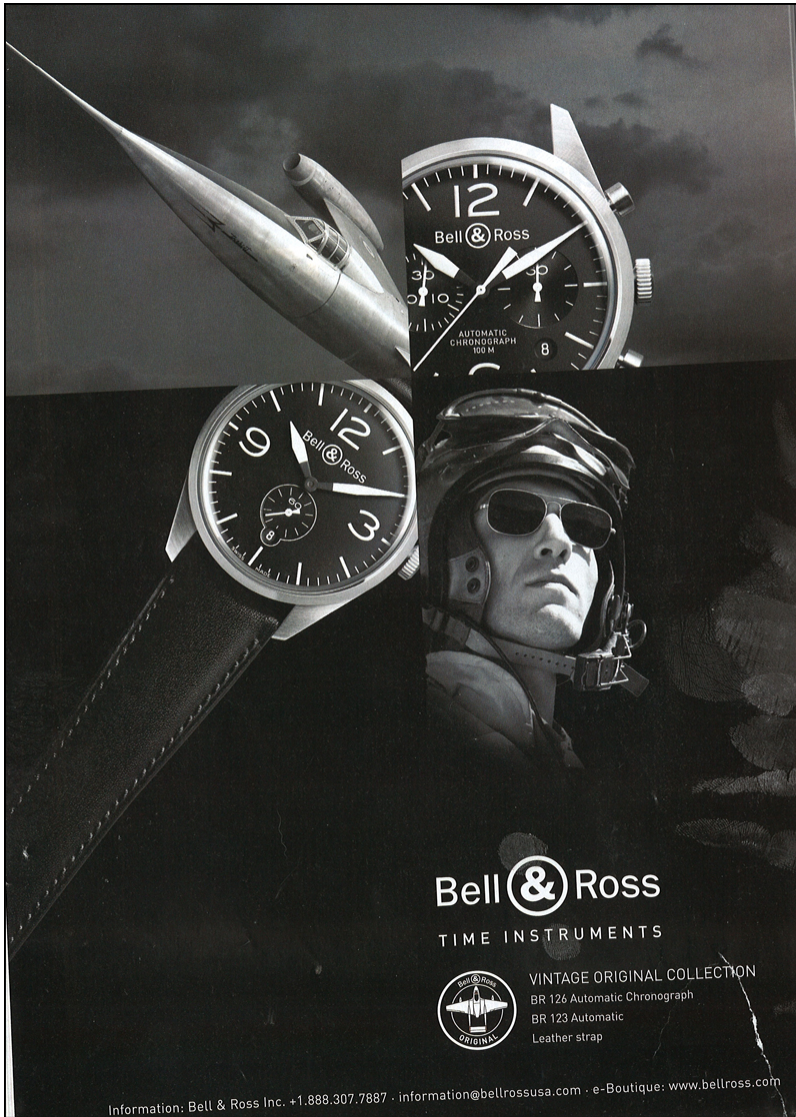
## The Cave Man Mentality



## Muscles and the Ideal Man



## The New Warriors



Bell & Ross  
TIME INSTRUMENTS

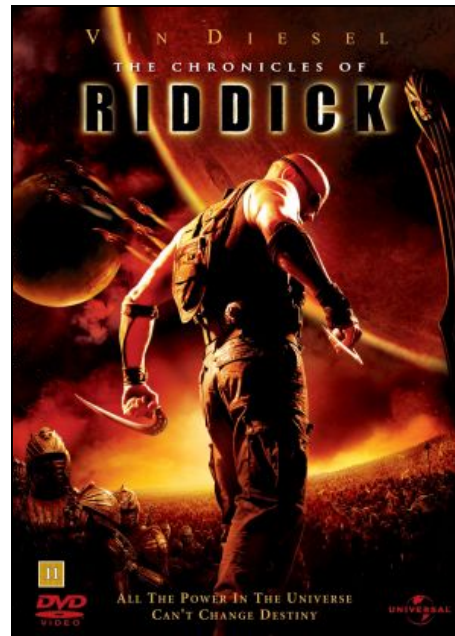
VINTAGE ORIGINAL COLLECTION  
BR 124 Automatic Chronograph  
BR 123 Automatic  
Leather strap

Information: Bell & Ross Inc. +1.888.307.7887 · information@bellrossusa.com · e-Boutique: www.bellross.com



# Heroic Masculinity

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Censuring Un-Masculine Behaviour

