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**CHILDREN'S CONCEPTIONS
OF MASCULINITY:
*THE MASK***

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Media Studies
at Massey University.

Simon Hart

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Abstract

Television's potential influence on its viewers is frequently the topic of heated debate, both in academia and wider society. This research uses media representations of masculinity embodied in the cartoon programme "The Mask" as a basis for the study of the social construction of masculinity. The research has two foci. Firstly, the observation of how children's talk about television, in particular, their understandings of masculinity, actively constructs subject positions for them; and secondly, participant use of modality judgements. This thesis holds that modality judgements are a vehicle through which potentially conflicting information (in the form of internal and external modality markers) is actively synthesized. Particular attention is given to how the participants' understandings of masculinity are actively negotiated with the representations of masculinity as depicted by the cartoon. The influential work of Buckingham (1993), Morley (1980) and Hall (1980) provides the theoretical framework in which this thesis is structured. The overall results from the focus group research indicated that participants tended to use traditional understandings of the nature of masculinity to conceptualise how 'most men ought' to be. This research has potential implications for the ongoing societal debates regarding the censorship of children's viewing material.

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