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# The Fashionable Life: Fashion Imagery and the Construction of Masculinity in America, 1960-2000

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE FASHIONABLE LIFE:  
FASHION IMAGERY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
MASCULINITY IN AMERICA, 1960-2000

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HISTORY

BY

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To my parents, Neal and Kathy

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## **ABSTRACT**

Women for far too long exemplified the consumer of fashion in scholarship. While studies have been produced about men's fashions, historians need to apply their tools of inquiry to give men, particularly American men, greater visibility as historical actors within consumer culture. This dissertation seeks to address this issue by examining the process of masculine identity formation through dress for the American male, specifically the upwardly-mobile, white, black, and gay male from the 1970s through the 1990s. After World War II, American culture, in large part, has been based upon the benefits and advantages created by consumerism. Happiness, fulfillment, and pleasure were defined through interactions with commodities that shaped one's identity. Traditional masculinity proved less attainable in a world beset by political, economic, and cultural upheaval. Elements of traditional masculinity were repackaged into consumer goods. Clothing was one type of commodity that now embodied traditional masculine qualities of mastery, dominance, confidence, and control. Men turned to fashion for security, esteem, and masculine pride.

No one article of masculine attire better symbolizes masculinity than the suit. During the 1970s through the 1990s, magazines serve as the best medium through which to explore the visibility and imagery of both the suit and American masculinity. Examining the varied presentations of the male body and suit fashions in print underscores not only societal expectations of masculinity, but how men used fashion to

conform or oppose elements of traditional masculinity. Suits served as a barometer of masculinity, visually charting the American man's struggle to locate an appropriate and comfortable masculinity that could be reproduced and replicated on a daily basis. Just as the suit oscillated between hard and soft imagery, so too did the American male depending upon societal conditions and individual needs. The suit not only acts as a window into the cultural, political, and economic issues of this period, but also allows for a greater understanding of American history and modern manhood.

## INTRODUCTION

The inimitable French couturier and designer Coco Chanel claimed, “Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.”<sup>1</sup> Chanel’s statement was made decades and decades ago by an insider to the fashion industry, yet many remain unwilling to give the study of fashion serious academic consideration. For some, fashion and its corresponding term “style,” are inherently linked with words like glitz, glamour, superficiality, and fad. Fashion is haphazardly labeled as a topic devoid of substantive or cultural value, one that does not merit significant or meaningful intellectual discussion.

Yet, fashion is everywhere. The average person sees a plethora of ensembles and styles just by walking down a city block, surfing the web, or perusing magazines before boarding a commuter train. Celebrities, starlets, and various sophisticates are photographed constantly in sartorial offerings by designers, posing for red carpet snapshots, and being ranked as best or worst dressed. Along with magazines, fashion can be found on television in programs like E’s *Fashion Police*, TLC’s *What Not to Wear*, and Lifetime’s *Project Runway* among others. Award shows such as the Oscars and Golden Globes typically reserve time before the actual event begins on their respective television stations for in depth commentary and criticism regarding what

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/fashion>; Internet; accessed 27 September 2013.

attendees are wearing. Fashion even infiltrates the world of politics with critics and supporters alike discussing Hilary Rodham Clinton's suit choices during her travels as Secretary of State or whether First Lady Michelle Obama prefers wearing designs by Jason Wu to Isabel Toledo.

Men are also not immune to the growing fashion consciousness within society. Male celebrities and politicians live under the watchful eye of fashion commentators who dissect their wardrobe choices including pontificating on the merits of Brad Pitt donning a Tom Ford tuxedo in contrast to Leonardo DiCaprio clothed head to toe in his perennial favorite designer, Giorgio Armani. In the most recent presidential campaign, frontrunners President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney fielded questions and critiques about their individual fashion styles as much as they spoke about issues like health care, tax reform, and national defense. And, in this era of the internet, countless websites and blogs consistently ruminate on everything from style on the streets of Paris to the clothes worn by Princess Kate of England. Ordinary men and women can insinuate themselves into this larger public discourse, opening themselves up to either public approval or censure by posting pictures of themselves and their garments on twitter or Instagram on a daily basis. Fashion is so accessible, disposable, and omnipresent in this day and age.

Yet, despite western culture's interest in designer goods and styles, many individuals simply will not concede that fashion is a topic worthy of serious scholarly analysis. Scholar Stella Bruzzi acknowledged that this mindset even exists among academics as they are plagued by the complexities of studying fashion since "it's too

trivial to theorise, too serious to ignore.”<sup>2</sup> This perception surfaces on occasion when someone inquires about my dissertation. Upon learning that it deals with men and the construction of masculinity through fashion and dress, a quizzical look typically appears. This grimace is usually followed by a list of questions that touch upon numerous items such as the merits of my study, its unconventional approach, and how my research constitutes relevant historical scholarship. Not only is the intrinsic value of studying fashion being scrutinized, but also the fact that men, American men at that, are the central characters and actors in this historical narrative.

Men and women alike both incorporate fashion and style into their everyday lives. However, the issue for historians is that women for far too long exemplified the consumer of fashion in scholarship. Part of the reasoning behind this discrepancy was that menswear appears to change very little in terms of style and form giving credence to this notion that “men wear functional clothing, while women wear frivolous fashion...”<sup>3</sup> For centuries women have been painted as the fashion-obsessed sex, wearing decorative, trendy, and lavish styles with abandon.<sup>4</sup> However, fashion historians have pointed out that men’s clothing was just as colorful, expressive, and ornate as women’s garments up until about the eighteenth century when “The Great Masculine Renunciation” began, a

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<sup>2</sup> Stella Bruzzi and Pamela Church Gibson, eds., *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Exploration and Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 3. Other scholars and academics have commented on this “Great Masculine Renunciation” theory including one of the earliest influential works about the psychology of clothing, J.C. Flugel’s, *The Psychology of Clothes* (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1969). This was originally produced in the 1930s.

<sup>4</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000), 146-176.

product of the twin forces of capitalism and democratic ideals taking hold in western nations. Men's garb became identified as somber, restrained, and practical, further perpetuating the view that men were devoid of fashion sense or simply disinterested in this cultural medium.<sup>5</sup> The plethora of books, articles, and research produced on women and fashion only reinforces this perception.

While studies have been produced about men's fashions, historians need to apply their tools of inquiry to further give greater visibility to men, particularly American men, as historical actors within consumer culture to challenge all of these past stereotypes and theories. Men still remain understudied as gendered subjects in the areas of consumption and consumer culture.<sup>6</sup> Fashion theorist Jennifer Craik hypothesized that, "...the relative neglect of men's fashion in many studies of fashion is a consequence of the peculiarity of western notions of gender."<sup>7</sup> This dissertation seeks to address these issues by examining the process of masculine identity formation through dress for the American male, specifically the upwardly-mobile, white, black, and gay male from the 1970s through the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Fashion materialized as a medium through which these men could exert time-

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<sup>5</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 2-3. See also Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*.

<sup>6</sup> Some notable historical works about men, masculinity, and consumer culture that influenced, shaped, and paved the way for this dissertation and its concepts include Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Imagery in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006); Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*; and Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1994), 13.

honored masculine attributes of dominance, control, self-assuredness, and mastery.

While men's fashion encompasses a wide range of products, categories, and garments, one item was selected to act as the primary window into American masculinity and society during this time. No one article of masculine attire better represents and symbolizes masculinity than the suit. Art historian Anne Hollander asserted, "The modern suit has provided so perfect a visualization of modern male pride that it has so far not needed replacement, and it has gradually provided the standard costume of civil leadership for the whole world."<sup>9</sup>

Men in the worlds of finance, law, and politics have worn the suit as proper, standard attire for the better part of over a century. Academics such as David Kuchta trace the development of the suit, or more specifically the three-piece suit, back to the court of King Charles II of England in the seventeenth century. However, other scholars

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<sup>8</sup> The study of men as consumers and subjects of fashion has been undertaken by some scholars and journalists. For a multi-faceted discussion and review of men's fashions in the twentieth century, see Cally Blackman, *100 Years of Menswear* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2009); Maurizia Boscalgi, *Eyes on the Flesh: Fashions of Masculinity in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Robert E. Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear: Council of Fashion Designers of America* (New York: Assouline, 2009); Farid Chenoune, *A History of Men's Fashion* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993); Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety: Image and Mortality in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Shaun Cole, *'Don We Now Our Gay Apparel' Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Maria Costantino, *Men's Fashion in the Twentieth Century: From Frock Coat to Intelligent Fibers* (New York: Costume and Fashion Press, 1997); Tim Edwards, *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (London: Cassell, 1997); Amy De La Haye and Cathie Dingwall, *Surfers, Soulies, Skinheads, and Skaters: Subcultural Style from the Forties to the Nineties* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1996); Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* (New York: Kodansha International, 1994); Paul Jobling, *Man Appeal: Advertising, Modernism and Men's Wear* (New York: Berg, 2005); Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Jocks and Nerds: Men's Style in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989); Colin McDowell, *The Man of Fashion: Peacock Males and Perfect Gentlemen* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997); John Peacock, *Men's Fashion: The Complete Sourcebook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Josh Sims, *Icons of Men's Style* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2011); and Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*. This is not an exhaustive list but a small and noteworthy selection of noted texts available on this subject matter.

<sup>9</sup> Hollander, *Sex and Suits*, 55 and 113. See also Tim Edwards, "Executive Looks: Masculinity, Sexuality, and the Suit," *University of Leicester Discourse Papers in Sociology*, no. S00/2 (April 2000): 17; Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2011), 53.

claim that the monarch truly responsible for this dress innovation was the “Sun King” or King Louis XIV of France during the eighteenth century. Despite this sartorial disagreement, the fact remains that during the eighteenth century, the three foundational articles of the suit—coat, vest, and breeches—were in existence.<sup>10</sup>

The suit from its earliest incarnation borrowed design elements from both English country sports and military attire.<sup>11</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, American ingenuity and industry took the lead in mass producing this once elite garment as the sack or lounge suit became the unofficial uniform of the professional world. Whether a gentleman then decided to put on an “unmatched tailcoat and vest with striped trousers” representative of the old guard of fashion, or a more youthful lounge suit that consisted of “matching cropped jacket, trousers, and a waistcoat,” he promoted the culturally ascribed belief that “being properly attired in this new-age business suit was a means to gaining respect and showing it in kind to work and personal associates.”<sup>12</sup> The suit made the man.

The suit has certainly encountered sartorial highs and lows in the twentieth century, but it endures and remains a staple in many men’s wardrobes. That is precisely why the suit stands as a valuable tool of historical analysis. During the 1970s through the 1990s, magazines serve as the best medium through which to chart and explore the visibility and imagery of both the suit and American masculinity. A clearer picture

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<sup>10</sup> See David Kuchta, *The Three Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity England, 1550-1850* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Sims, *Icons of Men’s Style*, 115.

<sup>12</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 115.



emerges of the anxieties, expectations, and dreams men combated and reinforced on a daily basis by examining the suit styles presented in men's magazines. The main periodicals chosen for this study include *GQ*, *Esquire*, *The Advocate*, and *Ebony* which all speak to an educated and upwardly-mobile group of men who defined their masculinity through achievement, success, and a high level of personal and professional prosperity. These are men who link themselves to a higher economic bracket and accordingly organize their masculine behaviors and practices around these class based ideals. They are not competing for entrance or manly recognition into subcultural groups or the working class.<sup>13</sup>

These cultural texts all promoted and popularized a lifestyle grounded in the benefits and joys of consumerism. These are not radical, alternative, or subversive magazines as they address a more mainstream, normative, upscale male consumer and reader with the time and means to devote attention to his body, fashion, and consumptive culture. Moreover, these periodicals reached a much wider audience than splinter or subcultural journals which establishes a solid basis of historical knowledge about the upwardly-mobile American male, setting the foundation for future studies that integrate and weave together the experiences of other males into this already established historical narrative.

Yet, there are slight variations regarding the intended audiences for these magazines that necessitate closer examination. For example, *Esquire* formed in 1933 due

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<sup>13</sup> See Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man*. Pendergast analyzed men's magazines in relation to consumer culture and masculinity from 1900-1950. This was a much broader study that scrutinized a wider range of items in consumer culture whereas this dissertation focuses on men's clothing and dress from 1970-1999.

to the efforts of David Archibald Smart, William Hobart Weintraub, and future editor-in-chief Arnold Gingrich. Historian Bill Osgerby explained that although, “*Esquire* was not the first magazine that addressed itself to a consuming male subject...it was the first to acknowledge openly the gender-specific basis of its audience appeal—the magazine expressly billing itself as ‘A Magazine for Men Only’.”<sup>14</sup> From the outset, *Esquire*’s target audience consisted of educated, cultured, urbane, middle-to-upper class American men interested in living and acquiring the good life.<sup>15</sup> *Esquire*’s pages informed readers about travel locations, home décor, fashion, and other notable cultural trends, making consumerism more palatable, enjoyable, and comfortable for the American male.<sup>16</sup> Fashion, still considered the domain of women, proved to be acceptable and suitably masculine through this medium since clothing styles and menswear advice presented within *Esquire* pointedly conveyed the trademarks of an idealized masculine and heterosexual version of American life.<sup>17</sup> Even by the 1970s, *Esquire* still maintained a large readership amongst its initial audience as it promoted “consumerist desire and youthful hedonism” only intensified by the era’s influences of self-expression, countercultural values, and belief in immediate gratification.<sup>18</sup>

Building upon this foundation set by *Esquire*, *GQ* (*Gentleman’s Quarterly*) also promoted the benefits of male consumerism. This magazine originated as a menswear

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<sup>14</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 43-44.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-57. See also Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man*, 206-223.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-58.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

trade publication called *Apparel Arts*, but became known as *GQ* by the 1960s since it proved to be more popular with actual fashion consumers than its targeted audience of fashion retailers. Even though the heavy fashion emphasis of *GQ* would lessen as the magazine looked to appeal more to business executives and professionals than the fashion elite, menswear reports and style articles, pictorials, and promotions continued to appear on a monthly and prolific basis.<sup>19</sup> *GQ* simply expanded its focus so that its upscale readers could acquire knowledge on fashion and style in addition to procuring information on entertainment, politics, travel destinations, culture, and general tips on living well ranging from what wine to purchase to the latest fitness fads. *Esquire* and *GQ* aided the American male in crafting a lifestyle and identity immersed and based around the world of goods, consumerism, and self-fulfillment.

Even though *GQ* and *Esquire* crossed racial and sexual readership categories by the 1970s, it was also important to incorporate magazines devised specifically for black and gay male populations into this dissertation since they reveal the similarities and differences in the construction of masculinity based on the historical boundaries to manhood created by race and sexuality. Race and sexuality are just as socially constructed as gender roles and ideals. Research such as this challenges the notion of essentialism and the premise of a universal male experience. *GQ* and *Esquire*, in their earlier incarnations, both in words and visuals initially reflected the world, needs, and dreams of the white male consumer over those of men of color. *Ebony* would step in to

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<sup>19</sup> Sean Nixon, *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship & Contemporary Consumption* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 133.

fill this void by the 1940s. Due to the benefits of both wartime prosperity and black participation in wartime endeavors, American businesses and corporations slowly started to realize that a market existed for the black male consumer that would need to be tapped into in order to sustain economic abundance and solvency for the nation as a whole.<sup>20</sup> John H. Johnson developed *Ebony* in response to these new societal conditions. *Ebony*<sup>21</sup> was meant to resemble *Life* magazine, with a combination of articles and pictures that exhibited "...happy examples of success and beauty" for black America, choosing to veer away from standard press offerings that focused on civil rights and issues of inequality.<sup>22</sup> And, "with its accent on entertainment and copy that was wedded to advertising, *Ebony* also offered a vision of the African American experience that embraced consumer culture as never before."<sup>23</sup>

Much like *Esquire* and *GQ*, *Ebony* incorporated information on a wide array of news worthy topics for its black readership that included pieces on politics, celebrities, economics, health, vacation spots, cuisine, and the arts. Although not specifically labeled as a men's magazine, the advertisements, pictorials, and print copies overwhelmingly focused on the black male consumer. Fashion was clearly part of the *Ebony* package since the magazine started disseminating fashion advice and style tips for its male

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<sup>20</sup> Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man*, 248-255.

<sup>21</sup> The magazine *Jet* was also founded by Johnson in the 1950s. *Jet* is used in this dissertation but not on the same scale as *Ebony* since fashion news and items published in *Jet* were typically addressed and included within *Ebony* as it was the larger and more prominent lifestyle magazine. *Jet* was akin to *Reader's Digest* as it provided quick and concise bits of information on world affairs, health, politics, culture, economics, and legislation among other matters pertinent to the black community.

<sup>22</sup> Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man*, 244; Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 173.

<sup>23</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 173.

audience by 1948. The *Ebony* male was upwardly-mobile, professional, educated, goal-oriented, and successful. This periodical remained devoted to promoting consumption and the benefits of fine living<sup>24</sup> at the dawn of the 1970s, particularly in the wake of the gains and achievements made by the civil rights movement in America.<sup>25</sup> Since it was created for a black audience, *Ebony* exposes the similarities and differences in masculine fashion consumption, knowledge, and usage based on race between upscale black and white males. These variations are essential in a greater understanding of how the upwardly-mobile American male, both white and black, utilized fashion in the process of constructing a masculine persona.

Unlike *GQ* and *Esquire*, but similar to *Ebony*, *The Advocate* is not a traditional men's magazine nor is it considered a fashion journal. Formed before Stonewall in the late 1960s, *The Advocate* labeled itself initially as "The Newspaper of the Homophile Community."<sup>26</sup> By the late 1970s, the phrases "Touching Your Lifestyle" and later "Celebrating Your Lifestyle" existed across the periodical's banner reflecting its expanded focus as a lifestyle magazine designed solely for a gay audience.<sup>27</sup> *The Advocate* eventually branded itself by the 1980s as "The National Gay Newsmagazine," informing its readers about economics, politics, health, fitness, travel, culture, and all other items it deemed pertinent to and reflective of the country's gay community. Since it was the largest LGBT magazine in America at this time, *The Advocate* sheds invaluable

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<sup>24</sup> Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man*, 245.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>26</sup> During the early 1970s, this label existed near the banner of *The Advocate* on its front page.

<sup>27</sup> For examples of this see editions from *The Advocate* during 1977 and then 1979 respectively.

insight on the attitudes, behaviors, and mindset of the gay male, especially since it had a very male-centric print and visual focus during the 1970s and 1980s. Additionally, *The Advocate's* readership consisted of the same type of male that read *Ebony*, *GQ* and *Esquire*—urbane, educated, and upwardly-mobile. As was the case with the other periodicals, *The Advocate* showed the value and benefits of masculine consumerism evident by the plethora of articles, press, and advertisements found within its pages that continued to grow with the subsequent gains and achievements made by gay rights groups and the initial liberation movement.

However, like *Ebony*, *The Advocate* displayed a form of masculine consumption that did not necessarily fit the white, heterosexual ideal that had existed in society for the greater part of the twentieth century. Although many upscale gay men certainly read *GQ* and *Esquire* for fashion and style knowledge especially since these were so widely accessible and culturally recognized, *The Advocate* did provide fashion columns, advice, and related information directed specifically for the gay male consumer. As such, this cultural text offers useful and pertinent data not only about connections and variances between gay and straight men's fashion styles, but also the actual process and resulting symbolism associated with masculine identity formation for the upscale gay male.

The magazines chosen for this study were the best method for the upwardly-mobile male to acquire considerable fashion knowledge and acumen since this was before the advent and implementation of fashion blogs, internet sites, televised runway shows, and fashion television. Due to their extensive focus on men's attire and corresponding accessories, these periodicals operate as fashion magazines since they incorporated

fashion advice, columns, and advertisements among other related items inside their respective publications on a regular and sustained basis. Moreover, *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Ebony*, and *The Advocate* were acutely sensitive to the changes occurring in America at this time since as a cultural medium, they reflect the times in which they are produced.<sup>28</sup>

Magazines featuring and promoting fashion are in a unique position to comment on society since as an image maker in the fashion industry, they provide a flexible and changing vocabulary of self-expression for consumers. Fashion is a cultural and visual language.<sup>29</sup> The exchange between image makers and consumers of fashion supplies historians with crucial evidence of the issues, trends, and anxieties present in a culture during a specific period of time.<sup>30</sup>

The political, economic, and cultural conditions of the 1970s through 1990s affected the suiting styles adopted, discarded, and advertised to the upscale male.<sup>31</sup> American manhood appeared to be under attack from a myriad of forces during this time. Economic security was no longer guaranteed as the nation faced growing financial competition from European and Asian firms that not only forced corporate re-structuring and downsizing within the country, but resulted in the flight of many top companies to

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<sup>28</sup> Historian Tom Pendergast argues a similar point about magazines stating that they “provide a window into the concerns of the day.” See Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> See Barbara Vinken’s *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends and Cycles in the Fashion System* (New York: Berg, 2005); Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication* (London: Routledge, 2002); and Dani Cavallaro and Alexandra Warwick’s *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress, and Body* (New York: Berg, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> For more on this concept see Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*; and Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> See Paul Jobling, *Fashion Spreads: Word and Image in Fashion Photography since 1980* (New York: Berg, 1999), for more on how to analyze magazines in this manner.

more financially friendly international climates. The move to a more service-oriented economy also hurt America's overall economic productivity and solvency, triggering the decline of traditional industries and increasing unemployment for both working and middle-class males. Along with uncertain financial futures, American men faced domestic challenges from civil rights groups, liberation movements, and feminism that sought to strip away the very privileges, protections, and prerogatives of male power. Moreover, the country looked weak and vulnerable in its handling of international affairs, no longer appearing invincible battling foes in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Ineffective leadership, scandals, and presidential miscues created a palpable disillusionment and distrust in government as a whole. In this cultural atmosphere, traditional routes at securing masculine pride and self-esteem proved unattainable and fleeting. All of these cultural tensions and conditions manifested in the clothing worn and popularized by the upwardly-mobile American male.

Exploring the varied presentations of the male body and suiting fashions in print underscores not only societal expectations of masculinity, but how men chose to embrace or reject certain styles based upon both individual and societal needs. Clothing permitted American men to actively try on, manage, and work out new masculine images and ideals. Through this process, men emerged with not only a voice, but a sense of confidence, self-assuredness, and poise that was otherwise lacking in their lives and in the world around them. Dress offered men "the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, and psychic security."<sup>32</sup> These periodicals communicated

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 7.



through words and visuals the aspirations, anxieties, and desires of their upscale, success-oriented, professional male readers.

Men used fashion articles like the suit to construct and reproduce a masculine persona that could be comfortably, securely, and easily replicated each and every day. Sociologist Tim Edwards noted that after 1960, “Masculinity is no longer simply an essence or an issue of what you do, it’s how you look.”<sup>33</sup> The structures and systems of male power may have been attacked by the 1970s, but all upwardly-mobile men, white and black, gay and straight, constructed the outward presentation of their masculine selves either by conforming or subverting elements of traditional masculinity appropriately exemplified through psychologist Robert Brannon’s 1976 theory regarding the “rules of masculinity.” Sociologist Michael Kimmel explained:

The rules of masculinity? (a) No sissy stuff: avoid all behaviors that even remotely suggest the feminine. (b) Be a big wheel: success and status confer masculinity. (c) Be a sturdy oak: reliability and dependability are defined as emotional distance and affective distance. (d) Give ‘em hell: exude an aura of manly aggression, go for it, take risks. These four rules do not define a masculinity that is biologically determined, nor do they even capture all masculinities in the United States today. But they do specify a normative masculinity, that version—white, middle-class, heterosexual—that is often used as the standard against which other masculinities are compared and other social groups suppressed.<sup>34</sup>

Fashion allowed men to integrate preferred qualities and ideals central to the tenets of traditional masculinity while doing so with a modern, consumerist-minded edge. Utilizing clothing for masculine expression also permitted groups typically denied full

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<sup>33</sup> Edwards, *Men in the Mirror*, 55.

<sup>34</sup> Jeff Hearn and David Morgan, eds., *Men, Masculinities & Social Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1990), 100-106.

manhood the ability to finally and visibly lay claim to all the rights, privileges, and prerogatives associated with being an American man. Masculinity still embodied time-honored notions of strength, command, power, and prestige, but it was achieved now through a man's interaction with commodities. Embracing fashion was not done to make men more feminine. Rather, as historian Lynne Luciano acknowledged, "Looking good is part of a quintessential male strategy whose ultimate aim is to make men more successful, competitive, and powerful."<sup>35</sup> Fashion surfaced as a tool of survival, cultural negotiation, and an instrument of masculine identity formation for upwardly-mobile white, black, and gay men from the 1970s through the 1990s.

Since this dissertation examines how men utilized fashion for masculine identity formation, it does not undertake to analyze the more oppressive nature of the fashion industry. Fashion certainly is not a morally or culturally neutral medium, but exploring men's agency with using this type of cultural production for self-actualization is primary. The fashion industry does at times exude affluence, arrogance, and sexism and this project is certainly not ignorant of these darker themes and influences. However, part of the overall goal in doing this type of research is to give all three groups of upscale men analyzed within this study greater scholarly visibility and historical attention not just as consumers, but as consumers of fashion.<sup>36</sup> Fashion provided the upwardly-mobile American male with agency, power, and control.

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<sup>35</sup> Luciano, *Looking Good*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> Many scholars have produced quality and important scholarship about the oppressive nature and darker side of the fashion industry. Examples include Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*; Evans, *Fashion at the Edge*; and Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1999).

But what is fashion? Fashion can describe a trend, a style, a manner of dressing, a world, and even an industry. Fashion editor Cynthia Durcanin contended, “Fashion is a state of mind. A spirit, an extension of one’s self. Fashion talks, it can be an understated whisper, a high-energy scream or an all knowing wink and a smile. Most of all fashion is about being comfortable with yourself, translating self-esteem into a personal style.”<sup>37</sup> As a concept, fashion has chameleon-like qualities. Fashion is a business, but more importantly, it is a visual language of self-expression through personal choice of clothing and dress. Dress and clothing are the material aspects of fashion and constitute a “form of informational exchange.”<sup>38</sup> Clothing is more than fabric and cloth; it is a statement. Dress is an unavoidable aspect of modern day culture for even those individuals who claim indifference; willingly or not, they daily enter the public realm where their clothing assumes meaning.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cynthia Durcanin, “What is Fashion?,” *pbs.org*; available from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/infocus/fashion/whatisfashion.html>; Internet; accessed 5 June 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Maynard, *Dress and Globalisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 3; Vinken, *Fashion Zeitgeist*, 4. For more on fashion and dress as a visual language or form of communication, the following works provide a broad and informative sampling of available scholarship. See Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*; Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* English Translation (Berkeley: University of California, 1990); Roland Barthes *The Language of Fashion* English Edition (New York: Berg, 2006); Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Christopher Breward, *Fashion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Bruzzi and Church Gibson, eds., *Fashion Cultures*; Craik, *The Face of Fashion*; Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*; Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*; Susan B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing and Personal Adornment* (New York: Macmillan, 1985); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1988); David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meanings of Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton, eds., *The Subcultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997); Cavallaro and Warwick, *Fashioning the Frame*; Patrizia Calefato, *The Clothed Body* (New York: Berg, 2004); Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*; and Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (New York: Berg, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 3.

Fashion is also intimately connected to the human body. While clothing certainly shields and covers the body from weather, disease, and the environment, it also operates on a more symbolic level as well. Bodies have cultural meaning attached to them. As such, the body then becomes more than just a biological organism; it emerges as a site of cultural rebellion, negotiation, and representation.<sup>40</sup> Throughout history, the body has been linked to the health and well-being of nations. Leaders have used the human form to represent a healthy country, a diseased nation, and appropriate physiques for men and women. The human body is a site of scholarly analysis. Gender studies scholar Susan Bordo commented, “What is still missing from this picture, though—and what was ultimately supplied in the twentieth century—is the recognition that when we look at bodies (including our own in the mirror), we don’t just see biological nature at work, but values and ideals, differences and similarities that culture has ‘written,’ so to speak, on those bodies.”<sup>41</sup> Since fashion is a contested space and a visual symbol of American culture, the body functions as the site of cultural interaction between product and man. The interconnectedness of the body and fashion unearths issues of gender, race, and sexuality present in a society.<sup>42</sup>

Fashion links an individual to the greater culture in a very public manner while at the same time, operating as a cultural communicator of fear, want, defiance, unease, and

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<sup>40</sup> See Craik, *The Face of Fashion*.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 26.

<sup>42</sup> For a further discussion on how fashion can be used to show issues of gender, sexuality, race, and identity see Arnold’s *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety* and Wilson’s *Adorned in Dreams* in particular.

health among other items and emotions. Clothes are not just items to be placed on a body; dress unearths the hopes and dreams of many men and women living in uncertain times. Moreover, fashion affords men and women a chance to challenge existing images of masculinity or femininity either overtly or subtly. There is agency in their actions. Individuals are not merely dressing to mimic peers, celebrities, or societal ideals—they want to reshape their own bodies to live more suitably in their skin. Fashion shapes, accentuates, and alters the human form underneath layers of cloth and thread. Clothing has transformative power.

Americans have not been strangers to the lure of happiness and fulfillment that could be extracted from the purchase of goods and commodities like fashion attire. The emergence of the American department store in the late nineteenth century ushered in new patterns of consumption for men and women alike. China, clothing, and housewares filled these grand stores which contained marble floors, escalators, restaurants, and other amenities implemented to ensure an enjoyable shopping experience for customers.<sup>43</sup> The most visible and vocal customers to these pantheons of consumerism were women, primarily from the middle-and-upper-class portions of society. The benefits and allure of consumptive culture had not been acknowledged or embraced fully by the American male at this point in time.<sup>44</sup> Department stores were a decidedly feminine space as managers

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<sup>43</sup> Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 1-123. For more on the history and emergence of the department store and its practices see also William R. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of New American Culture* (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

even situated menswear and its corresponding items on the street level since male patrons were “...presumed too timid to venture further into the store.”<sup>45</sup>

As the century progressed, men grew increasingly comfortable with becoming known and labeled as consumers. Women no longer reigned as the sole, target consumer in society. After World War II, American retailers encouraged consumption, especially male consumption, so men simply acknowledged this cultural shift when they purchased commodities like clothing. Masculine participation in consumptive culture helped to keep the wheels of industry alive which in turn added greatly to the economic fortunes of the country. However, this was not a one-sided relationship as mass-produced or ready-to-wear fashion gave men, even those with somewhat modest resources, a choice about what colors, styles, and patterns to purchase in order to construct their own self-imposed identity.<sup>46</sup>

Men’s fashion choices expanded substantially by the 1970s since designers realized that their success and longevity in the fashion industry depended more upon their popularity and acceptance among a mass audience than upon smaller, elite circles.<sup>47</sup> The days of fashion being solely the domain of the elite and privileged vanished due to the rise of middle-class consumerism. Because of liberation movements, youth, and the counterculture, the influence and power of traditional structures, systems, and institutions

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>46</sup> See Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 169.

<sup>47</sup> Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, 139-142.

crumbled.<sup>48</sup> Men's clothing visually symbolized this cultural shift. Designers like Giorgio Armani and Ralph Lauren soon developed secondary or more "affordable lines" for consumers in response to these new conditions.

Fashion helped the American male acclimate better to this postwar culture increasingly based on self-gratification and fulfillment that displaced older notions of manhood and masculinity. Lynne Luciano explained, "Until World War II, it is true male attractiveness was derived from activity; how a man behaved and what he achieved were the true measures of his worth."<sup>49</sup> However, with the rise of civil rights, Black Power, and the gay liberation movement during the 1960s and 1970s, the societal structures and privileges of heterosexual, white, male power came under attack. Moreover, the impact of feminism, accelerating divorce rates, unemployment, corporate re-structuring, and challenges abroad to American global hegemony further contested long-held notions about manhood. Traditional sources of masculinity such as the workplace, battlefield, and home proved inadequate at securing masculine pride and self-esteem.<sup>50</sup>

Normative masculinity with its historically accepted and long-established ideals, behaviors, and imagery was visibly in flux. As a result, some men looked to other venues for an identity and security. One approach these men took included focusing on the presentation of their public selves which meant giving copious amounts of attention to their physicality. In a society characterized by uncertainty, growing numbers of men attempted to regulate and dominate their bodies—one of the only environments under

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<sup>48</sup> Chenoune, *A History of Men's Fashion*, 285.

<sup>49</sup> Luciano, *Looking Good*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 194-196.

their full masculine control.<sup>51</sup> The convergence of all these social, economic, and cultural tensions manifested in the attire worn by American men. Suiting attire revealed and communicated all of these cultural and masculine tensions. Clothing moved beyond just providing “decoration, modesty, and protection” for the body.<sup>52</sup> Men’s garments served more than just a mere utilitarian purpose.<sup>53</sup> The upscale American male, black and white, heterosexual and homosexual, now needed and utilized fashion to construct a self-imposed masculine identity.<sup>54</sup>

The upwardly-mobile American men in this dissertation constructed their masculinity around the imagery and the visual of the suit. Suiting attire and masculine dress became integral to the process of masculine identity formation for these men from 1970 through the 1990s. But what did suit styles reveal about the political, cultural, and economic conditions of this period? What did suiting attire communicate about American men? To answer these questions, it is necessary to identify the norms, beliefs, and proper behaviors circulating throughout American culture and to analyze how fashion permitted upscale men the opportunity to verge away from normative standards if at all. Did traditional masculinity always remain at the forefront or did men experiment with new masculine ideals and beliefs? Moreover, it is critical to ask whether there were differences in suiting garb based on race and sexuality, and whether masculine fashion

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<sup>51</sup> For further discussion of this concept see Bordo, *The Male Body*.

<sup>52</sup> Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, also utilizes this theory for his study of postwar masculinity and consumptive culture.



was about competition with other men or was constructed in opposition to women.

What can suits reveal about changing models and approaches to manhood in American society? These are the questions that this dissertation seeks to explore and explain. The answers to these queries begin to come into focus upon a closer examination of the 1950s and 1960s as these decades set the stage for the impact, place, and significance of masculinity and the suit in the 1970s.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE AMERICAN MALE IS “ALL SHOOK UP”:**

#### **POST-WAR AMERICA AND MASCULINITY IN THE 1950s AND 1960s**

Conformity. Sameness. Drones. Youth. Energy. Change. These six words have been used time and time again to describe two seemingly incongruent decades in American history—the 1950s and 1960s. Decades are notoriously hard to label or categorize, but these terms have been applied consistently to clearly demarcate the oppositional struggle between these eras. Regardless of the inherent differences between the 1950s and 1960s, both periods have something important in common. American men utilized the suit in the process of masculine identity formation.

Suits function as cultural markers of manhood in postwar America, communicating the gender ideals, expectations, and insecurities encountered by the upscale male. Men returned home from World War II only to find that they had to adjust to a whole new American society, one built upon the glories and benefits of consumerism. Taking on the role of the consumer was not necessarily an easy or simple task for the upwardly-mobile war veteran reared on expressing his manhood through more conventional and traditionally masculine means.

Traditional manhood, with its norms of independence and aggression, often appeared unattainable and confusing despite men’s attempts to fulfill the time-honored roles of husband and provider. Acclimating to a life built around marriage, the nuclear

family, suburbia, and consumption proved dislocating and distressing for many American men. Men's suits, the much derided gray flannel suit and Ivy-inspired clothing, reflected these struggles. The gray flannel suit served as a symbol of the 1950s as it revealed men's longing for comfort, security, and simplicity.

As the 1950s drew to a close, the upscale American male faced the same economic, political, and cultural challenges in the new decade ahead and continued to utilize clothing as a means for masculine expression and communication. The gray flannel suit morphed into a sleeker, sportier, and more streamlined design, personified by the leadership and imagery circulated by John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s. Following Kennedy's example, men used their suiting attire to transmit a masculine self grounded in manly virtues such as courage, daring, strength, and potency, which were all qualities needed to successfully battle for global, economic, and cultural supremacy in the Cold War. Men had grown more comfortable with consumption, especially since American economic prosperity necessitated men's full and complete participation in this arena. Men now required proper battle gear that transmitted a more confident, poised, and powerful masculine exterior. Traditional masculinity could still be retained, albeit now through choice of proper masculine dress. Suits symbolized appropriate masculine dress and reflected the cultural tenor and competitive flavor of these times.

However, by the end of the 1960s, masculine dress underwent drastic upheaval, mimicking the societal unrest, disorder, and uncertainty of the times. The structure and design of the male suit changed dramatically due to the influences of the counterculture, youth, and liberation movements, while it also lost its sartorial and masculine standing since masculinity itself was in flux. Many upwardly-mobile men tired of living under

the weight of traditional masculine expectations, and instead chose to experiment with different gender and sexual ideals. The suit stood for tradition, a quality now derided and expunged in the name of authenticity and self-expression. The 1970s bore the actual fruit of these seeds of discontent sown in the 1960s. Without examining the 1950s and 1960s, men's utilization of fashion as a mode of masculine expression in the 1970s is incomprehensible. The changes to masculinity and masculine dress were planted in these early decades of the Cold War era.

Suits symbolized the fluctuating nature of American manhood which is characteristic of life in postwar America. The upscale American male realized that traditional manhood was not easily compatible with or attainable in a culture increasingly based on garnering happiness, fulfillment, and security through consumerism. If men could not confidently go off into battle, maintain economic autonomy, or truly embrace the roles of husband and father, then at least their attire could project masculine goals, attributes, and behaviors.

Conversely, men could use clothing to assemble a masculinity that stood in opposition to traditional tenets. Suits allowed men to negotiate the ever-changing cultural landscape of America. The upwardly-mobile male realized that his masculine identity could be constructed now through interactions with goods, rather than living up to frustrating societal ideals and expectations. This development gave room for men to experiment and also permitted other men the means to retain some measure of traditional masculine values that had stood as the barometer of masculine greatness and achievement for decades and even centuries. The changing visual of the suit and corresponding masculine attire signified men's divided loyalties between adhering to

societal norms or acquiescing to individual desires. The economic, political, and cultural issues of the 1950s and 1960s set up men's complicated involvement with the world of consumption. The cultural shifts of this period affected the very fabric of society and manhood by the 1970s. By that time, men actively and consciously utilized clothing as a tool of masculine identity formation which would not have been possible without the transitions that occurred in the immediate postwar period.

### **Blending In**

Men's clothing in the postwar period acutely conveyed the gender tensions, uncertainties, and insecurities festering within society. Nowhere is this statement truer than in the suit styles adopted by the professional, upscale American male of the 1950s. Suiting attire in the 1950s reflected the "Ivy League look" famously produced by the firm Brooks Brothers. The sheer growth and expanse of the American economy after World War II created numerous jobs for returning veterans and college graduates. Many of these jobs necessitated the wearing of a suit and since so many had just returned from fighting overseas, these men simply exchanged their military uniform for a corporate one. This transition appeared to be an easy one since many cultural critics of the time compared the environment of corporate America to that of the army. Historian Lynne Luciano noted, "Corporate recruiters tended to be impressed by military service on an applicant's resume because it suggested he'd been conditioned to work within a hierarchy."<sup>1</sup>

Brooks Brothers was a natural choice for this new corporate uniform due to their

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<sup>1</sup> Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 39.

long history in the retail business and their reputation of providing quality service and craftsmanship.<sup>2</sup> Their “Number One Sack Suit,” served as the universal suit model for professional America. This suit was a “plain-clean-lined suit (natural-shouldered, two or three buttons, no darts, little or no nip at the waist).”<sup>3</sup> This Ivy League look allowed American men the chance to display a bit of home grown style and patriotic pride on their sleeves each and every day. More importantly, this attire signified a marked departure from double breasted suits that gained popularity immediately after the war had ended.

Many men initially donned double breasted suits since they had been abandoned during the war years, a casualty of rationing policies on the homefront. Double breasted suits locked and restrained a man’s upper body due to the overlapping fronts found on the jacket’s exterior. This style required more cloth and fabric for its creation based not only on the design elements of the jacket, but also due to the inclusion of wider trousers.<sup>4</sup> There was a hint of formality in the very image projected by a double breasted suit which eventually contradicted with men’s growing desire for freedom and movement in their clothing and caused this style to lose sartorial favor. Veterans preferred the ease and comfort engendered by wearing military issued single breasted jackets and khakis while in service.<sup>5</sup> They wanted these sartorial items of war to

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Banks and Doria De La Chapelle, *Preppy: Cultivating Ivy Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 2011), 71.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 71.; Alan Flusser, *Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion* (New York: itbooks, 2002), 81.

<sup>4</sup> Flusser, *Dressing the Man*, 84.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 85. See also Robert E. Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear: Council of Fashion Designers of America* New York: Assouline, 2009), 117-118.

transition into peacetime wardrobe staples. Clothing provided men with a sense of security and reassurance even as they acclimated back into civilian life.

The Ivy League mode of dress gave more than just a sense of security as it also symbolized the decade's belief in conformity and sameness. Blending in was key to surviving and succeeding in 1950s America.<sup>6</sup> The gray-flannel suit, the most infamous example of Ivy style suit dressing, symbolized this new cultural mentality.<sup>7</sup> The term signified the uniform look to corporate America, business men, and professionals during this period.<sup>8</sup> The mere description of this garment linked to Cold War America's belief in the necessity of conformity. Designer Alan Flusser explained, "Soft rather than stiff, with just a pinch of texture, the best gray flannel eschews any hint of sharpness or newness, exuding that slightly worn-in, old-money look associated with genteel taste."<sup>9</sup> Even the color gray itself denoted blending in and not garnering much notice. These suits projected a softer masculine image in color, cut, and design which contrasted greatly with the double breasted suiting attire.<sup>10</sup>

*Playboy* and other lifestyle magazines promoted this Ivy League look to their readers endorsing it as "conservative elegance"<sup>11</sup> devoid of trends, garish colors and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, directed by Nunnally Johnson (1956; CA: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corp., 2005), DVD.

<sup>8</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 141.

<sup>9</sup> Flusser, *Dressing the Man*, 96.

<sup>10</sup> Banks and De La Chapelle, *Preppy*, 71-74; Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 117-118.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 128.

outlandish designs. Respectability, propriety, and professional success all melded into the visual associated with this mode of professional dressing. Looking as though you were prosperous and financially stable was imperative in this new cultural climate.



Figure 1. 1950s Man in the Gray Flannel Suit.<sup>12</sup>

The middle class were now able to fully participate in the benefits of consumption. Commodities conveyed acceptance to societal norms. This meant following the accepted dictates of dress and appearance in order to fit in and measure up

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<sup>12</sup> See [www.esquire.com](http://www.esquire.com).



against the rest of your class.<sup>13</sup> Ivy style allowed American men to visually demonstrate the notions of conformity and unity needed in this postwar period. Designer Jeffrey Banks and fashion writer Doria De La Chapelle maintained, “In the elite, insular, and often snobbish collegiate world, one’s identity *was* in the details: what a man wore, how his tie was tied, where his hair was parted and what club he joined were of paramount importance. Among the reasons behind Ivy League style’s resounding popularity with college students was the immense peer pressure to conform and its close relative, the deep need to belong.”<sup>14</sup> Cold War men and women needed to look and act as though they belonged.

Men’s leisure attire also displayed Ivy style and adherence to the notions of conformity. For those hours spent circulating at cocktail and dinner parties, the upwardly-mobile male typically donned an unmatched sport coat, white shirt affixed with a bow tie, and a pair of plain front trousers. Sport coats were single breasted and tended to feature a more natural shoulder along with smaller sized lapels. However, men’s choice of sport coats moved beyond the basic gray worn for business. Sport coats came in patterns that included tartan plaid, madras, and tweed along with a range of shades like burgundy. Ivy clothiers such as Haspel and J. Press, known for their professional suiting attire, supplied men with these types of leisure ensembles.<sup>15</sup>

Some upwardly-mobile men preferred to don khakis with their sport coats rather than traditional trousers. Khakis became a sartorial favorite since many men wore these

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<sup>13</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Banks and De La Chapelle, *Preppy*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 96.

during their service in World War II. The American military issued this garment for service first as part of the naval aviator's uniform early in the twentieth century and later as clothing for an officer both on and off base. Khakis resulted from British ingenuity in the mid-nineteenth century when soldiers stationed in India wanted to make their white uniforms blend in better against their surroundings. American males gravitated towards khakis since as fashion historian Josh Sims asserted, "they aged well, were functional, comfortable, and hard-wearing, and their style and neutral colour allowed them to cross over."<sup>16</sup>

Khakis and sport coats were not the only sartorial articles that radiated notions of comfort. Men tended to wear Weejun loafers with their casual attire, further making their ensembles look less stiff, rigid, and formal. Loafers were an American creation dating back to the 1930s. The famous Bass Weejun loafers came about when an employee of the company came back after a visit to Norway with a shoe resembling a moccasin, much like the kind once worn by Native Americans and American traders. Owner G.H. Bass reconfigured this model for the American consumer by adding an extra thick sole to the bottom and a "vamp strap with a cut-out, diamond-patterned slot." The slot became famous once Americans started placing pennies inside of it, giving it the nickname "the penny loafer."<sup>17</sup> Ivy style companies such as Brooks Brothers sold these items, giving them the Ivy seal of style approval. Loafers were soft in construction, feel, and design, making them a perfect foil to a man's professional shoe

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<sup>16</sup> Josh Sims, *Icons of Men's Style* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2011), 62-65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. Weejun is "a corruption of Norwegian."

that was more constricting and rigid especially if it featured laces and a sturdy heel.

Ease and comfort transmitted from these types of clothing options.

Leisure attire like khakis, madras jackets, and loafers symbolized the growing cultural power of leisure, recreation, and consumption in American society. Men possessed more sartorial choices, especially in regards to leisure hours. On weekends, men had the possibility of wearing more than just a formal suit; they could don Bermuda shorts in warm weather months or wear polo shirts at the backyard barbeque party.<sup>18</sup> If there was a slight chill in the air, men outfitted themselves in loose Eisenhower jackets otherwise known as a blouson which essentially was akin to a windbreaker. All of these garments were designed with comfort and ease of movement in mind, but they also represented the cultural shift occurring in the postwar years that promoted consumption and expanded leisure opportunities in American life.<sup>19</sup> American culture was increasingly based on finding happiness and fulfillment through the articles of consumption. Life in suburbia signified this shift. The American male retained more leisure time than ever before and now had clothing that acknowledged this development.<sup>20</sup> Having all of these items in one's wardrobe denoted participation in consumer culture, but also that one had the time and level of prosperity necessary to acquire these goods. Ivy style helped the American male acclimate to postwar society.

The Ivy look had considerable cultural currency. Not only was this style of dressing considered appropriate and acceptable for the upscale American male, but even

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<sup>18</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 58.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 117.

artists and creative types gravitated towards this mode of dress. For example, jazz legend Miles Davis frequently was pictured in Ivy attire both on and off stage. He regularly purchased garments from noted Ivy retailer, the Andover Shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts along with Brooks Brothers. Tweed and madras jackets, button-down shirts, Weejun loafers, khakis, and preppy striped ties all constituted wardrobe staples for Davis. He even wore a seersucker suit to the 1955 Newport Jazz Festival.<sup>21</sup> Chet Baker and other notable jazz musicians followed Davis's style and became Ivy devotees.<sup>22</sup>

Subcultural groups modeled their style of dress in direct opposition to the pervasive imagery of the gray-flannel suit and corresponding Ivy attire as evidenced by the growing numbers of musicians like Elvis Presley clothed in jeans, boots, or outlandish stage costumes as the decade progressed.<sup>23</sup> Youth movements including the Beats and Beatniks also donned unconventional garb for the times, inspired by intellectual concepts such as existentialism and by appropriation of working-class clothing styles. If the Ivy look was not considered normative, then it would not have inspired such imitation or contestation. Ivy style infiltrated throughout the many layers of American society.

The gray-flannel suit, tweed sport coat, Weejun loafers, and khaki pants represented the growing emphasis American culture placed on consumerism and leisure.

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<sup>21</sup> Banks and De La Chapelle, *Preppy*, 84; See also Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 58.

<sup>22</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 58.

<sup>23</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 40-41. Beatniks and intellectuals gravitated towards the use of black, donning black turtlenecks and dark accessories. Some of the Beats wore what constituted traditional working class dress like flannel shirts and jeans. Jeans were also used by some rock and roll musicians of the time as well.

The masculine imagery generated by these garments showcased new cultural and gender expectations thrust upon the upwardly-mobile American male. Clothing like this showcased the American male's need for comfort, movement, and ease. Men longed for these qualities in their attire since it did not exist necessarily in their personal or professional lives. The American male was not as comfortable with the changes occurring across the cultural landscape of America so he turned to commodities like fashion for contentment and fulfillment. Clothing provided security, reassurance, and an easily replicated and recognized masculine identity.

The clothing worn and adopted by American men during this period visually symbolized the struggles American men encountered as they adjusted to civilian life in the wake of World War II. As the nation transitioned its economy from one of wartime production and rationing to reconversion for domestic markets, Americans aggressively participated in the world of consumerism. During the war, since the American economy needed war materials and ammunition over such household luxuries as a refrigerator or ice box, families actually ended up saving money. Indeed, Americans saved nearly \$134 billion in government bonds, cash, and bank accounts. Towards the end of the war, many companies such as General Electric and Ford began running advertisements enticing consumers to spend those wartime savings on new goods to make themselves happy after years of want due to both the Great Depression of the 1930s and the rationing of food and resources during the war.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Americans needed to buy goods and products to keep the productivity created by wartime conditions afloat.

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<sup>24</sup> Irwin Unger, *These United States: The Questions of Our Past* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2006), 653. For more on this topic see John Blum, *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

Without substantial consumer demand, products would pile up in warehouses causing firms to lose profits which in turn would bring about wage cuts and unemployment. Spending was now an American's duty.

The American government cooperated with corporate interests by encouraging citizens to spend money on commodities like a new automobile, television, and radio among other goods. Measures such as the GI Bill in 1944 set aside funds for returning male veterans to attend college or technical schools, provided unemployment relief, and distributed loans designed to enable the purchase of small businesses, homes, and farms.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, with the passage of several acts designed to increase the highway system in the country, the government spurred on the suburbanization of America. Due to the large number of returning veterans, along with the rise in wartime marriages, there were simply not enough homes for Americans. Suburbanization solved this dilemma while also simultaneously cementing the consumerism mentality in the country since these new dwellings needed proper appliances, furnishings, and gadgets.<sup>26</sup>

The emergence of this suburban, family-oriented, consumerist ethos coincided with America's entrance into yet another war—the Cold War. This was an ideological struggle between the forces of communism and those of democracy and capitalism that spread across decades, countries, and continents. America's economy demanded engagement in this new conflict since the nation needed to keep countries from falling to

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 653-655.

<sup>26</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 66. For further discussion on postwar consumption and families see Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); and Jessica Weiss, *To Have and To Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

communism in order to secure its standing as an economic giant while also keeping another depression at bay. America's policy of containment, or containing the spread and influence of communism, was implemented not only on an international scale but on the home front as well. The prominence of the nuclear family and suburban mentality in America symbolized the country's commitment to anticommunism and containment domestically.<sup>27</sup>

Post-war America promoted itself as a land of abundance and prosperity epitomized by the suburbs with their tree-lined streets, white-picket fences, and images of idyllic family life. This vision of American life advertised a seemingly colorblind society with equal opportunities for all citizens, but the reality was a bit different with segregation and discrimination still persisting throughout the nation.<sup>28</sup> Yet, just like their fellow white Americans, African Americans hoped to attain their own version of the American dream.

In the postwar period, black workers advocated for continued full employment and participation in American life including access to the full benefits of consumerism. Historian Andrew Wiese explained, "Bolstered by national economic expansion and the opening of new occupations, black family incomes rose. By the mid-fifties, the United States was home to a growing black bourgeoisie and a cohort of economically stable industrial workers whose members had the means to purchase suburban housing on a greater scale than ever before."<sup>29</sup> This push for suburbanization paralleled the growth of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 63. See also May, *Homeward Bound*, ix.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., xix.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Wiese, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 112.

the civil rights movement in America. African Americans were no longer willing to sit and wait for rights to be bequeathed to them as the time had come for the nation and its people to recognize, affirm, and bestow all the rights, privileges, and prerogatives of full citizenship to black America, especially as they had attained a degree of professional success and prosperity. Upwardly-mobile black families simply wanted the same services, opportunities, and mode of living as other families within their economic bracket. Even as white suburban areas worked to minimize the presence of black families within their communities through covenants, fear tactics, restricting funding sources, and zoning legislation, upscale black America would simply not acquiesce or retreat as they visually made space for themselves in American society.

This push towards suburbia and the nuclear family tied into the nation's overall image and ideals propagated during the Cold War. Part of accepting the policy of domestic containment meant accepting and reproducing specific gender roles that tied into the country's larger goals during the Cold War. Historian Bill Osgerby asserted, "Images of affluent suburbia were pivotal to the ideological strategies through which American capitalism asserted its claims to economic and moral supremacy, while the promotion of family-oriented gender roles sought to reign-in and safely corral the cultural changes perceived as threatening the social order. For women this meant conformity to an ideal of home-making domesticity."<sup>30</sup>

This "cult of femininity" was visually expressed through clothing that included high heels, cardigan sweaters, aprons, dresses, and proper white gloves. Women stood as a symbol of their husband's values, merits, and successes. As such, a woman needed

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<sup>30</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 67.



to maintain a respectable and ladylike appearance, along with proper manners and behaviors since her husband's professional future depended upon these items.<sup>31</sup>

American women were encouraged to follow certain dictates and guidelines when it came to fashion. For instance, only single and more socially adventurous women owned jeans. Women were instructed to look clean, dignified, and womanly in all matters including while doing household chores. During the day, decorative aprons adorned a woman's body, signifying her devotion to the homemaker ideal. Certain dress lengths were to be donned only for specific occasions and times of day. As such, ball gowns were not acceptable garb for dinner or cocktail parties. Women's shoes also came with societal rules. Social commentators detailed which shoe styles were suitable for certain events and times of day according to skin type, heel height, and color. Also, a woman's shoes and handbag needed to match and compliment the overall tone of her outfit.<sup>32</sup> Women were especially encouraged to wear constricting items like a girdle based on advice from authors like Anne Fogarty.<sup>33</sup> Feminine clothing visibly and symbolically conveyed a woman's commitment to her postwar roles as wife and mother. Clothing communicated a woman's acceptance of her prescribed gender roles and her value in blending in. Cold War America expected and demanded as much.

What were the gender ideals and expectations then for men? During the 1950s, men's appearance became directly related to matters of national security. Masculinity and masculine imagery tied into the country's overall anticommunist agenda. Journalist

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<sup>31</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-38.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

Susan Faludi claimed, “The United States came out of World War II with a sense of itself as a *masculine* nation, our “boys” ready to assume the mantle of national authority and international leadership.”<sup>34</sup> The American government endeavored to take steps internationally to “flex the national muscle” since appeasing communism and communist forces implied an inherent “loss of virility.”<sup>35</sup> The US could not afford to lose prestige and influence in the competitive game of Cold War relations. However, American men were not as ready or fit for such battles both at home and abroad. In 1953, *Time* magazine declared that a quarter of all American men were egregiously overweight. Most Americans ignored this declaration until facts about the Korean War started to emerge. Nearly half of the men in America failed to meet the physical and health standards required for military service.<sup>36</sup> Almost overnight, diet books appeared on the market pleading with men to win the battle of the flab. The benefits of postwar abundance apparently made men more sedentary and complacent.<sup>37</sup>

Fitness and health became linked to the survival of American power abroad as the nation struggled to combat the forces of communism. A fit, toned, and healthy American male symbolized the strength of the national body, especially since the male body was asked to fight communism across the globe. Additionally, excess flesh and girth indicated a loss of self-control and command, two qualities inherent in strong, assertive, dominating masculinity. Historian Jesse Berrett discovered, “The state of

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<sup>34</sup> Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1999), 16-19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Luciano, *Looking Good*, 55-57.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

American masculinity was so thoroughly entangled in questions of national resolve and global politics that fat became as worrisome for what it symbolized as for the health risks it argued: a paunch offered too-solid proof of surrender to indolence and feminization.”<sup>38</sup>

Masculinity and national security were indelibly linked in the American mind. Not only did the American male have to look physically fit and strong, but he was also expected to fall into line and conform to the ideal masculine gender role and expectations of the day. Cold War conditions necessitated as much. Middle-class or aspiring upwardly-mobile men were instructed to marry, earn decent wages, and live a life of idyllic tranquility in the suburbs during the 1950s. World War II provided men with the opportunity to display their strength, virility, and bravery on the battlefield. Participation in battle had been a traditional way of demonstrating masculinity. Some men though did not want a return to their battle days as they were not comfortable with the role of warrior and protector.<sup>39</sup> Many veterans longed for the stability and security of family while fighting in far away lands, envisioning this as their reward for so many sacrifices and hardships endured not only on the battlefields of Europe and Asia, but at home during depression ravaged America. Consequently, marriage rates skyrocketed after the war creating a baby boom that would not subside until the early 1960s.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jesse Berrett, “Feeding the Organization Man: Diet and Masculinity in Postwar America,” *Journal of Social History* 30, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 809. For more on the topic of men and fitness during the Cold War see Robert Griswold’s essay “The ‘Flabby American,’ the Body, and the Cold War,” in Laura McCall and Donald Yacovone, eds., *A Shared Experience: Men, Women, and the History of Gender* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> Faludi, *Stiffed*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Unger, *These United States*, 652.

The return of this breadwinner was especially significant as it linked back to elements of traditional manhood.<sup>41</sup> The Great Depression and World War II altered traditional gender roles and responsibilities with women being called upon to work outside the home, even taking on more masculine jobs in order to keep their families financially afloat. And, with so many men off battling on foreign shores, the American woman was charged with taking on the duties associated with being both a mother and father. The normative family structure and its corresponding relationships shifted according to wartime needs and requirements.<sup>42</sup> With the Great Depression and World War II over, the country now encouraged its men to happily accept the roles of husband, father, and breadwinner, which all reflected a restoration of elements of traditional masculinity and masculine pride.

Acceptance of this postwar masculine ideal was important since “to stray from this norm was to court suspicion.”<sup>43</sup> The American male was required to blend in and conform. To this end, bachelors were even looked upon with increasing skepticism and mistrust since failure to propagate the suburban ideal meant one was at best too individualistic and favored oneself over community and national concerns, and at worst, a possible homosexual.<sup>44</sup> Homosexuality in 1950s America drew condemnation, fear, and scorn. Since the nineteenth century, homosexuality had been labeled as a mental

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<sup>41</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 67. See also Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983) for more on the breadwinner ethic.

<sup>42</sup> K. A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1-36.

<sup>43</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 68.

<sup>44</sup> Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 15-20.

illness and in this era of anti-communist paranoia and fear many believed that homosexuals would succumb to the lure of communism, damaging the country's security and ideals from within. Sexuality was a particular cause of concern once Alfred Kinsey's 1948 study on human sexuality became public knowledge. Kinsey's *The Human Male* demonstrated that "the behavior of the American male now contradicted legal codes and moral precepts" with published evidence that included men's admissions of extramarital affairs, unorthodox sexual practices, and instances of homosexual activity.<sup>45</sup> While Kinsey's research troubled many ordinary American citizens and families, these findings were a cause of great concern for the American government.

The link between communism and homosexuality was never more evident than in the noted Lavender Scare in which hundreds of government workers lost their jobs due to either suspected or confirmed homosexual activities and proclivities.<sup>46</sup> This event epitomized the second Red Scare that saw agencies and organizations like the House on Un-American Activities Committee investigate, identify, and then eliminate all possible communist or anti-American influences within the country politically, economically, and culturally. Homosexuals were branded as "psychologically disturbed" and morally lax<sup>47</sup> individuals which made them easy targets for blackmail by communist agents.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, as historian John D'Emilio contended, many believed that, "Homosexuality

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<sup>45</sup> James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 86 and 81-106.

<sup>46</sup> See David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004) for more details and information on this topic.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 8, 68-70, and 110-112.

became an epidemic infecting the nation, actively spread by communists to sap the strength of the next generation.”<sup>49</sup> While federal employees were forced to endure background checks, interrogations, and loyalty oaths in order to visibly demonstrate their commitment to America, the American way, and heterosexuality, average Americans also worked to conform and fit into these postwar American ideals so as not to incur criminal punishment, ostracism, or financial doom.<sup>50</sup>

In this state of heightened cultural paranoia, many gay men and women attempted to “pass” for heterosexuals in dress, speech, and actions.<sup>51</sup> Passing became a tool of personal and professional survival. Even though gay rights groups like the Mattachine Society formed during this time of political and cultural oppression, for most of its members looking just like every other respectable and law-abiding American became an integral part of their platform for challenging and fighting against institutionalized discrimination. Gay men donned traditional suiting attire while lesbians clothed themselves in feminine garb like dresses and skirts. Militant or revolutionary messages for change simply would not receive a welcoming and tolerant response. The homophile movement sought to obscure the differences between the heterosexual and homosexual worlds, endeavoring to show America that gay men and women were conscientious, proper, and valuable American citizens who simply had a same sex

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<sup>49</sup> John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 44.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 40-52.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

“object of sexual expression.”<sup>52</sup> Blending in was paramount to living, succeeding, and surviving in 1950s America.

Conforming to this masculine ideal proved problematic for many homosexual men, but it was just as confusing a process for many heterosexual males. Social commentators and the media started drawing attention to a general “decline of masculinity” pervading the American landscape.<sup>53</sup> Writers, intellectuals, and even scholars discussed this increased gender insecurity. Historian Arthur J. Schlesinger, for instance, believed masculinity was in flux due to “aggressive women, the fluid uncertainties of modern society, the cost in esteem of adjusting to centralization, and modern bureaucratic control of the workplace.”<sup>54</sup> Many returning veterans could identify with Schlesinger’s critique of corporate America. A hierarchy of power existed in the professional world which the corporate soldier answered to on a daily basis. The corporate man retained no real individuality. He was permitted no self-expression in this age of the “organization man.” American men constituted part of the machinery of business; they helped grease the wheels of the American economy. Along the way, some of these anxious professional men realized that, “The fate of the white-collar employee depended on his ability to please others, forcing him to develop a whole new social character in which his personality and appearance mattered most.”<sup>55</sup>

Pleasing others and looking good were long considered female traits and

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 79-87, 108-113.

<sup>53</sup> Banks and De La Chapelle, *Preppy*, 54.

<sup>54</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 63.

<sup>55</sup> Luciano, *Looking Good*, 40.

behaviors. Work was supposed to impart a sense of manly confidence and authority as it was masculine terrain. However, this breadwinner was a more passive and compliant male, not one who looked or acted like his aggressive, rugged, and virile forbearers. Even magazines geared more towards a female audience like *Cosmopolitan* and *Look* picked up on this cultural thread, bemoaning the passing of the once strong, powerful, and all dominating American male.<sup>56</sup> Along with deploring modern corporate structures and systems, *Look* blamed both suburbanization and the “relentless pressures to conform”<sup>57</sup> for the lackluster condition of the American male. Mass consumerism too received its share of scorn from many cultural critics since it engendered American men who were soft, weak, and without a stable masculine identity.<sup>58</sup> Historian James Gilbert argued that, “the effects of conformity, suburban life, and mass culture were depicted as feminizing and debasing, and the proposed solution often lay in a renewal of traditional masculine vigor and individualism.”<sup>59</sup>

But how to inject a dose of old fashioned masculinity and potency into postwar America? If work failed to provide an acceptable solution to men’s gender anxieties, could infusing the home with masculine virtues give men a renewed sense of masculine security and esteem? The problem though, was that the postwar vision of a life in the suburbs surrounded by other nuclear families represented for many men the growing feminization of America. The suburbs were identified as a feminine space with images

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<sup>56</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 71.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 35-71.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



circulating of housewives creating a tranquil home and hearth for their work weary men filled with the latest conveniences and luxuries. Women and children abounded in this universe with men grasping to make space for themselves in basements and garages, as they engaged in masculine hobbies like working on ham radios,<sup>60</sup> undertaking home repairs, or embarking on woodworking.<sup>61</sup>

Fatherhood was also promoted as a way for men to better acclimate to life grounded in the ethos of suburbia. Since suburbanization removed traditional networks of support and knowledge for families as men and women now lived farther away from their kin, husbands and wives now looked to medical experts and specialists for guidance on familial affairs. For example, noted physician Dr. Benjamin Spock advocated for the father to take a larger role in childrearing even going so far as to recommend he act as a playmate for his children. This directive partly afforded men a type of relaxation after a stressful day at work while also making it socially acceptable for men to carve out space and time for themselves in the domestic arena without their masculinity being called into question. This advice also permitted husbands to assist their wives in becoming more active parents.<sup>62</sup> The roles of husband and father differed from the models of masculinity generated by previous generations.<sup>63</sup> All of this familial “togetherness”<sup>64</sup> proved a bit dislocating for the American male.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Kristen Haring, “The “Freer Men” of Ham Radio: How a Technical Hobby Provided Social and Spatial Distance,” *Technology and Culture* 44, no. 4 (2003): 736-737.

<sup>61</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 161-168.

<sup>62</sup> McCall and Yacovone, eds., *A Shared Experience*, 350-360. See also Weiss’s *To Have and To Hold*.

<sup>63</sup> Gilbert, *Men in the Middle*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 66.

Fatherhood was just one manly role the American male was encouraged to heartily accept. Another of these new cultural and gender expectations thrust upon the American male was his full participation in consumer culture. For men nervous about the loss of masculine pride and esteem through traditional routes like professional success and military might, consumption provided a new outlet for masculine self-expression that would also allow men to insert themselves more comfortably into postwar society. However, historically women have been identified as the primary and target consumer in American culture. Consuming and shopping were not viewed as traditional masculine pastimes or endeavors. Many men were already uneasy with succumbing to societal pressures to marry, move to the suburbs, have children, and don a gray-flannel suit each day at an unfulfilling job that stifled their masculine drive, daring, and vigor. Consumption would have to be reworked to not only include men as consumers, but to make them secure masculine consumers.

Along with television programs and movies, magazines surfaced as mediums through which men could acclimate themselves to this role of consumer without fear of being labeled as unmanly or emasculated. For example, *Playboy* was created by 1953 as a means to rescue “the beleaguered male” and “to reclaim the indoors for men.”<sup>66</sup> *Playboy*, just like its earlier counterpart *Esquire*, promoted a hedonistic lifestyle that eschewed marriage, familial commitments, and suburbia.<sup>67</sup> This “alternative way of

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Kaufman, ed., *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 72.

<sup>66</sup> Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 43-44.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-145.

life” was devoid of any attachment to the breadwinner ethic or fatherhood, especially with its bent towards images of naked and semi-clad women.<sup>68</sup> Instead, *Playboy* showcased the joys and benefits of adopting the playboy lifestyle, one based in self-fulfillment, pleasure, and hedonism that instructed its readers on the latest fashion trends, entertainment, home décor, travel destinations, gadgets, and lifestyle trends with an urban focus and mindset.<sup>69</sup> Historian Elizabeth Fraterrigo explained, “*Playboy* approached the cultivation of male appearance by casting good taste and sex appeal as masculine attributes.”<sup>70</sup> To this end, *Playboy* educated its readers on how to mix and match accessories, suit options, and “which trends to follow and which fads to ignore.”<sup>71</sup>

Although it projected a universe removed from the confines of family life and suburbia, *Playboy’s* world actually had much more in common with this postwar ideal. Both served to ground American society in the consumerist mindset. And, as Elizabeth Fraterrigo maintained, “The playboy was neither a freeloading hedonist nor an ascetic overachiever, but a man who exuberantly pursued a full life of work, pleasure, and play.”<sup>72</sup> Whether a man adhered to a life of familial harmony in the suburbs or a single life filled with playboy accoutrements in the city, men were still being molded into consumers and full participants in consumption culture. In this age of homophobia,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-16.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 62 and 61-65.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 49.

consuming transformed into not only an acceptable masculine activity but a suitably heterosexual one as well.

Changing notions of masculinity surfaced slowly as more and more individuals formed “imagined identities” with their mass produced commodities.<sup>73</sup> Americans relied more on the exchange between themselves and goods to generate an identity, one that both filled individual and societal requirements. A man might lack satisfaction with his job, personal relationships, and societal conditions, but he could now acquire a measure of security, pleasure, and happiness through the goods he bought, wore, and displayed throughout his abode. Even roles like the playboy, which on the surface seemed to contradict postwar visions of the breadwinner and suburbia, did nothing to challenge or subvert societal systems and institutions. Consumption was now promoted as the next frontier open for men, including playboy and breadwinner, to conquer and tame.

As the playboy persona attests, the 1950s and early 1960s male was not completely without masculine images and models. American men witnessed traditional masculine attributes of aggression, strength, and bravery by going to their local movie theaters and watching film stars as John Wayne fill up the screen with his bravado and heroic antics. Wayne’s onscreen military roles reflected the continued presence of this institution in American society. Not only was there still a draft in place, but the military itself gave men the means to acquire employment, don historic masculine attire, and physically act out treasured traditional masculine qualities. Along with military and movie heroes, the American male could encounter masculine heroes in magazines. *Esquire* and *Playboy* featured submissions by noted “manly” authors including Ernest

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<sup>73</sup> Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 5.

Hemingway who was known not only for his literary accomplishments but also his extracurricular activities that involved war reporting, bull fighting, and sexual conquests. He embodied the risk-taking adventurer, glorious conqueror, and machismo, all attributes lacking in the breadwinner and suburban father. Middle-class men could also look to popular singers and entertainers like Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., and Dean Martin, leaders of Hollywood's Rat Pack. While these men were famous individually for their acting, singing, and general entertaining skills, taken together their exploits both on and off the screen included nights spent drinking, gambling, and partying with women who were not necessarily their wives or girlfriends. Even comic books and pulp magazines became more overtly masculine with stories featuring male characters exuding toughness, virility, and braggadocio paired alongside semi-clad women or helpless maidens that further indoctrinated the reader on the proper societal replication of traditional gender roles.<sup>74</sup>

### **Youth and Change**

Even with macho icons and manly cultural texts popping up in American society, many American men believed their country appeared “impotent” and weak both at home and abroad especially after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik by the late 1950s.<sup>75</sup> However, as the decade came to a close, one man emerged committed to restoring masculine pride and esteem—John F. Kennedy. In Kennedy's estimation, all the progress, material advancement, and economic glories bequeathed by the American

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 76-78.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 74-75. See also Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, for more on issues of masculinity and masculine anxieties during the Cold War era, especially during the 1950s.

economy had made American men and women too “soft” to wage a proper war against the Soviet Union either domestically or internationally. In his inaugural address, President Kennedy challenged his fellow citizens to “...ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”<sup>76</sup> Americans had become used to the good life, one built on material goods and consumptive practices. This was a life of passivity that lacked action and personal sacrifice necessary to ensure America’s standing as the superpower in the world. Kennedy particularly saw this deficit among his fellow American men and promised to inject “courage, adventure, daring, and self-sacrifice” back into American manhood in order to solve this current “crisis” of masculinity, much as Theodore Roosevelt did at the turn of the century with his promulgations of a “strenuous life.” This “vigorous life” would help American men to once again become potent, masterful, and powerful in the face of all global, political, cultural, and economic combatants.<sup>77</sup>

Kennedy’s rhetoric, bolstered by his charismatic personality and good looks, fascinated many in the country. Along with his fashionable wife Jackie, Kennedy visually and symbolically embodied a cultural shift away from the complacency and conformity of the 1950s. As the first president born in the twentieth century to attain this office, Kennedy brought to this position and consequently the country, an aura of youth, energy, and hope. He also infused his presidency in tone and action with a competitive flavor. Susan Faludi argued about Kennedy, “The fight was the thing, the

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<sup>76</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961,” [on-line]; available from John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum <http://www.jfklibrary.org>; Internet; accessed 15 November 2012.

<sup>77</sup> Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, 169-170.

only thing, if America was to retain its manhood.”<sup>78</sup> On the surface, Kennedy projected a life built upon the merits of competition and masculine prowess. Along with being a World War II veteran and having seen active duty, Kennedy was an avid sports lover. He regularly golfed and was frequently pictured with his family at their compound in Hyannisport, Massachusetts playing football, going sailing, and engaging in an array of other physical activities.

Kennedy appeared to radiate those masculine traits of dominance, strength, and potency which the country needed to once again reclaim. Once in office, Kennedy focused a tremendous amount of attention on foreign affairs, an area where he could demonstrate his leadership abilities as this was an arena ripe for dealing with matters of “urgency and crisis,” since it tested one’s authority, confidence, and resolve which were all qualities linked to elements of traditional masculinity.<sup>79</sup> Despite foreign failures such as the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy consistently displayed a controlled and confident exterior to the world. He continually handled himself with the poise and command required to steer the country forward in the Cold War era. More importantly, Kennedy presented a rejuvenated and revitalized model of American manhood.

Not only did Kennedy epitomize those time-honored masculine attributes of daring, strength, and “coolness”<sup>80</sup> under pressure, but his choice of clothing also signified his personal commitment to reinvigorating American manhood. Jeffrey Banks and Doria De La Chapelle maintained that Kennedy, “brought a whiff of Ivy with him to

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<sup>78</sup> Faludi, *Stiffed*, 25.

<sup>79</sup> Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, 212.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

the White House—not only in his personal style, but also with his Harvard-educated coterie of advisors, almost all of whom wore classic American, natural-shouldered suits, horn-rimmed glasses and repp ties.”<sup>81</sup> Along with Brooks Brothers, Kennedy and his advisors, friends, and devotees adorned their frames in other notable brands associated with the Ivy or “preppy” look including J. Press and Chipp. Chipp was a true favorite among Kennedy’s inner circle as this clothier created suits not only for the president, but for his brother Bobby and other family members like Sargent Shriver.<sup>82</sup>

Kennedy continued to embrace the Ivy League look in suiting attire, popularized in the 1950s, but his version was updated with a slimmer, sharper, more youthful tone especially with the inclusion of a stark white shirt and slim tie.<sup>83</sup> While he favored the single breasted, natural shouldered model for suit jackets, Kennedy made certain to typically wear two button versions over the historically accepted three-button Ivy model since it gave his overall suit ensemble more energy and dash. He simply updated the Ivy look to make it modern and hip.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Kennedy appeared more relaxed and at ease with himself and his brand of masculinity than the 1950s gray-flannel man.<sup>85</sup>

Donning preppy attire for presidential activities allowed Kennedy to visually embody those attributes of hope, youth, optimism, and competition. He extended his use

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<sup>81</sup> Banks and De La Chapelle, *Preppy*, 78.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-81.

<sup>83</sup> AskMen Editors, “Style Icon: John F. Kennedy,” *AskMen.com*; available from [www.askmen.com/fashion/style\\_icon/8\\_style\\_icon.html](http://www.askmen.com/fashion/style_icon/8_style_icon.html); Internet, accessed 08 November 2013; and Need Supply Co. Editors, “Style Icon: John F. Kennedy,” *blog.needsupply.com* (June 23, 2013); available from [www.blog.needsupply.com/2013/06/23/style-icon-john-f-kennedy](http://www.blog.needsupply.com/2013/06/23/style-icon-john-f-kennedy); Internet, accessed 08 November 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Christian Chensvold, “Jack and John: The Sartorial Dichotomy of JFK,” *Ivy Style* (February 3, 2010); available from [www.ivy-style.com](http://www.ivy-style.com), Internet, accessed 08 November 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Banks and De La Chapelle, *Preppy*, 3.





Figure 2. John F. Kennedy.<sup>86</sup>

of this style to his leisure pursuits as well since he was often seen boating or walking along the beach in a pair of rolled up khakis, untucked button-down Oxford shirt, and topsiders. In cooler weather, Kennedy flaunted Shetland wool crewneck sweaters and nautical tops. Ivy loafers also made his sartorial list, as he even wore these items while engaging in presidential duties in the White House. When Kennedy played golf, he did so in the preppy mold of donning vibrantly-hued golfing ensembles.<sup>87</sup> The president also favored polos shirts which are inherently designed to be less formal than a typical

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<sup>86</sup> See <http://blog.needsupply.com/2013/06/23/style-icon-john-f-kennedy/>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 78.

collared dress shirt due to the inclusion of a softer collar and fabric construction.<sup>88</sup>

Moreover, the perennially cool Ray-Ban Wayfarer sunglasses graced Kennedy's face whether dressed in a suit or out for a day of leisure activities. Fashion writer Christian Chensvold claimed, "With his sunglasses and convertibles, ironic wit and military heroics, Kennedy had something no American leader had ever had before: cool."<sup>89</sup>

Not only was Kennedy considered "cool," but he personified the breadwinner and provider ethic with pictures of time spent with his wife and children plastered about through the media alongside images of his duties in the Oval Office.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, Kennedy's professional and leisure wear classified as preppy, which gave his attire an inherently sportier edge, sartorially promoting his belief in the necessity of incorporating competition, fitness, and sport into the lives of American males to make them battle ready.<sup>91</sup> Kennedy and his sartorial choices provided American men with a reenergized, potent, and confident model of masculinity.

Many American males heeded Kennedy's call to action. Bright, eager, college educated young Americans started joining the Peace Corps, using their skills and intellect to enact change in countries across the globe, showing the world that America stood for more than just dollars, cents, and military might. Change was also happening domestically. A whole new stage of the civil rights movement for black Americans

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<sup>88</sup> Sims, *Icons of Men's Style*, 161-163.

<sup>89</sup> Christian Chensvold, "Jack and John: The Sartorial Dichotomy of JFK," *Ivy Style* (February 3, 2010); available from [www.ivy-style.com](http://www.ivy-style.com), Internet, accessed 08 November 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 11-18 and 169-179. See also Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise*, 74-75 for more on Kennedy and his masculine image.

<sup>91</sup> See Banks and De La Chapelle, *Preppy*, and Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, for more on the connection between sport and preppy style.

gained momentum, beginning in 1960 with four black college students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro, North Carolina who sat in their local Woolworth's counter, demanding service on the same level as the store's white patrons. Their sit-in inspired a whole wave of sit-ins across Southern states and even the nation.

Just as black Americans pushed for civil rights, so too did other groups including women and homosexuals, fighting for an end to discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. All of these groups simply desired that their country, the land of liberty, finally live up to its ideals and grant all of its citizens their rightful privileges, protections, and status as full American citizens. And, all of these movements desired more integration into America's ways, laws, and systems. There was a renewed sense of possibility emanating from the country and its citizens. Writer Nelson George commented that the 1960s "was about faith in the human capacity for change and a palpable optimism about the future."<sup>92</sup> In addition to all of these social changes, hope and optimism continued to abound since America's economy appeared to be churning along.<sup>93</sup>

However, the postwar world of prosperity, domestic stability, and unfettered global influence started to crack amidst growing economic, cultural, and political tensions as the decade continued. Inflation might have been at 2.9% in 1966 but that

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<sup>92</sup> Nelson George, *Post-Soul Nation: The Explosive, Contradictory, Triumphant, and Tragic 1980s as Experienced by African Americans (Previously Known as Blacks and Before that Negroes)* (New York: Viking, 2004), viii.

<sup>93</sup> For more on postwar economic prosperity see Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001); and Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

number jumped to 4.4% within the first few months in 1968.<sup>94</sup> The federal government ran larger and larger deficits to finance the myriad of programs under President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society without substantially increasing taxes or bringing in extra revenue to offset these expenditures. Not only was the government beset by domestic expenses, but it was financing a war raging thousands of miles away in Vietnam with each year requiring more human, physical, and monetary capital to sustain America's presence in that country and more importantly, credibility in the Cold War. Johnson refused to back down or minimize America's presence within Vietnam as this would have been done at great expense to his own masculine pride, not to mention the damage inflicted upon the country's global image. The United States looked to be stretching itself, its resources, and finances very thin domestically and internationally. It looked more and more as though America's "economic golden age" would soon be at an end.<sup>95</sup>

On top of these economic issues, the nation seemed plagued by a never ending cycle of violence, death, and destruction during the 1960s. The assassinations of respected leaders like John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers, shook the country to its core. The spirit of hope and change embodied by these men vanished. Even political conventions could not be held without bloodshed or discord as was the case with the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. The world witnessed police brutality, bloodied convention attendees, blatant civil disobedience, and martial law on their nightly news. War was not only on the streets of Chicago. The Vietnam War raged on television sets across the nation. The

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<sup>94</sup> Collins, *More*, 72.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 40. Collins discusses economic growth and stagnation in enormous detail starting from the Great Depression all the way through Bill Clinton's presidency in his book.

numerous casualties brought on by these frustrated war efforts seemed to disprove the long-held American belief that masculinity is valiantly displayed on the battlefield. On the home front, millions of dollars in physical property damage resulted from numerous race riots in cities such as Watts, Newark, and Chicago during the later years of the decade.

Increased racial unrest reflected the tenor of the nation as much as the shift that occurred within the civil rights movement. Many young black males became attracted to the ideology of “Black Power” over King’s adherence to non-violent peaceful protest. The call for “Black Power” resonated in the actions, speech, and dress of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Founded by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in 1966, the Black Panthers advocated black empowerment, black nationalism, and self-defense. The language used by “Black Power” supporters shocked many ordinary Americans, but not as much as the clothes these activists wore. Black Panthers typically wore dark colored leather jackets (usually black), black berets, and carried loaded guns, a dramatic contrast to the respectable looking suits flaunted by earlier civil rights activists like Martin Luther King. According to fashion commentators Richard Martin and Harold Koda, “The black leather jacket commands attention and respect. The dress of confrontation and power, it is the sign of the social outcast, politically engaged but socially estranged.”<sup>96</sup> The militant dress and demeanor exhibited by these activists challenged long held views about race and manhood in the country. Manhood was no longer assumed to be a white only terrain.

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<sup>96</sup> Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Jocks and Nerds: Men’s Style in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 72.

While some black men became attracted to the controversial rhetoric and militant posturing of groups like the Black Panthers, for others, embracing “black power” meant integrating elements of black culture or what was termed “black cultural nationalism” into their lives.<sup>97</sup> Many black individuals looked to their African roots in an effort to reclaim a heritage they felt had been denied to them under the structures of white patriarchal society. Rather than simply accept integration into the systems, culture, and values of white America as the earlier civil rights movement advocated, black men and women embraced their own unique racial and cultural past with a renewed sense of pride and esteem. Alongside efforts to implement courses in African and African-American studies in schools, some black men and women displayed their cultural and racial pride donning clothing like dashikis, growing their hair into afros, and incorporating African food, music, and customs into their daily lives.<sup>98</sup> Black men were visibly crafting a positive and self-affirming outward persona that contrasted with past negative stereotypes waged upon their bodies and race by white America.

The structures and sources of male power were not just challenged by black men and women, but also by the emergence of women’s liberation. The rise of women’s liberation contested long held notions about gender roles and expectations. Some women now ignored accepted societal expectations like motherhood and marriage. Instead, feminist women demanded to be treated as equals to men in American society. They wanted access to professional positions based upon their own qualifications,

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<sup>97</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies*, 60. Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

commensurate pay, and economic opportunities previously denied to them in a world based upon masculine power. Some women delayed marriage to pursue more immediate gratifications in sexual matters, relationships, and single culture. They demanded sexual liberation.

Woman's clothing embodied sexual liberation as hemlines became higher with young women flaunting mini-skirts and other body-revealing attire.<sup>99</sup> The influence of youth and street fashion turned the world of women's fashion upside down. Women moved away from overtly feminine and gender constricting garb, even burning these items in liberation trash cans as part of feminist protest against societal conditions. Some women even went so far as to start wearing pants and androgynous wear with greater frequency by the end of the 1960s.<sup>100</sup> The image of the 1950s housewife with her white apron, high heels, pearls, and frilly skirts was clearly under attack.

Traditional gender roles encountered great cultural resistance and contestation. Manhood no longer implied marriage or the breadwinner role as many women sought to achieve not only a level of parity, but wanted to realize their full personal and professional potential without relying on the safety net of a husband or marriage.<sup>101</sup> Since marriage often failed to secure individual happiness, divorce emerged as the easiest solution to this problem. Divorce now lacked the cultural stigma once attached to it. Rather, divorce presented a chance for happiness and fulfillment which marriage and a suitable partner no longer guaranteed. The numerous singles clubs that dotted the

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<sup>99</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 52.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 49-76.

<sup>101</sup> For further discussion of the decline of the breadwinner role for men see Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men*.

American landscape emphasized the need for men to take pride in their appearance.

American men became more self-conscious of their outward attributes since getting a date, finding a sexual partner, or even possibly a mate necessitated proper grooming, fashionable clothes, and a toned physique. As gender identities changed and shifted for men, their anxiety over these alterations grew.

Some men though eagerly embraced these cultural shifts and alterations by throwing off all connections to mainstream and normative American culture by becoming hippies. Hippies abandoned conventional dress in favor of styles that challenged the status quo and propriety. Sometimes, they abandoned clothing all together to live in a more natural state. Historian Valerie Steele elaborated, “The modern industrial world seemed to them corrupt, but surely “authenticity” could be found in the past or in other civilizations. The romanticism of the hippy worldview naturally led them to adopt certain evocative garments, such as the fringed leather shirts and beaded headbands of the American Indians.”<sup>102</sup> The traditional suit, a symbol of not only masculine pride but corporate power and professional respectability, became usurped in favor of beads, “ethnic” attire, t-shirts, blue jeans, tie-dye accessories, psychedelic garb, and bohemian ensembles. Men now donned tunic tops over structured suits to compliment their flared denim jeans or vibrant velvet pants that brazenly displayed the male form. Clothing radiated notions of the “exotic” with unconventional colors, fabrics, and ornate embroidery evocative of far-away places like India and Africa.<sup>103</sup> Garments associated with ordinary, typical, traditional America and American

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<sup>102</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 74.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-74.



values were forsaken. Sartorial conformity so prevalent in the 1950s and early 1960s shattered amongst these tides of change.

Moreover, many men started to blur the lines between feminine and masculine not only by adopting more colorful, expressive, and body-conscious clothing, but also through altering their physical appearance by growing their hair long and experimenting with sexual roles and practices. Some men's bodies eschewed visible signs of strength and muscularity in favor of a more slender and streamlined ideal. Sexuality was no longer solely confined to the binary structure of heterosexual and homosexual due to the rise of gay liberation. The gay liberation movement grew out of the homophile movement of the 1950s and early 1960s. However, gay liberationists were no longer going to respectfully protest conditions in proper masculine suiting attire. Just as was the case with other liberation groups of the time like the Black Panthers, gay men became more militant, confrontational, and demanding as evidenced by the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City. Gay men wanted to remove the societal closet surrounding them and receive full and equal treatment as human beings, American citizens, and men. The racial, sexual, and gender boundaries erected for decades and decades started to come crumbling down. Men's clothing visually symbolized all of this societal tension, cultural unrest, and gender disruption.

The world the upscale American male knew from his childhood was fading. Trusted institutions and traditions could not supply answers or proper solutions. Leaders proved ineffective, duplicitous, and at times, impotent. The economy now seemed incapable of producing long term, sustained growth. American glory at home and abroad no longer seemed certain. Corporate America continued to dehumanize its

employees with efforts towards eliminating jobs in favor of processes done through cost-saving automation. Notions of unity, community, and integration vanished. With the rise of the Human Potential Movement and popularity of psychiatry in American culture, Lynne Luciano noted, “Americans turned inward and became an intensely psychological people obsessed with thinking about themselves and examining the meaning of their lives.”<sup>104</sup> Some men tried numerous unconventional methods for self-expression and definition, including embracing alternative health and fitness practices such as tai-chi and yoga.<sup>105</sup>

Traditional manhood proved obsolete and devalued in this age of the hippies and the counterculture. As such, even time-honored and accepted codes of masculine dress like the suit came under attack. Alan Flusser declared, “Masculine attire was swept up in the quest for broader social freedoms: conformity came to be regarded as almost an infringement of personal liberty.”<sup>106</sup> Individuality, self-expression, and authenticity were the new cultural battle cries. Suits and Ivy attire were linked with the old guard, convention, and stood in gross opposition to the values and mindset of the growing numbers of rebellious youth and dissatisfied Americans.

If men still wore suits, they tended to break free from matched and conventional suiting styles by adopting looks with more color and pattern. Gray, black, and navy color schemes were replaced by the colors of the fashion rainbow. Men moved towards including prints such as paisley into jackets, shirts, and other corresponding suiting

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<sup>104</sup> Luciano, *Looking Good*, 100.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-100.

<sup>106</sup> Flusser, *Dressing the Man*, 4.

attire. Some upwardly-mobile men even neglected to incorporate a tie into their suiting ensembles, preferring to pair turtlenecks or sweaters underneath their suit jacket instead. Additionally, men started accessorizing their suits with traditionally viewed feminine pieces such as necklaces and pendants. The influence of youth and experimentation radiated from new styles like the safari jacket or other suit choices that showcased Nehru collars or Edwardian designs.<sup>107</sup> The traditional model of the corporate suit stood on very shaky ground as the decade came to a close.

The decade that ushered in the youngest president in history, brimming with energy and vitality, seemed to end amidst chaos, uncertainty, fragmentation, and disorder.<sup>108</sup> Even if many upscale or upwardly-mobile men benefited from the political, economic, and cultural conditions produced by the post-war prosperity boom, they now faced the issues of inflation, economic restructuring, changing gender roles, and cultural malaise together. The societal structures of traditional male power, especially white male power, were challenged and altered irrevocably. Gender rules, expectations, and ideals toppled under the weight of societal unrest and change. The hard, heterosexual masculinity advocated by traditionalists in the face of Cold War politics seemed incompatible with the later 1960s embrace of youth, creativity, and cultural protest. Men started searching for other avenues for identity and security since time honored ways of doing so provided ineffective in this new American culture based increasingly on self-fulfillment.

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<sup>107</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 118.

<sup>108</sup> There will be more discussion of these issues plaguing the country in the next chapter as well. The early 1970s had to deal with the fall out from the events of the mid-to-late 1960s. And as historian Bruce Schulman notes, 1968 starts the decade known as the 1970s so some of these items will be mentioned in greater detail in the chapters to come.

The bullet that ended President Kennedy's life also halted the cultural demand for traditional masculine qualities like strength, potency, authority, and control as these failed to acknowledge cultural fissures and tensions. The suit too was a casualty in this cultural war. American men could not successfully replicate the traditional masculine model with ease, security, or comfort any longer, especially since both black and gay men were advocating for alterations in this white archetype. Conventional masculine attire did not provide any solutions for this dilemma either. Masculinity was visibly in flux. As upwardly-mobile, white and black, gay and straight men faced the dawn of the 1970s with uncertain personal and professional futures, they turned their attention to one environment within their immediate control—their own bodies. Clothing would be the instrument of their revolution, their tool for constructing a masculine identity of their own making.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “THERE’S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE”:

### LEISURE SUITS, COWBOYS, AND THE EARLY 1970S

#### Introduction

The dance floor is flashing swashes of red, yellow, orange, and blue as the discotheque’s lights cast a rosy glow over the glazed crowd below. A lone couple glides around the dance floor, easily moving to the sounds emanating from the DJ booth. The dancers’ bodies are rhythmically aligned, swaying and shifting to the Bee Gees “More Than a Woman,” unaware of the men and women huddled around them as they have been lifted to a higher state of consciousness. Tony Manero is dressed according to the rules of his dancing tribe. He has ensconced himself in a three-piece white suit complete with flared trousers and a crisp, form-fitting vest. Both the vest and the black wide-collared shirt underneath are perfectly situated to show more than a mere hint of skin. The brightness and exuberance projected by Tony’s white suit are a stark contrast to his life of unfulfilled hopes, emasculation, and crumbling dreams. Tony has come to this Brooklyn temple of dance to escape the realities of his material existence clad in the only type of clothing that can make him feel confident, strong, and masterful—a suit. Although Tony is dressed in “what would become the most famous suit of the 1970s,” he is a figment of popular culture, an artistic invention.<sup>1</sup> Tony, played by John Travolta, is

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<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear: Council of Fashion Designers of America* (New York: Assouline, 2009), 213.

the main character in the 1977 film, *Saturday Night Fever*. While the movie subsequently helped make Travolta a household name, the real, enduring star of the movie, is the suit. Starting a scholarly discussion about the male suit using an example from the 1970s might seem a bit ironic to the casual observer, since as sociologist Tim Edwards comments, “The suit at the end of the 1970s was increasingly in danger of losing all credence in the wake of its ludicrously wide-lapelled, tight-fitting and synthetically constructed styles.”<sup>2</sup> But the suit has consistently endured the fashion pitfalls of fad dressing to maintain its spot as the quintessential emblem of men’s style.

However, with the rise of “flower power” and the counterculture coming out of the 1960s, the suit, as a masculine symbol of longevity and tradition, started to lose a bit of its cultural prestige and cache amidst the marked informality of dress that was becoming ever more popular among the masses. Suits represented the old guard, tradition, and the status quo which did not quite equate with the new way of dressing to express one’s individuality and taste. No longer were people dressing just to fit in or conform as they had in the 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Academic Alison Lurie explains, “The sixties and seventies were a time of great exuberance and variety in dress. Clothes were treated as costumes, and an observer on the main street of any large city and many towns in Britain or America might see persons dressed up as babies, grandmothers, cowboys, pirates, gypsies, Indians, soldiers, Christian hermits, Oriental sages, Robin Hood, and Little Bo-Peep.”<sup>4</sup> The suit seemed outdated and obsolete in this new cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2011), 61.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Costantino, *Men’s Fashion in the Twentieth Century: From Frock Coats to Intelligent Fibres* (New York: Costume Fashion Press, 1997), 107.

<sup>4</sup> Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (New York: Random House, 1981), 82.

atmosphere where attire like jeans, ethnic beads, tie-dye shirts, and Native American garb graced the bodies of many Americans.<sup>5</sup> This new type of dressing echoed the revolutionary spirit, rhetoric, and actions taken by men, women, groups of color, and gay men across the country.<sup>6</sup>

Many upwardly-mobile men reacted to these cultural shifts by attempting to regulate and dominate their bodies since this was one of the only environments under their full control as the world around them grew more unstable and uncertain with each passing year.<sup>7</sup> Even the most basic premise or concept of what it meant to be a true American male was being reconsidered. Established definitions of masculinity were now in flux in a nation coping with feminism, accelerating divorce rates, a war in Vietnam, corporate re-structuring, liberation movements, and challenges abroad to American global hegemony. American men began relying more on the exchange between themselves and goods to generate an identity as traditional sources of masculinity such as the workplace, battlefield, and home proved inadequate at securing masculine pride and self-esteem.<sup>8</sup> Many men welcomed the new cultural mood of the country that allowed them to move past the historically socially sanctioned roles of provider and protector.<sup>9</sup> Once valued masculine attributes such as aggressiveness, dominance, duty, and strength lost cultural currency and power in an age of youth, expression, and individuality. More

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<sup>5</sup> Edwards, *Fashion in Focus*, 105.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>7</sup> For a further discussion of these ideas see Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 194-196.

<sup>9</sup> See Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1999).

individuals formed “imagined identities” with their mass produced commodities as consumptive culture created new expectations and examples of what exactly it meant to be a modern man.<sup>10</sup> Sociologist Joanne Entwistle maintains, “Fashion, dress, and consumption provide ways of dealing with the problems of the modern world, characterized by increasing fragmentation and a sense of chaos.”<sup>11</sup>

In an era that pronounced individuality and freedom of expression as paramount to an authentic and real existence, men’s clothing simply became part of this transformative process. Many American men utilized their clothing to showcase their growing frustration, apprehension, and dissatisfaction with traditional American political, economic, and societal conditions. The male body morphed into a site of cultural negotiation and contestation. And, no one piece of male attire so visibly showcased these cultural and gender variations of the early 1970s as the suit, the time-honored symbol of masculinity and masculine dress.<sup>12</sup> Changes to American society during the early 1970s manifested in the revisions and adjustments made to the suit which actually subverted and altered its original intent and symbolism.<sup>13</sup> American men purposefully avoided

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 66.

<sup>11</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2000), 139.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, *Fashion in Focus*, 60.

<sup>13</sup> Among the many texts that contain a discussion on how fashion can be used to show issues of gender, sexuality, race, identity, resistance, and cultural negotiation, see Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Jennifer Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Critical Studies in Fashion* (London: Routledge, 1994); Tim Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006); Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication* (London: Routledge, 2002); Christopher Breward, *Fashion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Shaun Cole, *‘Don We Now Our Gay Apparel’ Gay Men’s Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness*



wearing the typical business uniform of their forefathers as they gravitated towards new modes of dress including the colorful and demonstrative leisure suit. Yet, leisure suits were not the only widely accepted fashion style for men at this time, especially among gay men. The cowboy aesthetic emerged as another popular sartorial masculine dress option determined to challenge the dominance and pervasiveness of the conventional suit in men's closets. Whether men selected leisure suits or cowboy gear, the message was resoundingly clear. The traditional suit consisting of a matching vest, jacket, and trousers coordinated with a complimentary tie and dress shirt lacked cultural resonance in the Age of Aquarius.

The struggles of the suit and traditional masculinity materialized in popular men's lifestyle magazines. *The Advocate*, *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *Ebony* acutely illustrated these developments, while also revealing the issues faced by the upwardly-mobile, middle-to-upper class American male as he embraced new modes of daily dressing just as society was postulating alternative ideas about manhood and masculinity. Men were becoming visible not only as consumers, but as objects to be looked at, admired, emulated, and desired. Fashion supplied upwardly-mobile white, black, straight, and gay men with a means to combat traditional expectations and gender roles thrust upon them by society. All of these men were of a specific class level and constructed their masculinity in relation to other models and beliefs historically accepted within their economic bracket. These upscale men had the time and financial means necessary to utilize fashion as a tool of masculine self-expression. American men allowed their clothing to demonstrate their

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(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (New York: Berg, 2005); and Susan B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing and Personal Adornment* (New York: Macmillan, 1985). This is only a sample of the books available on this subject matter.

visibility, expressiveness, and self-defined masculine identity. In effect, all these groups were asserting their claim and right to American manhood on their own terms.

### **The 1970s Begins**

The 1970s should have been a decade characterized by growth, hope, and promise. America had just emerged from the upheaval of the 1960s older and much wiser, or so it thought. On the surface, life appeared to be much better for the general populace after years of watching the nation and world around them crumble on the nightly news.<sup>14</sup> However, if the decade looked to be so blessed and enchanted, what happened so quickly to turn optimism into despair? Why is this era characterized so frequently as "...a time of political drift, international weakness, moral upheaval, and economic disaster"?<sup>15</sup>

The post-World War II economic boom enjoyed by Americans slowly dissipated and the cracks in the veneer of this prosperity were becoming more and more apparent with each passing year, which challenged men's ability to succeed in the 1970s. When President Richard Nixon took office, the country was in the midst of a recession that wore heavily on Americans' pocketbooks and psyche.<sup>16</sup> Traditional solutions to the problems of inflation, unemployment, and low productivity just did not seem to work in any sustained or prolonged manner. The country soon witnessed the birth of one of the

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<sup>14</sup> See Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 27-28.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>16</sup> Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 122. See also Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) for more on the economic issues of the early 1970s.

key economic dilemmas of the decade—stagflation. Stagflation “combined the problem of inflation with sluggish output and rising unemployment.”<sup>17</sup>

This issue of stagflation became magnified in 1973 when Arab nations placed a five month embargo on oil shipments to the U.S. due to the nation’s support for Israel during the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War. Images of cars lined up for miles and miles along roads waiting to fill up at gas stations troubled many Americans greatly. On the heels of this first major oil crisis of the decade, the American economy sunk into a recession that would last until about March 1975. Adding to these economic woes, the nation had already been undergoing a shift towards a more service oriented economy creating jobs consisting of lower pay and less benefits overall.<sup>18</sup> High income taxes along with rising property taxes further implied a loss of economic independence. From 1973 to 1980, discretionary income per worker declined by nearly eighteen percent.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, earnings for middle-class white men over the age of forty declined by fourteen percent during the 1970s.<sup>20</sup>

Working hard in the corporate world was no longer enough to advance up the ladder. In an age of deindustrialization, automation, and corporate restructuring, American companies devalued the worth of their employees on the most basic level. Even more troubling to Americans was that by 1975, over nine million citizens were

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>18</sup> Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 55-67.

<sup>19</sup> William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 435.

<sup>20</sup> Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 104-106.

unemployed.<sup>21</sup> To make matters worse, American companies faced severe competition from Asian firms in the automotive and electronic industries over which they once held dominance.<sup>22</sup> American businesses met this chilly economic climate with corporate takeovers and organizational restructuring. Many companies soon sought out alternatives to the unfriendly economic atmosphere of America. Alternatives meant moving firms abroad where real estate, tools, and labor were cheaper and the profits extracted from this endeavor would be much greater.

Economic productivity was also negatively impacted with the arrival of a whole new group of workers increasing the size of the workforce almost beyond demand.<sup>23</sup> First, the baby boomers started to come of age and this necessitated a whole slew of new jobs just to keep up with this population growth. Additionally, women flooded onto the job market in greater numbers than ever before due to the successes of women's liberation and the civil rights movement. Building upon feminist ideology, many women demanded to be treated like equals in American society. They wanted access to professional positions based upon their own qualifications, commensurate pay, and economic opportunities previously denied to them in a world based upon masculine power. Women sought not only to provide for their families, but to embark upon careers in industries and professions that had long closed their doors to them.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Irwin Unger, *These United States: The Questions of Our Past* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2006), 748-749.

<sup>22</sup> Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 6-10.

<sup>23</sup> Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 68. See also Collins, *More*, 130.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge: DaCapo Press, 2001), 161.

As all of these economic troubles continued to mount, the nation's once thriving economy floundered and both the government and the president looked at times helpless and even ineffectual. Since the 1960s, the reverence that Americans once showed the president, his office, and the government in general, diminished due to foreign policy mistakes, outside wars, and issues over credibility on the domestic and international fronts which were magnified amidst the youth, countercultural, and liberation movements that challenged the status quo, attacking anything and everything perceived to be too traditional, square, or inauthentic.<sup>25</sup> People were asking for authenticity, not secrecy, and not finding this in their country's most hallowed establishments. The credibility gap between the upper echelons of government and the people it served was revealed to be wider than most could have imagined in the wake of events like the Vietnam War and Watergate.

Any individual would have found it difficult to assume the mantle of the presidency in the wake of President Nixon's resignation, the Watergate scandal, and the atmosphere of malaise that had permeated throughout society, but Gerald Ford also had to deal with a souring economy. Ford considered inflation as the number one economic problem to solve. In spite of the numerous conferences his administration held on inflation, Ford's economic policies drove the economy into another recession with stagflation abounding. Unemployment stood at about 8.3 percent in 1975.<sup>26</sup> Tax

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<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these issues including Vietnam and Watergate please see Berkowitz, *Something Happened*; Schulman, *The Seventies*; Collins, *More*; and William H. Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century: The United States from 1890-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 55. See Collins, *More*, for further information on Ford's economic troubles and policies.

reductions, cuts in spending, and other traditionalist approaches offered no real relief to Americans. As historian William Chafe argues, “Stagflation had become the word of the day, with nine out of ten Americans anticipating that inflation was a permanent presence and two-thirds agreeing that the country was entering a period of lasting shortages, with a continued decline in the standard of living.”<sup>27</sup> The nation was now fully immersed in an “era of limits.”<sup>28</sup>

Ford’s own persona weakened the power and prestige of the presidency. If Nixon was perceived as ruthless, competitive, and paranoid then Ford made certain to craft his presidential persona in the vein of the “Everyman” who performed regular activities such as toasting his own English muffin for breakfast and testifying before Congress in an effort to remove any traces of “the imperial presidency” image from the White House.<sup>29</sup> This regular, average American facade cultivated by Ford soon backfired as he gained the reputation of being an “incompetent bumbler” as pictures of him falling while skiing on vacation in Colorado and tumbling down the airplane ramp after arrival in Salzburg, Austria proliferated in the press.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, Ford would also be viewed as a symbol of impotence and powerlessness due to the fall of South Vietnam to communism in 1975. Although Ford attempted to distance himself from the abuses of power associated with past presidencies, in the end, he too diminished the power, prestige, and authority of the nation and its leaders at home and abroad, and by extension, the pride,

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<sup>27</sup> Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century*, 229.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, *More*, 100.

<sup>29</sup> Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 72-73. For more on Nixon’s image, behaviors, and actions including Watergate see Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 16-31 and Schulman, *The Seventies*, 42-52.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

value, and esteem of the American male. The president is a visual symbol not only of the health and well-being of the nation, but also of American masculinity and masculine attributes to the world.<sup>31</sup> By Ford's era, America and the American male no longer looked powerful, strong, dominant, and masterful.

Upwardly-mobile men—white and black, straight and gay—all faced these social, political, and economic changes with apprehension and uncertainty at the dawn of the 1970s. Americans could no longer hold faith in traditional supports like their presidents, economic systems, and time-honored values. Nor could American men give credence to a symbolic representation of all of these items—the suit. Traditional suit styles, whether they were double or single breasted in conventional colors of navy, gray, and black, were not very visible in magazines through the middle of the decade. What was very commonplace was a reinterpretation of the typical suit in terms of colors, shapes, and styles. Both the suit and traditional American masculinity were being altered and in some ways liberated to fit the ever changing needs of the 1970s male. Men were asserting their right to be viewed and recognized as true, American men, not just according to the dictates of traditional white, patriarchal society, but according to their own standards and beliefs. Gay and black upwardly-mobile males were no longer content in accepting second-class citizenship or inferior status. Straight white men wanted to reconfigure time honored masculine ideals and roles in correspondence to their own needs and desires now. Clothing gave men a new visibility and expressiveness that was integral in the process of creating a self-imposed masculine identity. The suit and

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this connection between the presidency and the health, status, and strength of the nation please see Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

American masculinity did not completely die in the first half of the 1970s, rather both were simply repackaged and repurposed for the new American male consumer embracing this new ethos of living a life based on self-fulfillment.

The “leisure suit” vividly represented this new cultural and sartorial sensibility for upscale American men. *Ebony* announced in October 1975 that leisure suits had “established a firm position in the American way of life” in part due to their flexibility and comfort.<sup>32</sup> A leisure suit simply comprised a shirt-jacket and a pair of matching trousers. This suiting style emerged during the 1930s in California and consisted of a casual or relaxed suit made of lightweight fabrics. Originally these “Hollywood suits” were only worn by the elite and remained native to the West Coast. The modern version of the leisure suit developed due to the creation of polyester and other synthetic materials in the 1940s. Men’s professional and leisure attire became increasingly designed for greater comfort and ease during the 1950s and 1960s, laying the foundation for the broader cultural acceptance of this fashion style in the 1970s.<sup>33</sup>

By the 1970s, the typical suit model included a jacket (single or double breasted), a dress shirt fastened by either a tie or bow tie, and matching trousers. Some men even opted to incorporate a vest under their suit jacket which harkened back to the seventeenth-century origins of this clothing style.<sup>34</sup> However, as the institutions,

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<sup>32</sup> *Ebony*, “Fall and Winter Menswear: Fashions that Feature the Pulled Together Look Without Faddish Clutter,” *Ebony* 30 (October 1975): 93.

<sup>33</sup> See <http://people.howstuffworks.com/leisure-suit1.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the history of the suit see Edwards, *Fashion in Focus*; Cally Blackman, *100 Years of Menswear* (London: Laurence King Publishing, Ltd., 2009); Josh Sims, *Icons of Men’s Style* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2011); Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*; Costantino, *Men’s Fashion in the Twentieth Century*; Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*; Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*; Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*; David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity in England, 1550-1850*



manners, and values of mainstream America came under attack, so did their corresponding modes of dress.<sup>35</sup> Many American males pushed to create an alternative type of masculinity that was not equated with economic failure, despair, and convention.

The leisure suit supplied a new form of masculine and sartorial expression for upwardly-mobile, black, white, straight, and gay American men. *Ebony*, *GQ*, and *Esquire* quickly promoted the benefits of donning leisure suit attire to their customers, stressing that these types of garments allowed men to move beyond the typical suit palettes of navy, black, and brown. Color gave men an opportunity to experiment with their body imagery, gender ideals, and masculine personas. Shades once deemed as being too feminine or unmanly materialized in leisure suits challenging time-honored rules associated with masculinity and proper masculine dress. Red, olive, pink, lavender, bright blue, and peach represented just a sample of hue offerings available now to the upscale male.<sup>36</sup> *GQ* endorsed brands like J.S.I. for this very reason. J.S.I. produced shirt-jackets in tones of “seagrass, grey, ice blue, and honey.”<sup>37</sup> The firm Mr. Witt populated many fashion spreads in *Ebony* showcasing their vibrant leisure garments.

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(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); Catherine Hayward and Bill Dunn, *Man About Town: The Changing Image of the Modern Male* (London: Hamlyn, 2001); Alan Flusser, *Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion* (New York: itbooks, 2002); Diana de Marly, *Fashion for Men: An Illustrated History* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1985); Tim Edwards, *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (London: Cassell, 1997); Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Jocks and Nerds: Men's Style in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989); Colin McDowell, *The Man of Fashion: Peacock Males and Perfect Gentlemen* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997); and John Peacock, *Men's Fashion: The Complete Sourcebook* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996). This is not an exhaustive list, just a sample of the noteworthy texts available on this subject matter.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *Fashion in Focus*, 117.

<sup>36</sup> *GQ*, “That Scandinavian Style: Helsinki,” *GQ* 41 (October 1971): 101.

<sup>37</sup> *GQ*, “1970 Design Showcase,” *GQ* 40 (February 1970): 36.

One pictorial featured within the magazine exhibited a patterned leisure shirt in tones of red, maroon, and purple paired with white trousers while another model in the same feature posed in a red leisure suit that consisted of a matching vest, pants, and shirt-jacket that flaunted extremely oversized lapels.<sup>38</sup> Not only did these colors diverge from conventional suit jacket shades, but many shirt-jackets of this period altered standard sleeve lengths and modified the size and shape of lapels and shirt collars. Shirt-jackets, pants, and corresponding leisure attire emphasized exaggerated details, excessive ornamentation, and bold colors which visually contested traditional suiting styles. Additionally, leisure suits typically negated the inclusion of a tie, distancing these pieces even further from standard suiting attire. Men were encouraged instead to loosely tie a scarf around one's neck akin to a piece of jewelry. The conventional suit was being reinterpreted and reinvented for a more youthful, relaxed, and casual male consumer.<sup>39</sup>

Vibrant patterns also distinguished leisure suits from traditional suiting attire. Leisure suits veered away from standard suit patterns like pinstripes and windowpanes done in conventional shades of black, blue, or white. Instead, pattern now encompassed a wide array of designs, motifs, and colorful prints intended to grab attention. Representative of this trend was Carlo Palazzi for Jaeger's cream colored, red diamond pattern, belted, leisure suit that featured a wide collar and deep bottom pockets so characteristic of leisure suit styling during this period.<sup>40</sup> The look of an English country gentleman reverberated in many pictorials including one option by Amies for Esquire

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<sup>38</sup> *Ebony*, "Colorful Stripes, Cool Knits," *Ebony* 25 (April 1970): 142-143.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143. See also *GQ*, "1970 Design Showcase," 36.

<sup>40</sup> *GQ*, "Vieux Carre Town Alive! New Orleans," *GQ* 40 (April 1970): 55.

that consisted of “cranberry,” flared, velvet trousers complimented by a brown and cream tweed shirt-jacket.<sup>41</sup> Velvet also materialized in many leisure suits including a MacGregor form-fitting leisure shirt emblazoned with a “white circle print” against a “vivid green” backdrop worn with “white cotton-velvet slacks” and a skinny white belt.<sup>42</sup> For nights spent out gallivanting on the town, L. Magnami of Parma created a sheer, tapered, purple pinstripe shirt suit accented with a dark blue belt containing a rock crystal buckle that brazenly flaunted the male form.<sup>43</sup>

Patterned leisure suits were meant to attract attention. Men wanted to break free from convention and tradition in both gender roles and masculine dress. Clothiers responded to these needs by producing leisure suits filled with unique graphics and designs such as a tapestry laden leisure shirt-jacket in shades of orange, white, and brown with pinkish-red pants.<sup>44</sup> This extremely body-conscious, open-collared shirt suit definitely garnered a man notice on city streets just as certainly as when he paraded around in a black and white zebra print leisure shirt accessorized with a white belt and dark colored flared trousers. *Ebony* even showed models clad in leisure suits with pattern on both their upper and lower torsos. In one photograph, a black model posed in a white, ruffled, polka dot leisure shirt with equally flashy windowpane pants.<sup>45</sup> *Esquire* promoted patterned leisure suits as necessary components for a “flexible wardrobe” since

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<sup>41</sup> *GQ*, “Three Gentlemen,” *GQ* 41 (September 1971): 101.

<sup>42</sup> Chip Tolbert, “European Fashion Report,” *Esquire* 73 (February 1970): 128.

<sup>43</sup> Chip Tolbert and Max Evans, “The Elegance of Europe, 1970,” *Esquire* 75 (March 1971): 123.

<sup>44</sup> *Esquire*, “It’s that time of year again- resort wear...,” *Esquire* 73 (January 1970): 135.

<sup>45</sup> *Ebony*, “Colorful Stripes, Cool Kints,” 142.

these items were deemed as appropriate for time spent at work or at play. Additionally, leisure suit attire could be mixed and matched with other pieces in a man's closet giving him more fashion choices and opportunities for self-expression in an age of financial and professional uncertainty.<sup>46</sup> Regardless of the color, pattern, or print utilized to cobble together a leisure suit, the irreverent cut, casual nature, and styling of this mode of dress challenged the hegemony of the traditional suit, usurping its value and prestige during this era.

Tunic and vest suits further challenged the accepted dictates of masculine dress. Essentially the vest or tunic suit was a leisure suit except that the shirt-jacket portion morphed into a tunic styled vest with a long, blousy, full sleeve shirt underneath that was sometimes accessorized with a large pilgrim style belt.<sup>47</sup> In 1973 *Esquire* heralded the design and functionality of these shirt suits, announcing that these wearable ensembles symbolized "the ultimate in good looking comfort."<sup>48</sup> Tunic suits came in a variety of colors, patterns, and textures. *Ebony* circulated many examples of eye-catching tunic suits. One Eleganza vest suit combined a checkerboard print vest with polka dots situated on the sleeves of the wide-collared, long sleeve shirt.<sup>49</sup> Pattern abounded in a refined tunic suit by the House of Emmit that consisted of "a herringbone-weave knit in silver-grey"<sup>50</sup> finished off by a striped, wide-collared shirt by Givenchy shown in the

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<sup>46</sup> Tolbert, "European Fashion Report," 109.

<sup>47</sup> *GQ*, "1970 Design Showcase," 38.

<sup>48</sup> *Esquire*, "19 Great Ways to Look," *Esquire* 80 (September 1973): 170.

<sup>49</sup> *Ebony*, "Eleganza advertisement," *Ebony* 26 (January 1971): 24.

<sup>50</sup> *GQ*, "Vieux Carre Town Alive! New Orleans," 55.

pages of *GQ*. Elegance resonated in many tunic suit options circulated by *Esquire* including one that displayed a light blue turtleneck placed underneath Ballantyne's matching "pin-check cashmere" tunic suit.<sup>51</sup> However, matching tunic suits did not need to contain pattern in order to sustain visual interest. Many designers such as Tom Gilroy and Michael Stern produced vested, matching leisure suits in bright yellows and blues accessorized with items like a wide "Ottoman" printed collared shirt and thick pilgrim belts to entice upscale male consumers.<sup>52</sup> An advertisement in *Ebony* for the Mark of International Fashions echoed the popularity and allure of these garments stating, "Anytime, any place, this exciting shirt-suit will set a fashionable pace."<sup>53</sup>

Along with being fashion forward and stylish, vested leisure suits vividly flaunted the male form. The colors, patterns, and body conscious cut of these garments served to draw one's eye to a man's waist, and by extension, the size and firmness of his frame. There was no room for extra girth in these designs. As *Esquire's* fashion editors noted about this style of 1970s menswear, "For the greatest gift that shaping bestows in a man is a certain trimness—a flattening-out of fleshiness, so to speak."<sup>54</sup> Leisure suits not only redefined the visuals and images associated with the traditional suit, but also those of masculinity, thereby giving notice that now men and their bodies were on display in American society.

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<sup>51</sup> Tolbert, "The Elegance of Europe, 1970," 127.

<sup>52</sup> *Esquire*, "19 Great Ways to Look," 114; and *Esquire*, "The Know-How of Knits," *Esquire* 75 (February 1971): 100.

<sup>53</sup> *Ebony*, "IF The Mark of International Fashions," *Ebony* 30 (April 1975): 22.

<sup>54</sup> *Esquire*, "Wearables," *Esquire* 74 (October 1970): 175.

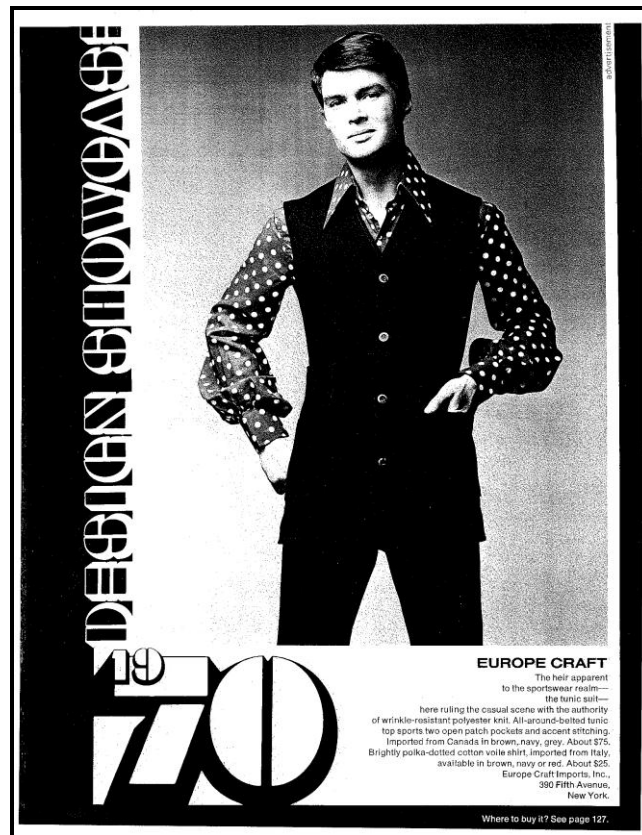


Figure 3. Tunic Leisure Suit.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to leisure suits, the increased popularity of sport coats signified the growing informality of masculine dress. Rather than don a traditional matching two-or-three piece suit, men were now encouraged to outfit themselves in blazers or sport coats with unmatched trousers for work and evenings out. In an ad for the brand Mavest, the promotional text reads, “You only take it off for special occasions, “The Jacket” in new anti-wrinkle knit of 100% DAERON polyester is so comfortable you’ll wear it to any occasion that isn’t black tie.” “The Jacket” came in a candy cane red hue with

<sup>55</sup> *GQ*, “1970 Design Showcase,” 36-38.

contrasting red and white pinstripes. Although the remainder of the ensemble consisted of standard items such as a blue dress shirt tucked into dark slacks, this sport coat definitely negated associations to convention, formality, or the business world.<sup>56</sup>

Historically pinstripes have been utilized on suiting attire, but a traditional banker's suit never contained red and white stripes set against a red background. A blue and white print scarf acting as an ascot removed the need for the inclusion of a tie, further breaking with standard custom. Typical elements of suit design were deliberately being revised, transmitting a more casual and youthful aesthetic in the process.

Sport coats symbolized what *Ebony* called “do it yourself” dressing since they contested the old, conventional mode of buying an already packaged suit set and then picking out a standard white shirt with a dignified, albeit, bland tie.<sup>57</sup> *GQ* specifically advised its readers to step out of the color doldrums when procuring clothing for the business world by selecting a plaid sport coat bursting with shades of peach, orange and lavender. Worn with cuffed and creased peach trousers and a matching vest, this ensemble by Dimitri of Italy made a statement, especially when accented by a peach tie.<sup>58</sup> The corporate male hesitant about integrating shades of peach and lavender into his professional attire was encouraged by *Ebony* to purchase sport coats in tones of brown and mustard yellow, especially if they featured plaids or stripes since these options blended easily into a man's existing wardrobe and spruced up any outfit.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Esquire*, “Advertisement for Mavest,” *Esquire* 73 (April 1970): 42.

<sup>57</sup> *Ebony*, “Anything Goes This Year...,” *Ebony* 26 (April 1971): 127.

<sup>58</sup> *GQ*, “Easing Into Fall,” *GQ* 43 (September 1973): 70.

<sup>59</sup> *Ebony*, “Colorful Stripes, Cool Knits,” 143.

Traditional menswear suit textures and patterns appeared in sport coats, but were updated and modernized to meet the changing tenor of the times. Tweed jackets received a 1970s makeover as reds, oranges, blacks, blues, and purples blended together in sport coats to create a multi-tiered and color dense background.<sup>60</sup> Along with tweed, window pane, a decorative element in men's professional suits for eras, underwent a transformation when applied in tones of red to a two-piece cream colored suit designed by Austin Reed at Regent Street. This "eye-catching design" displayed a slim cut and body-contoured appearance indicative of leisure suits.<sup>61</sup> For men that considered tweed and window pane to be too representative of tradition, magazines endorsed more exotic sport coats as well. One striking example from *Ebony* presented a red ribbed turtleneck placed under a black crocodile print sport coat accented with vivid blue pants by Pierre Cardin.<sup>62</sup> Magazines encouraged their readers to pair these colorful sport coats with equally distinctive and multihued pants emblazoned in paisleys and stripes.<sup>63</sup> This "peacock"<sup>64</sup> manner of dressing reinvented the sartorial rules for the American male.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *GQ*, "The Soft Line: Sport Coats," *GQ* 40 (March 1970): 119.

<sup>61</sup> *Ebony*, "Putting It Together," *Ebony* 27 (September 1972): 154 and 155.

<sup>62</sup> *Ebony*, "What's Goin' On in French Fashions," *Ebony* 27 (November 1971): 195.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. See also *Ebony*, "Anything Goes This Year...", 127.

<sup>64</sup> "Peacock" is derived from the "Peacock Revolution" that occurred in menswear during the 1960s, specifically coming out of England. This revolution was characterized by the infusion of youth, energy, and expression into men's clothing. Designers and clothiers introduced new colors, patterns, and silhouettes at this time to distance their attire from that of traditionalists and previous generations. Men donned accessories, fabrics, and styles that bordered on the feminine or androgynous. Males were ostentatious, daring, and experimental with their mode of dress, even in suits. Men were literally becoming peacocks. See Blackman, *100 Years of Menswear*. The Victoria and Albert Museum's website contains a brief description of this phenomenon at <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/h/history-of-1960s-fashion-and-textiles/>; and FIDM Museum also has a short commentary on this fashion period at <http://blog.fidmmuseum.org/museum/2009/09/my-entry.html>.

<sup>65</sup> *Ebony*, "Anything Goes This Year...", 127.



Sport coats were not the only items to denote this growing atmosphere of informality. Sweater coats or cardigans popped up in many fashion spreads in lieu of conventional jackets which further demonstrated the burgeoning trend towards a more laid back approach to masculine dressing. Cardigans mimicked the look and structure of a sport coat as they too followed the contours of the male body, sharply emphasizing and even enhancing a toned, trim, and streamlined male physique. An overweight male would not be able to successfully wear these types of sweater coats as their boxier cuts and shorter lengths negatively highlighted unwanted extra pounds. *Esquire* showcased a Daniel Hechter cardigan exhibiting varsity stripes at the trim of the collar and at the cuffs of the sleeves. The cardigan was not oversized as it intimately hugged both the model's body and a white and teal check shirt underneath. This sweater simply acted just like a sport coat or jacket would since it kept the model's waistline looking sleek and streamlined.<sup>66</sup> Whether cardigans were outfitted with stripes, polka dots, or bright colors, the message was clear—this was not your father's suiting style. Wearing a cardigan emitted an ease and informality about a person not present in a more visually constricting, conventional suit jacket. Broken up suit combinations with sport coats or cardigans revealed that traditional suit dressing was not truly dead as its components were now being updated and reformulated to meet the needs and standards of a new male consumer and era.

In keeping with the times, traditional-inspired, matching suits were given new color, cut, and fabric treatments to distance themselves from the days of the "Organization Man" and the "squares." This process aided those upwardly-mobile men

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<sup>66</sup> *Esquire*, "Paris Dateline," *Esquire* 79 (February 1973): 110.

teetering precariously between the old and new guard of men's style to update their professional look more comfortably and subtly. *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *Ebony* guided their readers through this transition. For example, inside the pages of *GQ*, the stereotypical gray flannel suit now acquired a peachy-pink pinstripe for extra panache which complimented the peach dress shirt affixed with a striped tie in shades of white, lavender, gold, and vibrant blue under the suit's jacket. A bright green pocket square molded into a flower finished off the overall look.<sup>67</sup> This definitely was not your father's gray flannel suit from the 1950s or the "shapeless suit with vest, white shirt and long narrow tie" so characteristic of the 1960s.<sup>68</sup>

Other classic suit styles underwent alteration by designers as well. *Ebony* showcased International Fashions, Inc., ensembles in established suit patterns such as houndstooth and glen-plaid in seemingly traditional colors as brown, black, and white. These colors and patterns may have been familiar ground for upscale men, but the construction and design of the actual suits were not. One example consisted of a mid-length suit jacket with a belt, two deep oversized side pockets, and two smaller pockets on either side of the chest in a pseudo-leather looking material. The matching, flared suit pants shaped the lower torso to reveal a demi-boot. Instead of wearing a dress shirt and tie with this selection, the model sported a turtleneck that spiced up the look to ward off any vestiges of it being viewed as too "old-fogey"<sup>69</sup> for the times.<sup>70</sup> Along with

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>68</sup> Jason McCloskey, "The Men's Fashion Revolt: Aquarius Rising," *GQ* 40 (March 1970): 108.

<sup>69</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 118.

<sup>70</sup> *Ebony*, "Putting It Together," 154.

houndstooth and glen-plaid, firms modified the famous windowpane suit. Franklin Bober's two-piece windowpane suit superficially connected to the days of old, but on closer inspection, the windowpane was done in a very unorthodox brown and steel grey color combination. *GQ* proclaimed of this creation, "Aficionados of avant-garde fashion will revere the design eloquence of the boldly window-paned suit. By one of America's leading young designers, it is dedicated to young men who seek individuality in their dress." This Franklin Bober Collection suit displayed a "waist suppression of the jacket" with matching body skimming pants.<sup>71</sup> These suits showcased in *Ebony* and *GQ*, moved away from the draped look of the 1950s and 1960s, showing more of an awareness of a man's body and form.

Even the iconic double breasted suit was modified and altered for the modern, upscale, male consumer. Double breasted suiting attire embraced a whole new adventurous color palette with suit versions crafted in bright and blinding hues like lime green splashed across the pages of *Ebony*.<sup>72</sup> *Esquire* circulated advertisements from firms such as Curlee that marketed equally colorful attire including a white, two-piece, double breasted suit that garnered much attention due to the bright orange, gray, yellow, blue, white, and black stripe shirt and orange tie peeking out underneath the suit jacket. Curlee insists, "The cut is close and clean...Great medicine for you this spring."<sup>73</sup> Color was not the only antidote for a man's blues. In addition to color, companies modified the design of the traditional double breasted suit placing the jacket's buttons on a diagonal to

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<sup>71</sup> *GQ*, "1970 Design Showcase," 30.

<sup>72</sup> *Ebony*, "Colorful Stripes, Cool Knits," 151.

<sup>73</sup> *Esquire*, "Advertisement for Curlee," *Esquire* 75 (May 1971): 18.

showcase a bit of whimsy and flair that complimented the standard 1970s details of wide lapels and deep pockets. This version of the power suit in *GQ* also featured pleated trousers, a striped shirt, and a similarly striped tie.<sup>74</sup> The original intent of the matching, traditional suit had been subverted and redefined for a new era that did not see salvation and worth in the worlds of business or politics. Moreover, suits like these highlighted a slim, trim, and well-proportioned male physique looking for more notice, acclaim, and visibility in updated, brightly hued, and slimly cut suit ensembles.

Men's traditional-inspired suits also received an infusion of color and pattern. Fashion spreads in *GQ* showed many daring, matching two-piece suit offerings such as a bright orange, almost tangerine, suit by Paul Ressler<sup>75</sup> and a bold green velvet suit by ES Aubrey.<sup>76</sup> Numerous colorful suit options materialized within *Ebony* including a two-piece, midi-length, burgundy suit with exaggerated wide lapels worn with matching, flared trousers. As if this suit did not contain enough visual interest, a pink, paisley vest was placed on top of a gray and green wide-collared dress shirt fastened with a red tie.<sup>77</sup> Paisley fabrics and jacquard prints surfaced quite frequently on matching suiting attire like vests at this time.<sup>78</sup> Tartan plaids proved equally popular, receiving a makeover within magazines like *Esquire* as plaids combined hues of pink, peach, light blue, green, and white instead of the time-honored red, white, brown, and black combinations found

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<sup>74</sup> *GQ*, "The Soft-Line: Suits," *GQ* 40 (March 1970): 80.

<sup>75</sup> *GQ*, "Resorting to Elegance," *GQ* 43 (Winter 1973): 102.

<sup>76</sup> *GQ*, "Three Gentlemen," 91.

<sup>77</sup> *Ebony*, "Black Men's Flamboyant Fashions," *Ebony* 27 (August 1972): 158.

<sup>78</sup> *Ebony*, "The Mark of International Fashion Advertisements," *Ebony* 28 (April 1973): 30; and *GQ*, "Vieux Carre," 106.

on conventional matching suit ensembles.<sup>79</sup> *Ebony* endorsed this type of masculine dress declaring, “Fashions today reflect the personality of the individual rather than the pressures of society to conform.”<sup>80</sup> Standing out, rather than blending in, was the new sartorial battle cry for the upwardly-mobile 1970s American male.

Magazines like *Esquire* further warned their male readers that it was not enough to simply add a dose of bold color to a suit jacket and pants. *Esquire*’s editors declared that vibrant colors should be incorporated into all aspects of the professional male’s work wardrobe, including dress shirts. Dress shirts appeared in a range of colors including lilacs, pinks, and oranges. Striped or printed shirts were deemed “as functional as they are flamboyant” whether they flaunted pink and white or blue and red stripes or even geometric patterns against a background of greens, purples, and blues.<sup>81</sup> Patterned shirts like these were coordinated with patterned ties as well. According to *Esquire*, “The solid white shirt has yielded place to a whole palette of rainbow hues, even in once-stuffy Wall Street offices, even after dark on occasions of a certain small formality.” Moreover, as the fashion editors argued, “In shirts it has reached the point where there is no longer any clear-cut distinction between what is appropriate for the counting house and what for casual wear.”<sup>82</sup>

Unconventional colors, prints, and patterns on traditional-inspired suit ensembles reflected the cultural climate in America. Businessmen were continually encouraged in

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<sup>79</sup> *Esquire*, “It’s that time of the year again—resort wear,” 129.

<sup>80</sup> *Ebony*, “Black Men’s Flamboyant Fashions,” 156.

<sup>81</sup> *Esquire*, “Wearables: Shirts to Make Daisy Buchanan Shed a Tear or Two,” *Esquire* 74 (August 1970): 115.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

men's magazines to move past standard office looks and suit apparel and embrace a more colorful and exuberant approach to professional dressing. An ad for Worsted-Tex's "The Magnate Stripes" line in *Esquire* proclaimed, "In business, people do judge a book by its cover. So we've reshaped the single-breasted business suit with new vitality, new spark. We've widened lapels, paired down the waist, taken stripes out of the dark ages."<sup>83</sup> Their chosen image projecting this new aesthetic was a charcoal gray two-piece suit that exuded a bold red, spread out, chalk stripe. A plaid dress shirt in reds and pinks complemented the maroon and white polka dot tie also worn by the male model. The patterns, cut, and design of these garments embodied the notion that these were now "Clothes that fit the times."<sup>84</sup>

The bright lilac, shocking lime green, soft peach, and intense red suits of the early 1970s exuded a vibrancy and brightness that contrasted sharply with the cultural mood of the times. After the turbulent era of the 1960s that saw liberation movements, militancy, riots, and assassinations, many people wanted to simply escape from the dreariness of life around them through their clothing. Dress gave people a sense of security and promise in times of confusion and uncertainty. Men's magazines like *GQ* realized the soothing effect fashions had on the male consumer, commenting, "Clothes that feel good on are a natural high. They excite the senses while they elevate the spirit. They're soothing to the touch while enveloping you in a heady, contagious glow."<sup>85</sup>

Along with providing feelings of security and ease, men's clothing harkened

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<sup>83</sup> *Esquire*, "Advertisement for Worsted-Tex," *Esquire* 74 (October 1970): 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>85</sup> *GQ*, "Clad to Be Happy," *GQ* 45 (Winter 1975-1976): 134.

back to times filled with more optimism, hope, and innocence. Details such as wide collars and exaggerated lapels in addition to the tighter fitting nature of these body conscious designs mimicked aspects of children's clothing. Many of these features and embellishments actually made the male body smaller in size and scope. Fashions revealed men's inner desire to leave adulthood for childhood when life had the potential to be so much brighter and wondrous. Just look at all the colors and shades used in combination together--greens, yellows, oranges, purples, blues, and reds--almost every color in a Crayola crayon box came to be included in men's suits and corresponding accessories. Bright and bold colors were mixed equally alongside a cornucopia of prints and patterns. Alison Lurie argues, "Color in dress is also like tone of voice in speech in that it can completely alter the meaning of what is 'said' by other aspects of the costume's style, fabric, and trimmings."<sup>86</sup>

For some men, colorful attire also reflected racial pride and ancestry. Pairing pinks together with lime green and lavender with reds and oranges in suit styles is not necessarily conventional or typical. However, combining seemingly unrelated hues and palettes against a mixture of textures and styles does equate with a clothing tradition that dates back to the slave era in America. For *Ebony* readers, this was familiar sartorial ground. Historians Shane White and Graham White revealed in *Stylin': African-American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* that female slaves regularly made their clothing from a mix of materials that consisted of different shapes, patterns, and textures woven together into a recognizable garment. To the eyes of white society, the shock of colors, fabrics, and weaves appeared unrefined and "clashed

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<sup>86</sup> Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, 182.

violently.” However, this West African technique yielded a quilt-like effect that symbolized a “framework for conceptualizing African-American history.”<sup>87</sup> This type of bricolage, or incorporating elements from African and American cultures and their corresponding fashions, survived in the styles pictured in *Ebony* and worn by upwardly-mobile black men in the 1970s.

Black masculine dress presented in *Ebony* appeared to mirror and echo the attire showcased in magazines like *GQ* and *Esquire* that were geared more towards a white male consumer. This reflected, according to scholar Christopher Booker, the premise that, “Black masculinity in America has always been influenced by the prevalent forms of masculinity of white America.”<sup>88</sup> Both white and black upscale males experimented with bold color, pattern, and fabric choices at this time. However, there was another meaning behind the use of such items for the *Ebony* male. By the early 1970s, black men witnessed the fruits born out of the civil rights movement. Due to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, thousands of black men and women would be able to cast their ballot for the first time, unimpeded. Over night registration nearly “doubled” along with many black officials being elected into office. Carl Stokes, the first African American mayor of a large U.S. city, took office in Cleveland in 1967, laying the foundation for other black men to acquire offices of great cultural and social significance.<sup>89</sup> In terms of employment, black men received ample assistance in combating workplace

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<sup>87</sup> Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin’: African-American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 30.

<sup>88</sup> Christopher B. Booker, *“I Will Wear No Chain!”: A Social History of African American Males* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), ix.

<sup>89</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies*, 54-55.



discrimination evidenced by the \$111 million budget granted to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by the end of the decade.<sup>90</sup> The political, legislative, and economic walls of segregation had started to come crumbling down.

Moreover, historian Bruce Schulman explains that by the 1970s, "...the rise of the black middle class offered the most dramatic evidence of racial progress. Over the last thirty years, the number of black families officially labeled as "Affluent" by the Census Bureau—with household incomes exceeding \$50,000—mushroomed by more than 400 percent."<sup>91</sup> Rather than don the confrontational garb of the Black Panthers and espouse complete separatism, some black men gravitated towards wearing brightly colored and unconventional suits that revealed their desire to participate in the greater American culture as both men and consumers, while still maintaining and espousing their version of black pride. Demonstrative leisure suiting did not signify the standard suit of yore that radiated masculine energy and attributes associated with a traditional masculinity grounded in notions of men as providers and protectors, two roles that were historically denied societal recognition to black men regardless of their class, educational, or professional status. This new suiting attire dramatically announced the arrival of the new upwardly-mobile black male who was not willing to sit in the shadows and accept meager acknowledgment, approval, and praise from white society only if he lived according to that group's terms and conditions. This was a marked divergence from the visuals, images, and symbols associated with the civil rights era of the 1950s and early 1960s when leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., instructed activists to

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 55.

radiate respectability, civility, and propriety in speech, dress, and behaviors.<sup>92</sup> This meant adhering to the ideals and tenets accepted by the normative culture in order to further their cause.<sup>93</sup> To this end, male activists wore dignified, traditional-inspired suiting ensembles while their female counterparts donned typical feminine garb such as dresses and skirts to advocate for integration and assimilation in white America's institutions and systems.

Black men tried to erase old stereotypes assigned to themselves, their race, and their bodies by donning traditional suiting attire. Historically, since the days of slavery in America, black men have been identified, defined, and objectified by their bodies. Words like savage, animal, and creature historically characterized the black male and his body. Black men were pictured either as beasts of burden or hypersexual beasts intent on unleashing their abundant sexuality on white women.<sup>94</sup> These images retained remarkable longevity and currency even in modern America.

The suit offerings displayed in magazines like *Ebony* during the early 1970s broke away from these socially imposed boundaries and negative stereotypes. Black men proudly donned updated suits crafted with multiple patterns like houndstooth and herringbone one day, while opting to wear suiting attire awash in bright tones of red and yellow the next. The black male frame radiated a new sense of confidence and pride in tunic suits saturated with polka dots and plaids. Fashion spreads geared towards the

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<sup>92</sup> Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith, eds., *Gender and the Civil Right Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 78.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>94</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 27.

upscale black male showcased jackets crafted in animal skins or exotic motifs reminiscent of far away lands. Sometimes multiple patterns existed within the same suiting ensemble or even on the same suiting component as paisleys, plaids, and geometric shapes supplied a multi-tiered and extremely decorative masculine visual. Even the length of some suit jackets and shirt suits designed for black males challenged conventional rules as some garments were of a midi-or maxi-length which was longer than the average suit jacket for even this time. These suit styles and corresponding attire symbolized an “aliveness,” a “rhythmic complexity,” and “vibrancy” which were integral components to linking past and present African American culture and history.<sup>95</sup>

The colors, cut, and patterns worn by black men drew attention to their bodies and frames. White upscale men also embraced unique patterns and vivid colors. However, black men consistently gravitated towards dress that was a bit more vivid, colorful, and graphic. Suing attire acted as a vehicle for self-esteem, racial pride, and positive societal affirmation for the African American male. Academic Richard Majors contends, “Clothes help the black male attract attention and enhance his self-image. After all, in a society that has kept blacks invisible, it is not surprising that seemingly flamboyant clothes might be worn to heighten visibility.”<sup>96</sup> Flamboyant described many fashion styles promoted to black male consumers including an unconventional two-piece suit with extremely wide, cuffed trousers and a short, bolero-like jacket with rounded, exaggeratedly wide lapels accented by a paisley dress shirt.<sup>97</sup> Clothing like this imparted

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<sup>95</sup> White and White, *Stylin'*, 83.

<sup>96</sup> Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), 80. See also White and White, *Stylin'*, 176.

<sup>97</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for The Mark of International Fashion,” *Ebony* 28 (February 1973): 24A.

a sense of agency and power to the black male. Upwardly-mobile black men suited up just as their white peers did to face the political, cultural, and economic challenges existing in the nation.

Suits expressed the upscale male's innermost fears and concerns about the society in which he lived.<sup>98</sup> Whether a man wore a leisure suit, a broken up suit, or a more classic, matching two-or-three piece suit, the cut of the garments attempted to "contour and sculpture the body."<sup>99</sup> The human body appeared more visible through slim fitting and tapered suit jackets paired with close fitting pants. In October 1970, *Esquire* "estimated that more than ninety percent of the men's coats—suit, sport, even outer—now in the stores are shaped."<sup>100</sup> The wide lapels featured on jackets also served to reveal more of the upper torso since they opened up the chest. Jackets lacked an enormous amount of padding at this time, eschewing visuals associated with strength and brawn in favor of a more natural and authentic presentation of the male body underneath layers of cotton polyester or wool flannel. As *Esquire* proclaimed, "A jacket molded to the lines of the body is far more becoming than one that hangs like a sack."<sup>101</sup> A man's waist was emphasized through the use of belts and design elements that tapered a jacket inward. The male body visually symbolized the authenticity, control, and order that citizens wished existed in a world where the economy spun out of control, the federal budget grew larger and larger, and traditions seemed obsolete. The tighter fit to pants,

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<sup>98</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*, 125.

<sup>99</sup> *Ebony*, "Black Men's Flamboyant Fashions," 156.

<sup>100</sup> *Esquire*, "Wearables," 175.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

shirts, and jackets contrasted with the gross enormity of the economic, social, and political issues that could not be tamed, reeled in, or seemingly reduced. Skinnier cuts reflected the leaner economic times men faced. Men did not have yards of extra fabric or padding to put on like armor for daily battle. They were more vulnerable now.

Men's bodies appeared vulnerable without excess pounds or yards of fabric, but the reality was that only firm, trim bodies looked appropriate in the suiting styles of the early 1970s. Words and phrases like tapered, trim, firm, shaped, and waist-suppression were commonplace in fashion spreads and advertisements in men's magazines. *Ebony* commonly reserved space within its pages to promote products such as the STA-TRIM Waist Belt that propagated a toned and streamlined male frame. STA-TRIM exhorted *Ebony's* readers to, "Trim That Waistline!!! The STA-TRIM waist belt is a ruggedly constructed non-porous belt that covers the entire waist area, causing it to perspire with the slightest exertion." For \$398, consumers would not only receive this leather girdle-like device, but also instructions and a detailed exercise program.<sup>102</sup>

*Esquire* subscribers were also familiar with many waist slimming mechanisms. For instance, readers might be tempted to purchase the "Relax-A-Cizer."<sup>103</sup> This item consisted of several pads placed onto the male body that were subsequently hooked up to a radio-looking machine that when operational, caused the pads to vibrate and move.<sup>104</sup> *GQ* and *Esquire* both featured similar product placements, including one for "The Sauna Belt" described as "The Fastest, Most Effective Waistline Reducer Ever Discovered!"

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<sup>102</sup> *Ebony*, "Advertisement for STA-TRIM," *Ebony* 26 (January 1971): 108.

<sup>103</sup> *Esquire*, "Advertisement for Relax-A-Cizer," *Esquire* 73 (March 1970): 81.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

The device was akin to a thick white bandage that a man wrapped around his waistline while exercising rigorously for several minutes. Users were instructed to leave the belt on for another twenty minutes while at rest in order to allow the belt to continue downsizing the male physique. This process required some commitment as it needed to be replicated for three consecutive days and then only every two to three days a week until an individual reached their desired weight or waistline goals.<sup>105</sup> *GQ* readers knew of other types of weight loss gadgets such as the Isotoner by Avis “snugsuit.”<sup>106</sup> According to the retailer Bergdorf Goodman, this mechanism acted as, “An energetic second skin to work on the first, tone your muscles, give you a sort of on-the-go massage. It’s the great new wave in body works—the Isotoner by Avis, a snugsuit of determined nylon spandex that partners with Isotoner Motion Cream...keeps a man in shape under anything from golf togs to tie-and-tails.”<sup>107</sup> The shirt portion of this suit came in white or black with the bottom half of the contraption available in black or beige.<sup>108</sup>

For those men with neither the time nor inclination to utilize these types of weight-loss devices, magazines offered alternate routes to achieving a slimmer build. The easiest method to achieving a slimmer torso consisted of wearing specific articles of clothing configured to hold in or compress worrisome areas of the body. “The Silver/Gulfstream Self Sizer” sold at Carson Pirie Scott was labeled as “America’s most

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<sup>105</sup> *GQ*, “Advertisement for The Sauna Belt,” *GQ* 40 (March 1970): 147; and *Esquire*, “Advertisement for The Sauna Belt,” *Esquire* 73 (March 1970): 171.

<sup>106</sup> *GQ*, “Bergdorf Goodman Advertisement for Isotoner,” *GQ* 41 (October 1971): 84.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

comfortable belt loop trouser. The unique Self Sizer feature automatically adjusts the waistband to your waist, whether you gain or lose a few pounds. That means a trim neat appearance all the time.”<sup>109</sup> For men worried their Silver/Gulfstream Self Sizer trousers simply would not do enough to hold in unwanted weight and flab, firms produced foundational garments equipped to calm men’s fears. The company Mandate announced that men could “look better, feel younger, whatever shape you’re in!” by wearing their selection of technologically advanced underwear that came in an array of options including briefs and boxers. One advertisement read, “Mandate! Support underwear that slims.”<sup>110</sup> Snugsuits, leather girdles, and binding underwear gave the 1970s male added assistance in presenting a trim, slender, and streamlined physique.

Excess weight and bulging biceps simply did not equate with the times. Nor did it fit this upwardly-mobile, class based, body ideal. According to *GQ* the proper, elegant body of the day “is flat-bellied and long-muscled like a swimmer’s since the fashions of the Seventies leave no room for bulging biceps.”<sup>111</sup> Upscale males were given instructions by magazines on just how best to achieve this look. *GQ* regularly featured articles on maintaining a pleasant appearance and appropriate body shape typically found in the “Grooming” section of the periodical. In the March 1970 issue, the article “The Fitness Palace” discussed the latest trends in working out since health clubs burst onto the scene with increased frequency during the 1960s. Editors offered advice on topics ranging from how to select the right gym to deciphering new exercise routines.

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<sup>109</sup> *GQ*, “Carson Pirie Scott Advertisement for Silver/Gulfstream Self Sizer,” *GQ* 40 (March 1970): 16.

<sup>110</sup> *GQ*, “Advertisement for Mandate!,” *GQ* 40 (February 1970): 11.

<sup>111</sup> *GQ*, “In Pursuit of Elegance: The Elegant Body,” *GQ* 43 (Winter 1973-1974): 54.

According to *GQ*, the best new exercises for men included “dynamics, aerobics, isometrics and the current rage, jogging.”<sup>112</sup> None of these activities would bulk up the male frame or add extra weight to it, be it as fat or muscle, since they are all designed to create longer and leaner bodies.

However, for those men worried that these types of fitness were just too strenuous to undertake on a recurring basis, *GQ* endorsed other types of physical exertion such as yoga. Greg Brodsky claims, “The nice point about yoga is that it’s relaxing and feeds your body instead of tearing it down to build it up. If you want to feel good after exercising, instead of sore and tired, yoga should be looked into.”<sup>113</sup> Yoga was an individualistic sporting endeavor that meshed well with this era of countercultural influences, youth, and self-discovery. Although a centuries old practice, yoga permitted men to partake of an activity not deemed traditional or conventional by the Western mindset even though during the 1970s, Eastern medicines, therapies, and activities were becomingly increasingly utilized and available to the mainstream masses. Yoga was not akin to long-established American sports like hockey, baseball, or football. In an age where men looked around and saw cultural malaise, uncertainty, and societal failure, yoga acted as a band-aid to cover man’s psychic wounds as it provided immediate gratification and a path towards self-fulfillment. Similar to clothing, yoga supplied men with feelings of ease, comfort, and security. They had control over this physical process and their bodies during it, just as they did with the attire they chose to display on a daily basis. And, it helped that magazines like *Ebony* made certain to acknowledge that

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<sup>112</sup> *GQ*, “The Fitness Palace” *GQ* 40 (March 1970): 38.

<sup>113</sup> Greg Brodsky, “No Strain Exercises: Hatha Yoga Relaxes You Into Fitness,” *GQ* 41 (October 1971): 65.



popular athletic stars such as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar practiced yoga, thereby giving this ancient activity a bit more cache and legitimacy.

While magazines approved of active pursuits like yoga and aerobics to reshape a man's form, they also reported on more passive ways of body manipulation. Writer George A. Mazzei introduced interested males to fat reducing techniques cultivated at Eric Bernard's Trim-a-way Salon in New York City. Mazzei relayed how men were guided into wearing a contraption that was akin to "coveralls" as they proceeded to "stylishly zipper up both legs to the neck. Then, looking like a spaceman and feeling like a tree trunk (it is impossible to bend even slightly from the waist once you're wrapped), you're led to one of the couches."<sup>114</sup> After ninety minutes on these pseudo-waterbed structures, the "excess fat is compressed and flattened."<sup>115</sup> Mazzei acknowledges, "In practical terms, you see that you're slightly narrower, and the proof is in your pants."<sup>116</sup> Although these treatments required follow-up visits and diet monitoring, they bequeathed to the American male a means to cope with and adjust to modern life. Just as the presidents and American citizens saw the limits of good government, economic growth, and prosperity, the human body internalized this "era of limits"<sup>117</sup> through slimmer suit styles and modes of dress achieved through isometrics, hatha yoga, and beauty treatments.

Suit styles displayed this new "era of limits," but they also simultaneously

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<sup>114</sup> George A. Mazzei, "Flattening Fat: Trimming Your Waistline Without Lifting a Finger," *GQ* 41 (October 1971): 152.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>117</sup> Collins, *More*, 100.

signified changing gender roles and cultural definitions of masculinity.<sup>118</sup> The success of the women's movement and feminism made Americans reflect on conventional expectations of what it meant to be a man and woman in this new era. If women could dress more masculine and take on traditionally masculine roles and behaviors without losing their femininity, men started to wonder if they too could change too. Gender roles and ideals appeared more and more to be socially constructed entities and not biologically generated traits. This development opened up a greater dialogue and examination of what defined masculinity and American manhood.<sup>119</sup>

Gay liberation also challenged traditionally-held definitions and beliefs about American manhood. Bruce Schulman maintains, "Straight men could 'soften' themselves without fearing they might be labeled effeminate or latent homosexuals. They could become less aggressive, more sensitive, more concerned about their appearance, their feelings, and their relationships."<sup>120</sup> Sexuality was no longer solely confined to the binary structure of heterosexual and homosexual by the early 1970s. American men in general were now free to experiment with adopting new personas and masculine behaviors through their clothing in order to find just the right psychological, emotional, and physical fit. Modifying standard suiting attire simply allowed the upscale male to embrace, challenge, and negotiate these new cultural expectations and changing gender ideals. The casual and relaxed nature of leisure suits symbolized this cultural shift. In addition, the vibrant colors and unconventional patterns present in leisure suits

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>119</sup> See Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Schulman, *The Seventies*, for more on this topic.

<sup>120</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies*, 180-181.

and modernized suiting attire permitted men to experiment with accepted dictates of manly dress. Men flirted with traditionally deemed feminine shades and prints without risk of excess condemnation. The conservative, traditional, two-or-three-piece suit, a symbol of the patriarchal and capitalistic systems of the west, came under fire in America.<sup>121</sup>

Many gay men, as was the case with their straight, white and black counterparts, eschewed conventional suiting attire choosing instead to embrace the growing trend towards more casual dressing. This was a marked departure from the buttoned up styles and conservative dress publicized by the homophile movement of the 1950s.<sup>122</sup> Such dress showed the greater world that gay men and women were just like other respectable, orderly, and law-abiding Americans who wanted respect, recognition, and guarantees of protections before the law in much the same manner as the civil rights movement demanded for black Americans. Homophile activists shied away from flamboyant dress so as to move past historic associations that linked homosexuality with the feminine and effeminacy.<sup>123</sup>

Due to the dissemination of countercultural influences and the growing visibility of the gay liberation movement across America, gay men realized they were no longer beholden to time-honored and accepted dictates associated with masculine behaviors, ideals, and even attire. Fashion scholar Shaun Cole argues, “Once fashion, in general,

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<sup>121</sup> Tim Edwards discusses the idea that feminists dislike the male suit as it is a symbol of capitalism and patriarchy in a few of his texts, including “Executive Looks: Masculinity, Sexuality, and the Suit,” The University of Leicester Discussion Papers in Sociology, no.S00/2 (April 2000).

<sup>122</sup> Cole, *‘Don We Now Our Gay Apparel’*, 60.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

began embracing flamboyance and effeminacy, gay men could dress in a less restrained way and not necessarily be condemned as homosexuals.”<sup>124</sup> For too long gay men lived under the premise that they were not real men or true standard bearers of masculinity due to their sexuality. The suit, a symbol that once negated the difference between the worlds of homosexual and heterosexual men, came under attack by many gay men.

Upscale gay men were no different than their straight, black and white counterparts in revising the structure and look of the suit. *The Advocate* regularly featured fashion advice, information, and guidance that advanced this perspective. For instance, in the fall of 1970, fashion editor Larry D. Drane in his “Fashionation” column endorsed the proliferation of what he termed the “non-suit.” According to Drane, “This is a complete outfit consisting of pants and matching vest or jacket.”<sup>125</sup> Basically the “non-suit” was akin to the leisure or tunic suit popular in *Ebony*, *GQ*, and *Esquire* at this time. The jacket was essentially a form-fitting leisure shirt-jacket or pseudo-sweater coat that simply followed the contours of the male body, drawing particular emphasis on a man’s waistline due to the inclusion of a waist-defining belt. While Drane acknowledged that the traditional suit was not completely eradicated, he underscored the notion that leisure suiting or the “non-suit” style was now the proper and trendy way to dress for the upscale, gay, professional male.<sup>126</sup>

Jumpsuits were also promoted as suitable attire for the upwardly-mobile gay male. In a fall 1970 “Fashionation” column in *The Advocate*, Larry D. Drane advised

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>125</sup> Larry D. Drane, “Fashionation,” *The Advocate* 16 (September 30-October 13, 1970): 13.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 13.

readers that the jumpsuit was “the anytime casual look” for both young and older gay men alike. Drane explained, “For the mature man, the jumpsuit is usually belted at the waist. The functional purpose of the belt is not to hold the pants up, obviously, but rather to hold the pants in, as this type of jumper has excess fabric at the waist to fit the mature body that comes in a variety of waist sizes. Not everyone can maintain his slender figure after 30.”<sup>127</sup> However, this causal item simultaneously appealed to a younger gay male since, “For the young man whose vanity dictates his taste, there are jumpsuits that are made to fit the body closely. These usually come in stretch or semi-stretch fabrics and, because of this, are more expensive than the other jumpsuits.”<sup>128</sup> Jumpers, just as with leisure suiting, highlighted a man’s waistline, giving the impression that a man’s shape was lean and tight. There was no extra room for unwanted pounds in a one-piece jumpsuit since any unwanted girth simply exaggerated the visual produced by those yards of cloth. Sartorial items like jumpsuits evoked images of play for gay men by their mere design alone.

Many gay men gravitated towards other articles of masculine dress representative of this trend towards youthful exuberance and play. Collared shirts in colors ranging from “bright cherry red to burnt orange and sky blue” cloaked the frames of many upscale gay men.<sup>129</sup> Large flowers and geometric prints adorned ties affixed to very large and oversized collars. Long, pointed collars and lapels figured regularly into

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<sup>127</sup> Larry D. Drane, “Fashionation: Jumpers Abound,” *The Advocate* 18 (October 28-November 10, 1970): 27. Jumpsuits did appear in *Ebony* and *GQ* at this time but not on the same level as in *The Advocate*.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>129</sup> Larry D. Drane, “Fashionation: More shapes and flares for fall,” *The Advocate* 68 (September 15-September 28, 1971); Larry D. Drane, “Fashionation: Fashions Still Wild and Unruly,” *The Advocate* 60 (May 26-June 8, 1971): 21.

fashion discussions in *The Advocate* along with instructions on how to best utilize fabrics such as velvet and corduroy for day and evening wear.<sup>130</sup> Even t-shirts emblazoned with comic book characters and superheroes became popular articles of gay masculine dress.<sup>131</sup> Exuberant and informal dress signified changing attitudes about gay men and how gay men visualized themselves amidst American society.

Clothing like this correlated directly to an individual's childhood or adolescence. While straight males might have embraced wearing oversized collars and vibrant colors as a means to retreat into the security of clothing that suggested a more pleasant and optimistic future, gay men enveloped their bodies in casual clothing reminiscent of childhood and adolescence in a manner of defiance. Abandoning rigid dress and conventional attire went hand in hand with removing self-hatred and stigmas associated with one's sexuality or sexual orientation. Full social and cultural acceptance was not yet to be had, but visible steps towards these goals surfaced especially once the psychiatric profession removed homosexuality as a mental illness from its annals.<sup>132</sup> Although historically "bright colours and tight-fitting clothing had traditionally been associated with homosexuality," during the early 1970s, these negative stereotypes were transformed into positive tools of self-actualization for the upscale gay male.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Drane, "Fashionation: Fashion Still Wild and Unruly," 21.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>132</sup> See Berkowitz's *Something Happened* and Schulman's *The Seventies* for more information on the progress, issues, and dilemmas faced by the gay rights and gay liberations groups in the 1960s and early 1970s. Also review Martin Levine's edited collection of essays called *Gay Men: The Sociology of Male Homosexuality* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979). These are just a few sample texts on this matter.

<sup>133</sup> Cole, 'Don We Now Our Gay Apparel', 72.

Even though casual attire like non-suits and jumpsuits was promoted to the gay male community, cowboy dress also gained prominence during this period as well. The growing popularity and pervasiveness of cowboy imagery and its attire signaled the arrival of the clone.<sup>134</sup> The clone symbolized a type of macho masculinity that surfaced right after the Stonewall riots of 1969. This gay masculinity was rooted and demonstrated through sex and sexual culture, linking manhood here with sexual prowess.<sup>135</sup> Traditionally masculine garments suggestive of the cowboy displayed participation in and acceptance of this new clone culture.

So what did the clone and gay macho masculinity actually look like? Typically clones were white and came from a middle class or above socio-economic bracket.<sup>136</sup> In terms of body shape, clones projected a toned and muscled physique earned through many long hours spent in the gym or weight room.<sup>137</sup> Clones did not utilize clothing to obscure their forms, rather clothing served as a means to attract male attention and attraction. Shaun Cole describes the clone uniform as, “Form-fitting Levi’s and T-shirts hugged the body, revealing the contours of genitals, buttocks, and musculature. These features were often highlighted by not wearing underwear, wallets or shirts. Some men even left the top or bottom button of their Levi’s undone, in part to signal sexual

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>135</sup> Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1-2. The gay clone will also be discussed in the next chapter as well. The early 1970s witnessed the birth and emergence of this phenomenon. The mid to later 1970s see a greater visibility if not explosion of this image in words and print even if this clone not represent all gay men in actuality.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 7.

availability, and in part to suggest that their genitals were so large they had popped a button through sheer size.”<sup>138</sup> Clone dress reflected elements of the working class since more androgynous and flamboyant fashions for gay men were historically linked to the upper class elements of society in the tradition of men like Oscar Wilde.<sup>139</sup> The clone wanted to challenge these past stereotypes and figures.

The clone image materialized at the same time that gay liberation grew more militant and confrontational, with tangible changes being made in the political, economic, and social institutions of the nation towards greater acceptance and recognition of homosexuality. In stark contrast to claims of effeminacy and “swish” leveled against their population for the better part of a century, many gay men slowly chose to embrace a more masculine and tough looking outer persona, enveloping their bodies in clothing styles evocative of traditional American masculinity in order to assert their claim towards recognition as real American men irrespective of their sexuality.<sup>140</sup> The clone image became so pervasive and widely adopted, that it truly emerged as a uniform that upscale gay male were expected to embrace and project.

Cowboys represented the tough, physical, domineering, virile American masculinity clone culture valued. The cowboy was one of the first masculine archetypes young boys were schooled about and tried to emulate. In *The Advocate*’s first issue of 1971, the magazine instructed its readers that western-inspired clothing like flared

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<sup>138</sup> Cole, ‘*Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*’, 95-96. See also Levine, *Gay Macho*, as he describes the clone in a similar way. Levine said of the clone on page 7, “He wore blue-collar garb—flannel shirts over muscle-T-shirts, Levi 501s over work boots, bomber jackets over hooded sweatshirts.”

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.



trousers was growing in popularity. Subsequent fashion spreads and columns revealed that it was the foremost fashion style for gay men. In addition, advertisements for stores, saloons, and playhouses in *The Advocate* regularly included men dressed as cowboys or at the very least, artistic renderings of men in cowboy-inspired clothing to entice potential consumers.<sup>141</sup> The cowboy look was noticeably recognizable and its symbolism understood by the larger gay community.

But, what is the cowboy look exactly? Robert Bryan explains, “As fanciful as it may appear, the true cowboy’s garb is strictly functional, from his ten-gallon Stetson hat to block the sun to his high-heeled boot to hold the stirrup. In between, he wears a utilitarian bandanna, a plaid flannel shirt, a hand-tooled leather belt, rugged chaps, and durable denim dungarees, all requisite for his cattle-punching duties.”<sup>142</sup> Although the actual era of the cowboy had come and gone, gay men resurrected the visuals associated with this masculine icon, appropriating what had been utilitarian work wear into expressions now of masculine identity formation. Upscale gay men living in a city did not need to throw on denim jeans or a Stetson hat to combat the heat and dust after a long day on a cattle drive, but rather, they wore these sartorial items to demonstrate their masculinity, self-imposed masculine persona, and sexuality. Western clothing was in vogue once again, albeit, exhibiting slightly different shapes, cuts, and colors.

Masculinity exuded from these garments. Fashion editor Larry D. Drane comments, “The hand-tailored look is definitely western. Form-fit is a cowboy way of

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<sup>141</sup> For a few examples of this see *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for Tinder Box NYC,” *The Advocate* 107 (March 14, 1973): 12; *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for Coronet Theatre Playhouse,” *The Advocate* 102 (January 3, 1973): 30; and *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for Mario’s Last Call Saloon,” *The Advocate* 102 (January 3, 1973): 9.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

life. Slacks, shirts, and jackets that hug the body are as much a part of today's (and yesteryear's) cowboy as boots and saddles."<sup>143</sup> Form fitting clothes and flared trousers on the surface link back to historic stereotypes of what constituted gay fashion and gay men's desire to show off the male form. *GQ* writer Jason McCloskey acknowledges that flared and tighter fitting pants, like bell bottoms, "brought the natural contour of the male bottom back into the fashion area."<sup>144</sup> The cowboy aesthetic not only denoted a reclaimed, vigorous, aggressive, and physical masculinity for gay men, but it also signified their desire to publicly display their sexuality and bodies after years of being trapped in the societal closet. Wearing leather, suede, and form constricting pants certainly garnered sexual desire and erotic attention, but *The Advocate* assured its readers that this attire was not necessarily reverting back to the days before gay liberation, but that there was a historic link to virile and commanding masculinity in these articles of dress. Drane maintains, "The leather look didn't start in the city either. Where would the cowboy be without a leather vest and jacket? And bell-bottom pants aren't uncommon among cowboys, particularly when cowboys dress for a show; they're actually very practical to go over the tops of boots."<sup>145</sup>

Gay men utilizing cowboy gear were merely accentuating the fact that they were men, not effeminate "nelly queens" playing drag, but that now, both inside and out, their masculine selves were shown to the world at large.<sup>146</sup> Sociologist Martin Levine

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<sup>143</sup> Larry D. Drane, "Fashionation: Form fitting cowboys set a style," *The Advocate* 56 (March 31-April 13, 1971): 25.

<sup>144</sup> McCloskey, "The Men's Fashion Revolt: Aquarius Rising," 110.

<sup>145</sup> Drane, "Fashionation: Form fitting cowboys set a style," 25.

<sup>146</sup> Levine, *Gay Men: The Sociology of Male Homosexuality*, 1.

elaborates, “Activists rejected the belief that gay men were womanly, claiming that to believe so was a symptom of internalized homophobia (self-hatred based on the dominant culture’s view of homosexuality as deviant or immoral).”<sup>147</sup> The only difference that existed between gay and straight men in this liberation age was that “Gay men were simply men who loved men.”<sup>148</sup> The cowboy, the historic representation of that fearless and virile American man riding out into the frontier, taming the wilderness and all its creatures in his path, was now not just a straight man’s hero, but a gay icon.

*GQ* and *Esquire* are not technically publicized as gay men’s interest magazines, but the imagery and pictorials published within their pages clearly emulated the dialogue, symbols, and information found in *The Advocate*, especially in regards to appropriating Western style dressing.<sup>149</sup> Denim abounded within the pages of these periodicals in both advertisements and fashion spreads. And, no type of denim clothing was more popular than jeans, or specifically Levi’s. According to *GQ* writer Jason McClosky, “The American blue jean—Levi’s—is generally agreed to be the best contribution America had ever made to men’s fashion. The jean was snug, soft, comfortable, form-fitting, sexy, and suggestive of prime male energy.”<sup>150</sup> Jeans were originally devised as an everyday working garment for miners and railway workers out West in the later part of the nineteenth century.<sup>151</sup> Gay men were drawn to the garment’s aura of “strength” and

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<sup>147</sup> Levine, *Gay Macho*, 57.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>149</sup> The cowboy look was not as prominent in *Esquire* as it was in *GQ* in the early 1970s.

<sup>150</sup> McClosky, “The Men’s Fashion Revolt: Aquarius Rising,” 109.

<sup>151</sup> Sims, *Icons of Men’s Style*, 67.; Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 17.

“authenticity” in addition to its associations with rugged, virile, physical masculinity represented through archetypes like the cowboy.<sup>152</sup>

*GQ* announced in its September 1970 edition, “Jeans are currently the most popular pants style around—not just blue denim versions, but jeans done in all kinds of beefy materials like leather and corduroy, as well as dressier fabrics.”<sup>153</sup> Designers updated traditional denim with new colors, cuts, and styles. For example, *GQ* included examples of denim leisure suits within its pages. One particular leisure suit featured white stitching and button snap closures so characteristic of standard western-styled jackets and shirts. Red and white Western flower appliqué dressed up this ensemble and complemented the red and white turtleneck peeking out from underneath the leisure shirt.<sup>154</sup> In addition to new fashion styles, bold color updated standard elements of cowboy attire. A cropped red jacket patterned after a typical jeans jacket contained white stitching as trim around the collar, cuffs, and pockets. This short jacket exposed a pointedly long, wide-collared shirt accented with a black and white scarf standing in for a traditional cowboy’s bandana. The accompanying diamond patterned red and cream pants modernized this ode to western wear. *GQ*’s fashion editor comments of this ensemble, “The waist or Ike-type jacket, brilliantly colored with sharply contrasting seams, gives off a distinctively masculine glow, from its two pronged buckle and snapped front, to the western-styled chest yoke and pockets.”<sup>155</sup> Denim even became

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>153</sup> *GQ*, “New Jeans,” *GQ* 40 (September 1970): 143.

<sup>154</sup> *GQ*, “That Scandinavia Style: Stockholm,” *GQ* 41 (October 1971): 118.

<sup>155</sup> *GQ*, “Town Alive! Lightly Coated,” *GQ* 40 (April 1970): 72-73.

suitable for evening hours as evidenced in one fashion spread that clothed a male model in a pair of blue satin pants resembling the look and design of blue jeans. This urban cowboy donned a suede sheepskin lined midi-coat with a shawl collar by Europa Sportswear over a bright orange t-shirt, colorful New Balance trainers, and a snakeskin skull cap.<sup>156</sup> By the early 1970s, denim had definitely moved past its simple utilitarian origins to become a fashionable mode of dress for the upwardly-mobile American male.

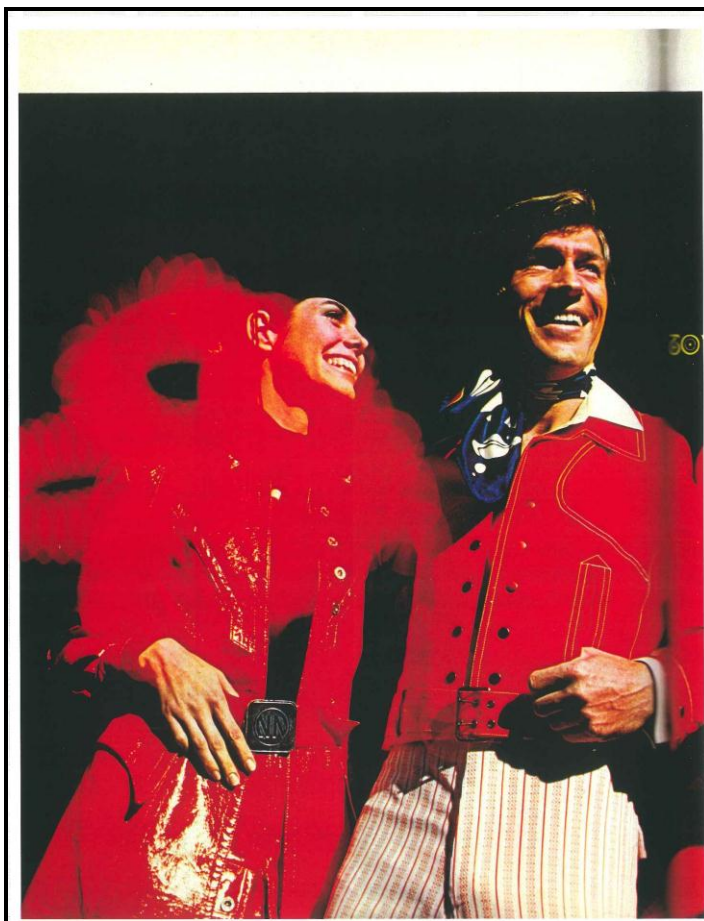


Figure 4. Cowboy on the Town.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *GQ*, "The Fashion Activist Funky," *GQ* 40 (September 1970): 102.

<sup>157</sup> *GQ*, "Town Alive! Lightly Coated," 72-73.

While satin jeans might prove to be a bit too dramatic for the typical male to confidently display, more traditional western fabrics like suede and leather were deemed as appropriate substitutes for denim. *GQ* showcased many examples of these alternatives to denim in their fashion spreads and advertisements including leather jeans with side rope-like lacing.<sup>158</sup> Along with leather pants, suede and leather jackets received endorsement as necessary wardrobe staples. For example, upscale men might be tempted to don a black, western-inspired, cropped, suede jacket designed as a jean jacket complete with gold snap buttons and stitched chest pockets by Europa Sport. Worn with a striped Jockey turtleneck in colors of blue, black, orange, and red along with black denim-inspired pants, this jacket added a bit more masculinity to one's everyday casual gear.<sup>159</sup>

Masculinity radiated from other styles of western-inspired attire that reproduced the cowboy aesthetic. One 1973 fashion spread from *Esquire* entitled "Rugged Country Gear"<sup>160</sup> propagated the look of the cowboy since the scenery consisted of forests, trails, mountains, and lakes with horses lurking in the background as models emanated a sense of strength and toughness with their puffed up shoulders and steely gazes. Western styled clothing further enhanced this mood as these modern frontier dwellers wore thick-belted, knee-length suede overcoats lined in shearling and designed with thick, durable, wide lapels that could withstand the effects of blizzards, ravaging winds, and rainstorms.

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<sup>158</sup> *GQ*, "Clotheslines," *GQ* 40 (Winter 1970-1971): 51.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 115; *GQ*, "Unreal," *GQ* 43 (March 1973): 85.

<sup>160</sup> *Esquire*, "Rugged Country Gear," *Esquire* 80 (November 1973): 188-189.

The 1970s cowboy could tame any wilderness by confidently donning a Stetson hat, bandana, plaid shirt, jeans, and a shearling-lined coat.

Advertisements in *GQ* and *Esquire* frequently used the aura of the West to sell their wares. In an advertisement for Salem cigarettes, a physically fit man stood in a river out in the wilderness smoking his preferred brand of cigarette. He exuded masculine daring and potency due to the motorcycle helmet clung under the pit of his arm, the bike behind him, and the western-inspired denim shirt and jeans shaping his body.<sup>161</sup> He was a modern adventurer, clad in his modern armor. This company, like so many others at the time, understood the cultural currency the cowboy and frontier look had for upwardly-mobile males, especially upscale gay male consumers.<sup>162</sup>

The cowboy look was not the only “manly” mode of dress for upscale men. The garb of the “hardy frontiersmen” also gained notoriety.<sup>163</sup> Historically, this figure is best represented by Daniel Boone. The cowboy and frontiersmen were iconic cousins, alike in that fact that both “had a reputation for being a straight shooter and having a taste for fringed buckskin.”<sup>164</sup> However, there were slight differences in their overall preferred modes of dress since Boone’s attire, “based on Native American garb, consisted of buckskin leggings; loose-fitting fringed animal-skin shirts; and a broad-brimmed beaver felt hat—not, as legend would have it, a coonskin cap.”<sup>165</sup> While all items described here

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<sup>161</sup> *Esquire*, “Advertisement for Salem,” *Esquire* 80 (December 1973): 30.

<sup>162</sup> *Esquire*, “Advertisement for McGregor,” *Esquire* 80 (December 1973): 26-27.

<sup>163</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 10.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

were not necessarily exactly replicated for the early 1970s male consumer, particularly the gay male consumer, the overall feel and aura personified by this example of tough, rugged, virile masculinity was repackaged and reformulated for the modern American male. The frontiersmen conquered the elements, land, populations, and savage creatures all standing in his way. He was a living personification of Theodore Roosevelt's famous notion of a "strenuous life." This was physical, dominating, virile, controlling, and authoritative masculinity.<sup>166</sup>

Advertisements and fashion spreads in *GQ* and *Esquire* displayed the presence of the frontiersmen look in fashion. In an ad for Ericson of Sweden's new "big and brawny" coat, the text reads, "it takes its cue from gamesmen who need pockets and comfort."<sup>167</sup> This coat constructed in water buffalo hide with 1970s features such as a prominent belt, wide collar, and patch pockets, was the modern interpretation of garb worn by trappers and rugged individualists who once shielded their bodies from the elements in animal hides, visual trophies of their conquests against nature. Stanley Blacker enticed potential male clients to purchase suede coats through their promotions that highlighted the adventure of frontier days. In one placement, a model sported a Russian fur hat while ensconced in a belted, double breasted, wide-lapelled suede overcoat that exuded ruggedness and authority. According to this advertisement, this

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<sup>166</sup> This concept has been analyzed by many academics including historians. For some notable examinations of Teddy Roosevelt and his belief in a "strenuous life" see Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House*; John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American War and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>167</sup> *GQ*, "Advertisement for Ericson of Sweden," *GQ* 40 (March 1970): 46.



was, “the Earl, a cotton-suede great coat, bold, belted, full of swash and swagger.”<sup>168</sup>

On the adjoining page, stood the Villa, “a brawny buckskin suede sport suit, the total turnout for gallivanting everywhere.”<sup>169</sup>

Animal prints and pseudo-skins infiltrated other masculine articles of clothing. Retailer Bergdorf Goodman promoted one such sartorial item announcing, “A ROBE TO ROAR IN after a hard day in the jungle. Soft, cotton velvet, wild with animal markings, lined in silk and ours alone in pretend python, tiger, or leopard.”<sup>170</sup> For men wishing to publicly flaunt this aesthetic, *GQ* and *Esquire* displayed several examples of reptile-like gear including a Himalaya reptile vest best worn without a shirt underneath to better transmit the notions of adventurer and masculine hunter.<sup>171</sup> For the more adventurous fashion consumer, there was flared reptile print trousers and matching reptile-patterned leisure suits while more cautious males could infuse smaller doses of reptile into their wardrobes through belts.<sup>172</sup>

Along with garments made of water buffalo and python, fur coats also signified the frontiersmen look. Men who wanted to infuse that spirit of the West, the same masculine energy that once dominated over man and nature alike, might want to select a “double-breasted natural hair seal” fur car coat with suede pockets, a wide collar, and slightly exaggerated lapels. More mainstream fur coat options of the period included

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<sup>168</sup> *GQ*, “Advertisement for Stanley Blacker,” *GQ* 41 (October 1971): 8.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>170</sup> *GQ*, “Advertisement for Bergdorf Goodman,” *GQ* 41 (November 1971): 46.

<sup>171</sup> *GQ*, “NOW!,” *GQ* 40 (Summer 1970): 43.

<sup>172</sup> *Esquire*, “Wearables” Snakeskin is in,” *Esquire* 74 (August 1970): 119; and *GQ*, “Fashion Happenings Section,” *GQ* 40 (September 1970): 81.

mink, raccoon, fox, “Persian lamb,” and “Chinese rabbit.”<sup>173</sup> In addition, fur coats came in a myriad of designs ranging from double breasted to bomber to blouson jacket styles. *Esquire* writer Chip Tolbert announced in February 1970 that fur was “the most opulent outerwear.”<sup>174</sup> Continuing, Tolbert maintains, “FUR can be ‘camp’ but in cold weather it is elegant and opulent...”<sup>175</sup>

Camp had long been used by gay men as a means to identify other gay men before the Stonewall era. To outsiders and mainstream America, camp embodied notions of femininity and unmanliness due to its link to both drag and the “swish” elements of gay culture.<sup>176</sup> Film historian Vito Russo describes camp as “the love of the extravagant, the exaggerated, converting the serious into the frivolous (or vice versa).”<sup>177</sup> Yet, camp imparted much more to the gay male community than just a sense of frivolity and playfulness.<sup>178</sup>

Camp was code. This mode of communication was crafted around adoration of famous women and strong actresses like Judy Garland or Bette Davis which has also been labeled as “diva worship.”<sup>179</sup> Establishing a code through elements of popular

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<sup>173</sup> *GQ*, “1970 Design Showcase,” 29; *GQ*, “Fur Without Guilt,” *GQ* 43 (October 1973): 108-112; and *GQ*, “Consider the Alternatives,” *GQ* 40 (November 1970): 75-78.

<sup>174</sup> Tolbert, “European Fashion Report,” 112.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>176</sup> Craig M Loftin, “Unacceptable Mannerisms: Gender Anxieties, Homosexual Activism, and Swish in the United States, 1945-1965,” *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 577-596. The “swish” concept is taken from this article.

<sup>177</sup> Levine, *Gay Men*, 205.

<sup>178</sup> Daniel Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 16.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-22.

culture gave men agency. As writer Daniel Harris relays, “Homosexuals were drawn to the image of the bitch in part because of her wicked tongue, her ability to achieve through conversation, through her verbal acuity, her snappy comebacks, the control over others that gay men were often unable to achieve in their own lives.”<sup>180</sup> For some gay men, camp was a vehicle to combat the torment and sense of unease that filtered into their lives lived in the symbolic closet. Before Stonewall, gay men endured threats of censure, prison time, discrimination, and societal reprimand just for being gay. Camp gave gay men a sense of power and control during those perilous times.<sup>181</sup>

By the early 1970s, this mode of communication was no longer appealing to certain segments of the gay male community. It was more in vogue to pattern one’s life and lifestyle after that of virile, rugged, and authoritative masculine figures like the cowboy. Fur coats suggested glamour and effeminacy and therefore, had to be reincarnated as masculine articles of sartorial display for the new gay male consumer. The February 1970 issue of *Esquire* showcased several varieties and styles of fur coats in keeping with this new mantra. One model displayed a Givenchy double breasted, leopard spotted, maxi-length, fur coat. Another example consisted of a black, double breasted, maxi-length fur coat with a “man-size collar” and “masculine belt.”<sup>182</sup> Describing these garments with the words “man” and “masculine” worked to lessen any connotations that these items exuded femininity. Fur garnered more of a masculine edge in pictorials including one shot that featured a raccoon “stadium coat” enveloping a male

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>182</sup> Tolbert, “European Fashion Report,” 112.

body under yards of protective animal fabric. This brawny and imposing visual harkened back to the days of the frontier when animal skins graced men's backs and shoulders since the raccoon coat completely engulfed the male frame due to its oversized collar and design.<sup>183</sup> Only confident and strapping men could properly wear this garment that boldly transmitted overt masculine energy in both its form and construction.

Just because the cowboy and frontiersmen imagery found within *Esquire* and *GQ* connected with the needs and culture of the upscale gay male, this does not negate the fact that both magazines were read also by straight males who could certainly find worth, value, and interest in adopting sartorial aspects of both of these masculine archetypes. For straight males, jeans, denim, and western wear signified the growing informality of American culture similar to leisure suit attire. Jeans challenged the dictates of proper professional dressing due to their working-class origins and adoption by the hippies and counterculture in the 1960s. Some men gravitated towards denim not for its link to traditional masculinity, but for its connection to the aura of the mythical American West. There was authenticity and simplicity in these garments donned by the cowboy and frontiersmen that many upscale men longed for in a time of cultural disillusionment, fragmentation, and uncertainty. By the 1970s, Americans regardless of gender, race, age, or sexual orientation were buying jeans since these sartorial items were responsible “for nearly half of all pants sales.”<sup>184</sup>

Western wear allowed the upscale straight male to infuse elements of rugged masculinity, androgyny, or even femininity into his daily persona depending upon his

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<sup>183</sup> *Esquire*, “Great Ways to Look,” *Esquire* 80 (September 1973): 94.

<sup>184</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 20.

mood or needs. This was an era of great experimentation in masculine dress and masculinity. Male consumers were encouraged to flirt with bold colors, unique patterns, and flamboyant attire. Western clothing incorporated many of these ideas but made them palatable to both straight and gay consumers in fashion spreads and pictorials even if both groups were attracted to these fashion articles for different reasons and objectives. Celebrities and noted “manly” icons also made western garb more suitably masculine and popular. For example, football star Joe Namath commonly wore fur coats on the sidelines or walking about town. Fur coats, suede jackets, and flared jeans flaunted the male form. Straight men’s bodies, as was the case with those of their gay peers, became objects to be looked at, admired, and emulated since clothing for all upwardly-mobile men was designed to be more form-fitting and body-conscious at this time. The garb of the cowboy and frontiersmen permitted American men, gay and straight, to contest not only normative modes of dress, but gender ideals as well.

If *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *The Advocate* all publicized and acknowledged the cowboy aesthetic, did *Ebony* as well? The first three magazines certainly presented western-inspired wear, promoted its influence, and alternately wavered between subtle or conspicuous links between this fashion style and its symbolism to the gay community. However, *Ebony* was different in how it featured and positioned western clothing to its public. The cowboy was a male icon, but one created for white America, a symbol of white American history. As *Ebony*’s readership consisted of middle-to-upper class, upwardly-mobile African Americans, the western look did not generate the same type of meaning and significance as it had for the upscale gay community. The *Ebony* male was not seeking to remove a label of effeminacy borne out of his sexuality from his personal

and group identity when he purchased cowboy boots, jeans, and denim shirts promoted within the magazine. Rather than don these fashion articles for the purposes of displaying an overt machismo or hypermasculine persona, the *Ebony* male showcased racial pride and self-esteem. In one Lee advertisement, a young black man sporting an Afro with books nestled on his right shoulder is photographed walking down a street from behind. In this photo, the youth is also palming a basketball with his left hand while outfitted in a denim jacket, cuffed jeans, and Chuck Taylor high tops. He looks like a typical all-American kid wearing these sartorial items of Americana as the corresponding text proclaims, “Black and blue is beautiful.”<sup>185</sup> Racial pride was also displayed by brands such as Stetson. While seemingly only trying to entice customers to purchase leather boots and Oxfords in their advertisements, Stetson also emphasized the esteem and respect growing within and towards the black community. The text reads, “No ordinary man can wear these shoes. Because no man who steps into Stetson remains ordinary.”<sup>186</sup>

The upscale black man negated any associations with the ordinary when he donned fur coats. Black men gravitated towards wearing fur for two reasons at this time. First, fur coats retained a connection to the mythic, masculine West and the dress of the cowboy and frontiersman. These garments created a stronger and more imposing presence by their mere design and construction. Secondly, fur jackets projected an aura of extravagance and status. A man parading around in a fur jacket acquired notice and attention on any city street. *Ebony* promoted this type of attire as early as September 1972. Short fur coats received a remarkable amount of press coverage. In one fashion

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<sup>185</sup> *Ebony*, “Lee Advertisement,” *Ebony* 27 (March 1972): 26.

<sup>186</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Stetson,” *Ebony* 27 (May 1972): 31.

pictorial from 1973, a black model posed in a short fur jacket made of “dyed ranch mink.” This wide-lapelled, double breasted jacket was worn with dark brown pants and a pink hued dress shirt.<sup>187</sup> An advertisement for The Mark of International Fashion also endorsed shorter fur jackets as a model clad in a matching vibrant plaid suit stood before the camera. The plaid suit jacket contained fur accents on the collar, arm, and upper torso areas.<sup>188</sup> Shorter jackets like these allowed a man’s form to be on complete and full display. Fur coats revealed that the upwardly-mobile black consumer was not afraid of flaunting his frame or his financial status.

Upwardly-mobile black men were no longer content to be invisible and overlooked participants in American society and in the American economy only gaining acknowledgement and recognition when it was deemed appropriate by the greater society. Black men wanted tangible and visible affirmation and acknowledgement of their manhood and access to all the privileges associated with being a real man in America. As the white patriarchal systems of the nation came under attack by liberation movements across the country at this time, many upscale, educated, and successful black men realized that they now had a unique opportunity to lay claim to traditional routes, attributes, and roles associated with American manhood. As the doors to Washington D.C., education, better housing, and the work force began opening with increased frequency, black men also demanded and advocated for equality as American consumers, irrespective of any boundaries once erected due to race and segregation. They had more

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<sup>187</sup> *Ebony*, “Putting It Together,” 154-160; and *Ebony*, “Men’s Fashion: An Expression of Lifestyle,” *Ebony* 28 (September 1973): 126.

<sup>188</sup> *Ebony*, “The Mark of International Fashion Advertisement,” *Ebony* 28 (September 1973): 20.

money and resources in the early 1970s than ever before and were not afraid to display their clout as consumers and full participants in economic systems of the nation.<sup>189</sup>

Firms like Wrangler courted the black male, affirming his growing financial clout in advertisements. One Wrangler promotion featuring denim jeans and shirts announces, “Whenever with-it people talk about clothes, we keep our eyes and ears open.”<sup>190</sup>

Wrangler regularly inserted ads in *Ebony* showcasing their denim jackets, jeans, and western shirts. Boots and plaid flannel shirts also appeared in many of these promotional insets as well.<sup>191</sup> Along with Wrangler, Levis also wooed the upscale black male consumer. One frequently featured Levis advertisement asked the question, “Have you ever had a bad time in Levis’?” while black male models posed in flared denim trousers and denim shirts.<sup>192</sup> Regardless of whether the magazine’s featured clothing included jeans, corduroy pants, or striped trousers, Levis provided black men with a means to comfortably don the attire of mythic Americana while also maintaining their own fashion and racial sensibilities. This company, like many others, so identified with America’s western past, was embracing a new customer, a new clientele, while also drawing in this new consumer to the sartorial emblems of America’s past. Consumer culture not only integrated America’s past and present, but male citizens both black and white, straight and gay, into its wide reaching embrace.

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<sup>189</sup> Marlene Kim Conor, *What Is Cool: Understanding Black Manhood in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995), 9.

<sup>190</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Wrangler,” *Ebony* 25 (March 1970): 37.

<sup>191</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Wrangler,” *Ebony* 27 (September 1972): 104.

<sup>192</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Levis’,” *Ebony* 25 (March 1970): 63; and *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Levis’,” *Ebony* 26 (March 1971): 39.



## Conclusion

The classic two-and-three-piece suit stood upon shaky ground as it was besieged from a myriad of forces ready to usurp its dominance in the male wardrobe. However, that is precisely why the suit is such a valuable barometer of American masculinity and changing gender expectations. Rather than emanating masculine power, strength, and dominance, the suit became utilized as a tool of cultural negotiation and protestation. Suits reflected men's discontent, disillusionment, and dissatisfaction with the current conditions, leaders, institutions, and customs of the day. The suit was employed as a symbol of protest and resistance against tradition, convention, and more importantly, gender roles and indoctrination.

The emergence and popularity of leisure suits and the cowboy aesthetic revealed the changing attitudes about men, masculinity, and masculine dress in America. Men were visually liberating themselves from outdated rules, customs, and regulations. If "value systems are inevitably embodied in our dress," then the suit styles of the early 1970s reflected men's growing desire for expression, individuality, and self-fulfillment.<sup>193</sup> The upscale American male utilized leisure dressing and the cowboy look to redefine and create a masculine persona of his own making. Gay men wanted to invoke associations with a rugged, virile, and dominating masculinity best represented by the figures of the cowboy and frontiersmen in order to challenge long-accepted cultural beliefs in their group's inherent effeminacy. Black men gravitated towards vibrant leisure suits and even items of western lore in order to proclaim their worth, esteem, and

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<sup>193</sup> Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., *Chic Thrills: A Fashionable Reader* (Berkeley: The University of California, 1992), 14.

visibility as men, consumers, and full participants in the American way of life. Straight white males became a bit more androgynous and adventurous with their clothing, ensconcing their bodies in vibrant colors and hues in addition to unconventional patterns and designs in their leisure suiting and everyday wear confronting traditional beliefs about men's roles, images, and qualities. All of these groups boldly asserted their claim and right to American manhood, albeit manhood constructed on their own terms. During these early years of the 1970s, "something" was definitely "happening here."<sup>194</sup>



Figure 5. Colorful Suiting Attire.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> This is a reference to the Buffalo Springfield song "For What It's Worth" released in 1966 and then re-released in 1967 by the group on their self-titled album *Buffalo Springfield*.

<sup>195</sup> See [www.esquire.com](http://www.esquire.com).

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**DRESS YOU UP IN NOSTALGIA:**  
**MASCULINITY AND MASCULINE DRESS IN LATE 1970s AMERICA**

**Introduction**

“Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away/  
Now it looks as though they’re here to stay/  
Oh, I believe in yesterday/  
Suddenly, I’m not half the man I used to be/  
...Now I need a place to hide away/  
Oh, I believe in yesterday”<sup>1</sup>

These lyrics taken from The Beatles “Yesterday” signify more than just a series of aching words detailing a painful breakup between lovers. Although released in 1965, this song and its corresponding lyrics appropriately and astutely symbolized the conflict facing the upscale American male during the late 1970s. American men were now searching for their lost self, their lost half; they wanted and believed in the hope and promise of yesterday. Their clothing would transport them there.

But, why would men now wax so nostalgically about the past? And why would men’s dress supply the right dose of medicine to cure their ills? The answer, in part, lies with the excess, decadence, and societal transformations that erupted in the earlier part of the decade. The early 1970s bucked convention and formality in both masculine gender identification and masculine attire. Individuality and self-fulfillment characterized the

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<sup>1</sup> The Beatles, “Yesterday” from album *Help!* (London, United Kingdom: Parlophone, 1965); SongMeanings, The Beatles – Yesterday, <http://www.songmeanings.net/song/view/1216> (accessed 26 December 2012).

mantra of American men at this time. Influenced by the achievements and rhetoric of civil rights, feminism, the counterculture, and liberation movements, straight white and black men broke away from their traditional masculine gender roles and all corresponding expectations as they flirted with integrating feminine and androgynous qualities into their personalities in an attempt to configure a masculine persona both acceptable and comfortable for themselves and society at large. Conversely, gay men adopted the look of the cowboy in order to throw off past stereotypes that labeled them as feminine or effeminate based on their sexuality. Unconventional dress suited these unconventional times.

The second half of the 1970s (1975 onward) echoed a return to tradition, a propagation of nostalgia in both dress and masculine identity formation.<sup>2</sup> This transition appeared to be at odds with earlier fashion pronouncements from magazines like *GQ*. In February 1970, the editors of *GQ* announced, “If a single factor could be said to characterize the styling of the oncoming decade, it would be its boldness.”<sup>3</sup> This boldness forecasted at the beginning of the era was met by 1978 with *GQ* labeling the decade’s style as “distilled and sober.”<sup>4</sup> How can one decade have such contrasting characterizations?

The answer to this query seems muddled at first since the same economic malaise, political distrust, and overwhelming sense of disillusionment and anxiety continued to

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<sup>2</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 82. Elizabeth Wilson also argues that “fashion trends in the 1970s were predominately nostalgic.” Please see Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson, eds., *Chic Thrills: A Fashionable Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 23.

<sup>3</sup> *GQ*, “Tomorrow Designers Today Section,” *GQ* 40 (February 1970): 98.

<sup>4</sup> *GQ*, “Better Late Than Never: Finally, a Style for the Seventies,” *GQ* 48 (Winter 1978-1979): 56.

fester and grow during the second half of the 1970s just as it had in the earlier part of the decade. Societal conditions may not have changed much, but over the span of a few years, upscale American men did. Men decided to seek out new survival strategies to combat their growing unease, apprehension, and dissatisfaction with the world spinning unstably around them. Clothing became their preferred weapon of choice. Donning leisure suits and more feminine-like apparel had not given the upwardly-mobile American male the masculine edge required to successfully live, work, and act as a confident and poised American man. The earlier alterations in gender roles and expectations proved to be a case of too much change too soon for the American male as he simply could not comfortably embrace the new sensitive masculine aesthetic. Men, straight and gay, black and white, all reverted back to a masculinity steeped in traditional values, behaviors, and imagery.

In a world characterized by uncertainty and change, many upwardly-mobile American men turned inward, focusing on self-improvement and fulfillment through dress and clothing since their bodies remained the only environment under their full reach and control. Critic Christopher Lasch argued about this period, “Impending disaster has become an everyday concern, so commonplace and familiar that nobody any longer gives much thought to how disaster might be averted. People busy themselves instead with survival strategies, measures designed to prolong their own lives, or programs guaranteed to ensure good health and peace of mind.”<sup>5</sup> Enveloping the male frame in more traditionally-inspired masculine garb served this greater purpose. The

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 4.

upscale American male gained a sense of inner peace and control when he wore a business suit or western-inspired attire. The traditional suit and cowboy look harkened back to times of greater prosperity, adventure, and privileges for the American male and signified the American male's desire to return to a time of societal power and prestige.

Upscale American men faced the challenges of economic stagnation, feminism, and international decline, but they also acutely felt growing competition from other males. This was competition for jobs, mates, opportunities, and more importantly, competition for the throne of masculinity. American men realized more and more that masculinity was a social construction, not a biological trait or internal essence. As such, masculinity needed to be proven and demonstrated on a daily basis for affirmation.<sup>6</sup> The 1970s was a fight for men to survive economically, politically, socially, and culturally. Why would proving and demonstrating one's manhood be any different?

Manhood in the late 1970s was a competition.<sup>7</sup> Upscale American men, white and black, straight and gay, all competed for access to this title and all of the rewards, power, and prestige associated with it. If men could not successfully fulfill time-honored masculine roles and ideals, they could at least dress the part. And, in this age of uncertainty, clothing imparted a sense of security and comfort to the upwardly-mobile American male. Times were tough and many upscale men combated the conditions through donning nostalgic and traditional masculine clothing. This mode of resistance

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Kaufman, *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power, and Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 15-17.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Harding, ed., *Wingspan: Inside the Men's Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 3. See also Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

materialized in the form of the suit and western wear. These clothing styles surfaced as the two most popular modes of traditional masculine dress within the pages of *Ebony*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, and *The Advocate*. Nostalgic attire symbolized bygone eras of American prosperity, triumph, and invigorated masculinity, all elements desired by American men at this time. The suit and western wear became integral to the process of masculine identity formation. Clothing helped the American man, look, act, and feel like a true American man.

### **The Competition Begins**

By the middle part of the 1970s, a move towards classic dressing slowly started to emerge in men's fashions, especially in regards to suit styles. Nostalgia drove this shift in the suit's overall appearance.<sup>8</sup> The appeal of nostalgia attire was apparent earlier in the decade in *GQ*. In 1971 Howard Kissel's article "Remembrance of Things Past: Yesterday's Fashions Make It Easy to Face Tomorrow," argued, "For fashion, rather than keeping pace with the future, has become a retreat from it. A retreat affectionately called nostalgia. For many people, fashion has become a security blanket, a refuge from troubled times."<sup>9</sup> Kissel acknowledged the usefulness of both conservatism and classicism in men's fashions citing the case of the 1950s, since in his estimation, "The Fifties, if not an era of soaring imagination in fashion, were at least subdued and tasteful."<sup>10</sup> This decade so commonly derided for its emphasis on domesticity, suburbia,

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<sup>8</sup> See Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, for a look at men's and women's fashions over the last fifty years in America.

<sup>9</sup> Howard Kissel, "Remembrance of Things Past: Yesterday's Fashions Male It Easy to Face Tomorrow," *GQ* 41 (November 1971): 26.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

and conformity, now had cultural value and worth to offer individuals perplexed by living in 1970s America.

Menswear designers in the late 1970s looked to the attire of the 1920s and 1930s for sartorial inspiration.<sup>11</sup> During the 1930s, many of the flamboyant designs of the 1920s were discarded like Oxford baggy trousers (which could have a width on the bottom of over twenty-six inches) and the slim-fitting and outlandish jazz suit. The new aesthetic was best exemplified by famous style icons including William Powell, the Duke of Windsor, Fred Astaire, Gary Cooper, and Cary Grant.<sup>12</sup> The words debonair, stylish, confident, and classy easily described and still represent all of these men and their manner of dressing. Their chosen attire belied the reality that Western society was going through a period of anxiety, economic tribulation, and cultural wars.

This same principle held true for upwardly-mobile men in the later 1970s. Reverting back to blue, black, gray, and camel colored suits with classic stylistic features conveyed a modicum of restraint and also resistance in the face of America's domestic and international decline. *GQ* declared in 1975, "A critical interface exists between clothes and the social, political and economic makeup of a society."<sup>13</sup> Simplistic as it may sound, this attempt to dress akin to the past is done wistfully as a way to try and reinvigorate a sick society with those values, traditions, and beliefs that eventually made America dominant in the world politically, economically, and culturally.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert E. Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear: Council of Fashion Designers of America* (New York: Assouline, 2009), 118.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

<sup>13</sup> *GQ*, "Fashion Overview 'Paris Originals: The Gallic Way with Wearable,'" *GQ* 45 (October 1975): 61-62.



America and American men did not appear to be dominant or confident during the late 1970s. A fresh, new face may have been in the White House, but the same sense of disillusionment, cultural malaise, and anxiety permeated across the nation as it had in the earlier part of the decade. Unlike many past presidents, Jimmy Carter was neither an insider to the inner workings of national politics, nor to how the machinery of government worked at the highest level. This deeply religious, moral, peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia just did not seem to fit the mold of presidential material. Yet, it was exactly this lack of political experience in Washington along with his very humble background that enticed American voters to elect him as the next president.<sup>14</sup>

Once in office Carter aimed to pull Americans back into a community bound by its commitment to one another and the “common good.”<sup>15</sup> To this end, Carter continued the work Gerald Ford had started in attempting to remove the label of “imperial presidency” from the White House. Much of the pomp and circumstance associated with the White House and the presidency was eliminated, including playing the song “Hail to the Chief.”<sup>16</sup> Carter and his administration strove to promote an air of informality around the White House and the Executive Office which also extended to all professional dealings with the American public. While attempting to reign in corruption and the excesses of government, these actions taken by Carter actually diminished further the stature and scope of the presidency.

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge: DaCapo Press, 2001), 123-124.

<sup>15</sup> Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press), 110.

<sup>16</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies*, 122.

Just like Richard Nixon and Ford, Carter would be beleaguered with a failing and faltering economy. Carter's economic policies simply could not tame the 1970s beast known as stagflation. This failure only magnified as tensions mounted with OPEC resulting in higher oil prices that served to deepen America's already growing energy crisis. Carter's administration simply could not attain long term financial prosperity and solvency for the country as yet another recession occurred in 1978.<sup>17</sup> This souring job market provided many Americans, including many upwardly-mobile males, with an uncertain financial future. Moreover, it was not just that Carter appeared helpless to stop the downward trajectory of the economy, but that he was perceived to be ineffectual and incompetent by his constituents.<sup>18</sup> Carter, the economy, and the nation seemed submerged in a never-ending downward spiral.

Unlike other presidents, Carter would not be able to offset his negative domestic record with a favorable international one.<sup>19</sup> While Carter engaged in détente with the Soviet Union, communism crept across the globe making many Americans anxious since the Cold War had technically not ended. It was not until the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 that Carter took decisive action against what many perceived was a growing communist threat to the world order by tabling a SALT agreement, placing a

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<sup>17</sup> For more detailed information on Carter's handling of the economy see Berkowitz's, *Something Happened*; Schulman's *The Seventies*; and Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies*, 135.

<sup>19</sup> Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 116. Other historians including Robert Dean and K.A. Cuordileone have discussed in their scholarship how foreign policy allowed presidents like John F. Kennedy to show strength, confidence, and toughness since this area has such a concentrated focus on what Dean calls "crisis and urgency." Skill, acumen, quick thinking, and leadership abilities are fully on display in this arena when making decisions about embargoes, quarantines, and invasions among other items. Favorable conduct and leadership in international affairs can overshadow and mitigate a less than stellar domestic record.

grain embargo on the Soviet Union, and informing the world of the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

On top of this growing antagonism with the Soviet Union, Carter and his administration would face another crisis that would, in the end, mar his presidency—the Iran Hostage Crisis. Carter’s decision to allow the Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, to enter the U.S. for cancer treatments in late October 1979 soon prompted Iranian revolutionaries to take over the American embassy in Teheran. Nearly sixty-six Americans became hostages as a result. Most of these Americans remained in captivity for 444 days, released only after the next president, Ronald Reagan, was inaugurated. Carter appeared weak as did the country by association. This event only compounded the already heavy psychological toll the loss of Vietnam placed upon the country and its populace. The once proud, unrivaled, dominant, fierce U.S. had been rendered impotent once again by a smaller nation.

American manhood was negatively affected by these domestic and international ills that plagued the country. All upscale men struggled to survive and adapt to these political, cultural, and social developments. In order to combat these tides of change, many upwardly-mobile men started to adopt the ideals, tenets, and behaviors associated with traditional masculinity. The traditional model of American manhood valued qualities like aggression, authority, command, confidence, and strength.<sup>20</sup>

However, the upscale heterosexual white male had difficulty following this model as he no longer perceived himself atop the American societal pyramid. He watched as

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Newton, *From Panthers to Promise Keepers: Rethinking the Men’s Movement* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 17.

men of color and homosexuals received protections and privileges that once solely belonged only to those in his racial, sexual, and socio-economic bracket. Parity was far from accomplished, but many of these males perceived that their way of life was under attack from not only these forces, but also from the achievements, influence, and rhetoric of feminism. Many white men could no longer live up to the historically masculine roles of provider and protector in an age of rising divorce rates and increased female employment. At the same time, many of these men could not comfortably accept or embrace the softer and more reflective masculinity embodied by individuals such as President Carter and actor Alan Alda.<sup>21</sup> Some men attempted to incorporate a more feminist viewpoint into their outlooks and lifestyles, even going so far as to morph into the “sensitive man who did the dishes and made professional sacrifices for his family,” but others simply became more confused and adrift by these new gender models and images.<sup>22</sup> A cultural opening started to emerge that allowed for elements of traditional masculinity to slowly seep back into the nation’s consciousness. Whether this shift symbolized a “backlash” or an expression of “resentment” against the legal, economic, and cultural gains made by women during the 1960s and 1970s, the American male decided to fight back against the perceived eroding tides of his power and prerogative.<sup>23</sup>

Feminism though was not the only societal combatant that besieged the stability, pride, and integrity of white manhood. Heterosexual men were also troubled as to how they could feasibly take on the mantle of authentic masculinity in a world where gay men

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<sup>21</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies*, 177.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 178-185.

<sup>23</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 217-218.

actually looked, acted, and behaved more like strong, tough, real men. So how could the once successful, independent, and commanding upwardly-mobile straight white male regain a measure of control and power? Many white, upscale, straight American men longed for a return to those days when masculine privileges and prerogatives were natural and assumed. At the very least, the straight white male desired a restoration of various elements of traditional masculinity into his own persona. The traditional suit materialized as a very real and simple solution to these men's problems.

The once lauded, classic, business suit, the ultimate symbol of not only masculinity, but also tradition, reappeared on the fashion scene with a renewed sense of purpose and function during the late 1970s. More telling of this shift was information published in October 1978's "Help!" section in *GQ* about the state of the once beloved, admired, and acclaimed leisure suit. Reader W.K. from Dallas asked, "Is it ever acceptable to wear a leisure suit?" The magazine responded, "You won't feel uncomfortable wearing them to country clubs in the Midwest and Southwest, but they'll only suffice for costume parties calling for early Seventies dress on the East and West coasts."<sup>24</sup>

The traditional-inspired suit visibly diverged from leisure suit attire in color, pattern, and design elements. Suits now appeared to be more loose-fitting through the torso with stronger, more accentuated shoulders. This was a marked departure from the earlier suit jackets of the decade that exhibited the look of natural shoulders along with cuts made to overtly highlight the male waistline. Pants also became less slim-fitting as the lines of fabric now flowed and followed the body. Lapels and collars decreased

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<sup>24</sup> *GQ*, "Help!," *GQ* 48 (October 1978): 67.

significantly in size and girth, looking less gargantuan and outlandish. In addition, the color of suits moved away from the hodgepodge mix of pastels and loud shades found on leisure attire and gravitated towards navy, charcoal, and black—all three colors were standard in the suit world before the era of early 1970s experimentation began. Navy, black, and charcoal gray now appeared as strong and solid hues, conveying a sense of gravity and seriousness that had been somewhat absent in men's professional wardrobes.<sup>25</sup> *GQ* and *Esquire* devoted entire fashion spreads to suits in these shades, highlighting their value and worth in the workplace and beyond. In “Workday Blues” *GQ* editors asked, “Have you ever thought of navy blue as avant-garde? Wall Street did. Blue was the cutting edge of the sartorial revolution in business wear that began early this century, resulting in the virtual banishment of black and de-emphasis of gray. Today, navy is the epitome of respectability.”<sup>26</sup>

The navy suit became popular early in the twentieth century with businessmen but now, this historic garment received a makeover in the hands of *Esquire* and *GQ* as they showcased various ways to infuse this ancient business uniform with a bit of modern flair and individuality. For men desirous of greater flexibility in their professional wardrobes, magazines offered many examples of how to mix and match various suiting components, giving consumers not only “a lift” in their fashion acumen, but also a means to stretch one's discretionary fashion budget in these financially troubled times.<sup>27</sup> A Michael Stern

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<sup>25</sup> For more examples see *GQ*, “Easing Into Fall,” *GQ* 43 (September 1973): 55-67; *Esquire*, “Fall in Focus,” *Esquire* 84 (September 1975): 116-117; *Esquire*, “Putting it Together This Fall,” *Esquire* 84 (August 1975): 112; *Esquire*, “Beyond the Classics,” *Esquire* 88 (November 1977): 160; and *Esquire*, “Suited for Business,” *Esquire* 88 (November 1977): 162.

<sup>26</sup> *GQ*, “Workday Blues,” *GQ* 48 (August 1978): 64.

<sup>27</sup> *Esquire*, “Window Dressings,” *Esquire* 87 (January 1977): 98.

navy suit from *Esquire's* January 1977 issue demonstrated this new stylistic sensibility.

In one photograph, Stern's suit was paired with a pink dress shirt, red tie, and complimentary hued pocket square. For those men interested in incorporating pattern into this suit option, *Esquire* then presented a plaid dress shirt, white silk tie, and tartan plaid vest.<sup>28</sup> This type of broken up suit combination was not a continuation of the decade's previous offerings since it exuded an aura of classicism and tradition due to its color, cut, and overall visual package. Navy is "the quintessential power suit color,"<sup>29</sup> so men of the late 1970s could not help but feel more confident and poised as they enveloped their bodies in this sartorial emblem of achievement, longevity, and success. The navy suit had endured and so would the American male.

The double breasted suit emerged as another popular suit style at this time. The upscale white male was inundated with examples of this classic mode of masculine dress. Alexander Julian's brown, herringbone, two-piece suit worn with a dark brown mohair turtleneck, complimentary hued dress shirt, and a paisley ascot conveyed a return to those days of refined and elegant masculine fashions. While on the surface, the absence of a tie implied a subversion of tradition, the overall aesthetic projected by this ensemble is one of sophistication due to the textures, patterns, and fabrics selected.<sup>30</sup> Along with patterned versions, designers produced simpler models of double breasted attire to satisfy more conservative male consumers. A Christian Dior "heather-grey," matching, double breasted suit ensemble comprised of a striped dress shirt, dark colored tie, and pocket

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Flusser, *Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion* (New York: itbooks, 2002), 93.

<sup>30</sup> *Esquire*, "Beyond the Classics," 160.

square appealed to men looking for more cautious and understated professional garb.<sup>31</sup>

*GQ* commented, “Elegance merges with authority in the double breasted suit. Never easy to wear and perhaps a bit inflexible, it is nonetheless a paragon, the nearest thing in men’s wear to timeless chic.”<sup>32</sup>

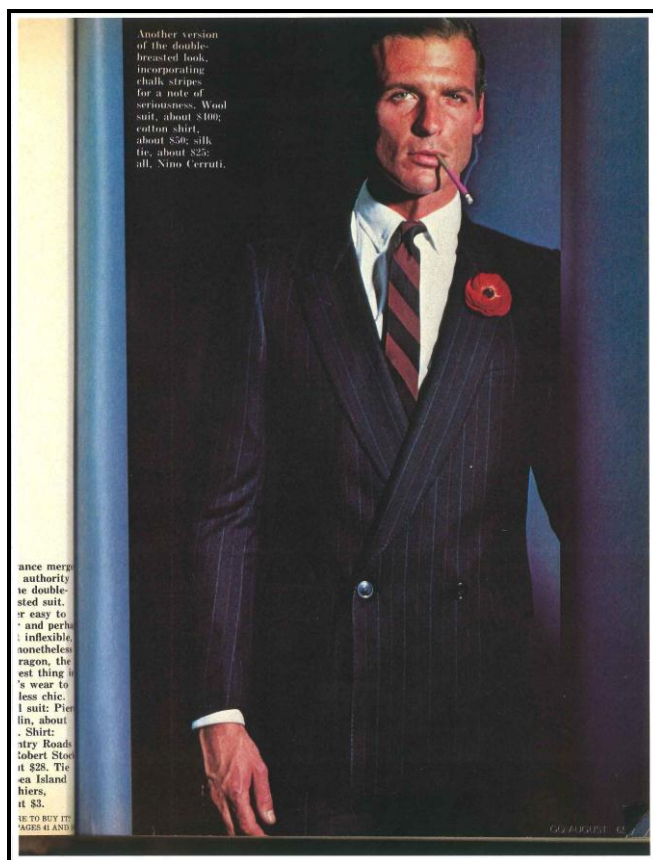


Figure 6. Double Breasted Elegance.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Esquire*, “Suited for Business,” 162.

<sup>32</sup> *GQ*, “Workday Blues,” 64-65.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-67.



The late 1970s double breasted suit model did not completely emulate its thirties ancestor, but basic design elements in the jacket endured such as the “six-on-two button front” and “overlapping fronts” features.<sup>34</sup> Double breasted suits were emblematic of the growing popularity of the “squared-off effect” in men’s suiting attire.<sup>35</sup> By 1979, *Esquire* announced this fact in an article entitled, “The Shaped Shoulder Comes Back.”<sup>36</sup> The first half of the 1970s witnessed a fondness for a more natural shoulder in men’s suit jackets and coats. These types of jackets featured minimal if any shoulder padding, drawing the eye instead to the shape of a man’s waist due to the cut of the fabric which followed the contours of a man’s body. This action was akin to giving a man an almost hourglass figure. The jacket featured a more open and exposed chest area which was in direct opposition to the closed off and contained look a male torso received from a conventional double breasted model. Fashion designers and companies simply shifted the visual focus of a man’s body from his waist to his shoulder area to generate “broad-shouldered lines.” These suits still nipped in somewhat at the waist, but the overall effect magnified the sartorial importance of a man’s shoulders and chest region. According to *Esquire* writer Rita Hamilton, “Shoulders mean strength, virility, dynamism.” Hamilton acknowledged the attraction of designs that drew emphasis towards the shoulders since, “men want to look and feel a bit more assertive these days.”<sup>37</sup>

The resurgence of the shoulder in masculine dress signified that men were no

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<sup>34</sup> Flusser, *Dressing the Man*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> Rita Hamilton, “The Shaped Shoulder Comes Back,” *Esquire* 92 (September 1979): 77.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-81.

longer retreating into a world of exaggerated lapels, waist suppressing suit jackets, and outrageously hued clothing to convey their need for expression, authenticity, and individuality. Rather than hide away and retreat in one's clothing, the upwardly-mobile American man decided to exhibit a sense of resolve, purpose, and confidence by donning clothing that made him feel more authoritative, powerful, and self-assured. The upscale male could now tackle all obstacles since mentally he was suited up for the big game, for the battle of his life with the psychological comfort that came from extra padding and yards of fabric indicative of this cultural shift towards nostalgia and tradition.

The cultural shift towards nostalgia and tradition even infiltrated the Executive Office. According to *GQ* magazine, "No man in America has more succinctly reflected what his fellow country men are wearing at any point in time more than the 20<sup>th</sup> century President."<sup>38</sup> Carter was no exception to this rule. During the early years of his administration, Carter's garb mirrored those of his fellow American males who had been donning leisure suits and more casual attire for the better part of the decade. His preference for causal clothing even extended to wearing jeans and cardigan sweaters during televised events and addresses.<sup>39</sup> Informal dress simply represented the air of informality Carter tried to instill in the White House and his presidency. Carter's casual style was a marked departure from wearing a two-or-three-piece formal suit, the standard uniform choice for those men who historically managed the nation's affairs from the Oval Office. However, by the end of his tenure, Carter embraced traditional suiting

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<sup>38</sup> *GQ*, "Hail to the Chiefs: How Presidents Have Set Fashion Precedents...and How They Haven't," *GQ* 50 (August 1980): 82.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

styles demonstrating that he too understood the psychological effects of clothing.

Photographs at the time displayed Carter in many traditional-inspired suiting ensembles awash in hues of gray and brown with more conservative ties and dress shirts. Carter's move towards classicism in dress emulated the larger shift occurring in menswear for the upscale American man at this time. Even the president was not immune to the lure and intrinsic worth of donning nostalgia suiting attire.

Nostalgia dressing also materialized in the resurgence of the classic chalk stripe suit. One version by Hickey Freeman showcased a navy, chalk stripe, two-piece suit accented with a blue and white pocket square, gold tie pin, light blue and white small check shirt, and a beige, cream, and blue striped tie. According to *GQ*, "The chalk stripe registers another kind of authority when used to cut a suit's navy content. It also adds a hint of racy, thirties style."<sup>40</sup> Just as with the double breasted style, chalk stripe suits were reminiscent of classic men's fashion from the interwar years.<sup>41</sup> However, chalk stripes now came in an array of sizes, colors, and widths which allowed upscale men to display a bit of their personality on their attire each and every day. The chalk stripe and double breasted suiting styles promoted a new strength, power, and refinement to men's dress. Men now seemed taller, solid, and sturdier even if their realities belied such assertions. Although men's suit styles still gravitated towards emanating a long and lean physique, this long and lean physique had less to do with gender experimentation and more to do with exercising control and order amidst chaotic and uncertain times.

American men endured the trials and tribulations of the 1930s awash in various classic

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<sup>40</sup> *GQ*, "Workday Blues," 67.

<sup>41</sup> Flusser, *Dressing the Man*, 94.

suiting styles. The late 1970s man would prove just as resilient by donning these types of ancient artifacts evocative of masculine endurance and power.

Classic suit styles revived the popularity of classic suit accessories like the bow tie. An advertisement for the company Arrow in *GQ* emphasized this point stating, “After thirty long years on the rack the bow tie is finally making a comeback.”<sup>42</sup> Bow ties embodied debonair, sophisticated, masculine dress.<sup>43</sup> However, the actual process of physically tying this accessory is filled with much cultural symbolism. Designer Alan Flusser explained that in order, “to wear a bow tie stylishly, two issues should be considered. First, its width should not extend beyond the outer edge of a person’s face, and definitely not beyond the breadth of his collar.”<sup>44</sup> To follow this first edict, a man must employ accuracy in constructing his bow tie. The wearer has to be meticulous and forthright in his actions so as not to have the item viewed as absurd or ridiculous. The second issue revolved around “the tying of the bow. There is no point in sporting the bow tie unless you plan on tying it yourself. Place a mathematically perfect, pre-tied bow under your chin and you forsake all individuality.”<sup>45</sup> Donning a bow tie afforded upscale white men a means to protest the current societal conditions festering around

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<sup>42</sup> *GQ*, “Arrow Advertisement,” *GQ* 43 (October 1973): 4.

<sup>43</sup> For more information on the origins, history, meanings, and symbolism of the bow tie see Rob Shields’ essay “A Tale of Three Louis: Ambiguity, Masculinity, and the Bow Tie” in Peter McNeil and Vicki Karaminas’ edited anthology *The Men’s Fashion Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 108-115. King Louis XIV of France borrowed the concept of the cravat from Croatian soldiers and mercenaries. Cravats were worn around the neck by these men almost as an “amulet” or charm to prevent and ward off “decapitation” and other terrible events and evils from occurring to the body as the neck is considered one of the most vulnerable spots on the body. During the Middle Ages people believed that evil spirits entered at the neck. From these mystical and magical origins, the modern bow tie emerged.

<sup>44</sup> Flusser, *Dressing the Man*, 162.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

them, while at the same time, gaining a measure of self-fulfillment due to the accessory's color, knot, and presentation. The bow tie radiated notions of control, exactness, precision, and care—all qualities sorely needed in America and by the straight, white, upscale American male.

If upwardly-mobile, straight, white males wanted to return to a bygone era, did their black peers as well? The desire to return to those days of yesteryear seeped into suiting attire that directly targeted the upscale black male consumer. *Ebony* proclaimed in its October 1975 issue that new menswear offerings for fall were “stripped of faddish clutter, the basic elements are good taste, good fashion, good fit and, most of all, good feeling—this is capturing the refinement and elegance of the good old days.”<sup>46</sup> Suits and their corresponding attire exhibited “toned down feelings in color, fabric and design” reflective of the economic ills of the country, especially the recession occurring that very same year.<sup>47</sup> Three-piece, single breasted, vested, matching suits in colors like camel and dark chocolate by designers such as Ralph Lauren and Austin Reed typified this trend towards sophistication and elegance in black masculine dress.

Brown and camel were not the only color options available for the black male consumer. Suiting ensembles in hues of blue, gray, and black became popular at this time as well. *Ebony* promoted numerous examples of these suit styles within its pages. Dimitri of Italy's two-piece, matching, grayish-blue, single breasted suit complemented by a muted white dress shirt and gray tie signified a more restrained approach to

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<sup>46</sup> *Ebony*, “Fall and Winter Menswear: Fashions that feature the pulled together look without faddish clutter,” *Ebony* 30 (October 1975): 93.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

professional dressing.<sup>48</sup> Pierre Cardin's three-piece gray suit paired with a similarly hued tie to offset the accompanying black and gold striped dress shirt added a dose of energy to this otherwise classic suit style. For summer months, the stylish black male could emulate looks straight out of the novel *The Great Gatsby* by donning seersucker suits from firms like Christian Dior and the Hapsel Brothers in patterns of blue and white or brown and white.<sup>49</sup> Although the lapels on these selected jackets still identified somewhat with the exaggerated shapes of the early 1970s, the colors, appearance, and overall look of these outfits harkened back to a time of prosperity and respect for tradition. However, by 1978, lapels on suit jackets evolved into much smaller and thinner decorative details mimicking more closely the actual size and shape of a garment.<sup>50</sup> Suiting attire communicated a polished and sophisticated, not outlandish and purposefully rebellious exterior. This discreet and subtle approach to dressing matched the subdued and anxious age.

Although upwardly-mobile black men outfitted themselves in traditional masculine garb like the classic suit just as their white counterparts did, their overall goals diverged a bit. The upscale black male certainly did not want a return to those days steeped in white prestige and power. However, he did want to be recognized and acknowledged as a real American male, fit to receive all the privileges and rights associated with this title. No longer would black America's contributions and presence

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>49</sup> *Ebony*, "From Morning 'til Night Sports Lovers on a Tropical Vacation," *Ebony* 34 (January 1979): 116-120.

<sup>50</sup> Eunice W. Johnson, "Menswear for Fall and Winter: Sculptured Males Visit Chicago Sculpture," *Ebony* 33 (October 1978): 154-162.

be denied or even minimized. This was not mere emulation of a white masculine standard in order to attain greater integration and assimilation. By wearing a professional, elegant, classic suit, the black male was visibly and openly asserting his right to possess full American citizenship and manhood. The black body historically has been regarded in the eyes of white society as both hypersexualized and hypermasculine, existing in opposition to the values and standards of normative masculinity that rested upon a white ideal. Now, upwardly-mobile black men were reclaiming the ability to positively define, flaunt, and parade their masculine frames in full view of society. These visuals stood in stark contrast to the “flash” or “funk” style embodied by entertainers like James Brown and perpetuated in blaxploitation films such as *Shaft*, *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss*, *The Mack*, and *Superfly* during the early 1970s.<sup>51</sup> Many upscale black Americans were troubled by the “implications of a look popularly associated with pimps and drug dealers” that seemed to enchant many young, urban, black Americans.<sup>52</sup> Rather, these black men wanted to move away from images representative of past stereotypes and caricatures. By wearing a gray or camel three-piece suit, black men enveloped themselves in the ancient artifacts of masculinity just as their white peers were doing but with a twist.

Nostalgic attire also served another purpose beyond positive identity and image formation for the upscale black male. Due to the gains of the civil rights movement and black power, black men had acquired a considerable amount of political, economic, and social power in the country. They would never again be held under the dictates of white

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<sup>51</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 92-93 and Rebecca Arnold’s *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Mortality in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 40-42.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 93.

America nor go back to those days of grueling trials and travails. However, with all of these victories and successes came the realization that they also faced the same harsh economic, political, and cultural climate as their white peers. They too were surrounded by societal malaise and disillusionment. In addition, black men also had to deal with notable achievements made by other movements like feminism and gay liberation that could potentially chip away at their growing societal power and clout. Many of the very issues plaguing white males troubled black men as well. Yet, unlike their white peers, upwardly-mobile black men had only recently been allowed nearer to the pinnacle of American power structures. They did not want to go back in time, nor did they want to lose any of the advantages and benefits already procured. Wearing traditional masculine dress like the suit gave black men the edge and confidence they needed to live, work, act, and perform like real men in the late 1970s just as it would for their white counterparts.

Upscale gay men were also drawn in by the lure of nostalgic masculine attire at this time. In 1975 *The Advocate* announced, “Now that all the aging hippies are getting more drearily casual, the young-young men are into a new formality that was previously associated with their bankers grey elders.”<sup>53</sup> Men were encouraged to embrace this new trend towards classicism even if it meant buying a few foundational pieces and not an entire suiting ensemble. The editors instructed, “We like a navy blazer which worked like a dream with a pair of Oxford bags in the richest grey flannel around, worn with a checked shirt and crewneck sweater...The whole rig costing about \$280 all told.”<sup>54</sup> This look by Halston exuded refinement, tailoring, and elegance—all three qualities lacking in

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<sup>53</sup> *The Advocate*, “Fall Fashion Preview,” *The Advocate* 173 (September 24, 1975): 24.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



the concept, execution, and design of the leisure suit. The leisure suit simply would not suffice in this new cultural environment, nor would it aid the upwardly-mobile gay man since as writer Mark Thompson remarked about gay men, “We are now maneuvering into the mainstream of the political ‘arena,’ into the world of ‘big business.’ It means learning to be tough, aggressive and competitive, fine skills to have at one’s command.”<sup>55</sup> *The Advocate* openly acknowledged the death of the leisure suit to its readers in 1977. Staff writer Gilbert Cameron contended, “It was back to the drawing boards when menswear designers got the word that nylon knit, print sport shirts and polyester leisure suits had succumbed to overexposure.”<sup>56</sup>

Classic suiting attire became accepted and promoted within the gay male community. Traditional suit colors, designs, and styles received coverage in *The Advocate* just as they had in *Ebony*, *GQ*, and *Esquire*. The upscale gay male was encouraged to purchase tweed jackets, corduroy sport coats, and blazers to round out his professional look and project this “artfully nostalgic” trend of dressing.<sup>57</sup> Double breasted suits received editorial attention as they offered a “little panache” to an outfit especially when done in historically tasteful fabrics like seersucker that evoked an aura of glamour and sophistication reminiscent of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>58</sup> More importantly, suits were recognized by *The Advocate* as stylish sartorial articles for summertime, not

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<sup>55</sup> Mark Thompson, “Sissies,” *The Advocate* 229 (November 30, 1977): 23.

<sup>56</sup> Gilbert Cameron, “12 Looks for Spring,” *The Advocate* 211 (March 9, 1977): 44.

<sup>57</sup> Gilbert Cameron, “Dress to Suit Your Taste: It’s Easy This Season Thanks to Wide Variety,” *The Advocate* 227 (November 2, 1977): 4; and Gilbert Cameron, “A Hibernial Fashion Journal,” *The Advocate* 282 (December 12, 1979): 45.

<sup>58</sup> Cameron, “Dress to Suit Your Taste,” 4.

just necessary aspects of fall and winter dressing. Even with the calendar moving into sunnier and warmer months, a time when most men wanted to remove layers of clothing from their bodies, the magazine acknowledged the suit as an integral part of the upwardly-mobile gay male's wardrobe.<sup>59</sup>

Traditional-inspired suiting ensembles imparted a sense of style and flair to the upwardly-mobile gay male's wardrobe, but these fashion articles also served another purpose. The upscale gay male used these items as a vehicle to showcase his toned and fit physique to the rest of the world. Rather than hide and shield the male form underneath yards and layers of fabric, these types of suiting attire flaunted the gay male body. For example, *The Advocate* instructed its readers to purchase suits featuring more natural shoulders. At first glance, the casual observer might assume that a jacket designed with this type of aesthetic would make a man's body appear less strong and powerful due to a lack of shoulder padding. However, the actual cut derived out of this design element served to enhance the upper half of the male torso since it followed the contours and shape of the wearer, emphasizing and highlighting his natural physical attributes. If a man's chest and shoulders were well-defined and shapely, the natural shouldered jacket simply enhanced this visual. The gay male consumer knew the benefits of donning traditional-inspired suits such as these. Double breasted models and suits with natural shoulders showed off a gay male body to its greatest advantage. This turn towards classicism in male dress during the second half of the 1970s allowed gay men's bodies to be stripped of all the garish fads, design elements, and outlandish color palettes indicative of the popular leisure suits from the decade's earlier years.

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<sup>59</sup> Cameron, "12 Looks for Spring," 44.

This increased body awareness or sense of “body consciousness” pervaded the pages of *The Advocate* through numerous advertisements, articles, and pictorials.<sup>60</sup> Inserts for gymnasiums and health clubs touted the benefits and advantages of undergoing a fitness regimen. For example, The Golden Gate Health Club in San Francisco included a black and white photograph of their establishment in their promotional literature. Their picture featured an array of nautilus equipment, presses, and stretching devices representative of any true workout facility. However, these items were not the real lure of the advertisement. *The Advocate*’s readers would be more inclined to frequent this business due to the muscled, toned, and shapely man exercising on a leg press machine also found in the photo. What was really on display here were not the merits of the gym, but the model’s ample pectorals and well-defined chest.<sup>61</sup> The message here was clear. Gay men, who wanted to look like this model or simply meet a man like this, would have to start frequenting the gym.

Gay men who did not have the time or inclination to join a specific gym received regular advice on these matters from *The Advocate*. The periodical’s “Shape Up!” column supplied a variety of information in this area including guidance on fitness activities and instructional information on exercises that could be completed either at home or the office. Contributor Ken Charles provided his followers with pictures and written details on broom twists, book lifts, running in place, arm wrestling, and executing quality stretches among other items in order to show that daily doses of exercise were accessible, achievable, and required for the 1970s gay man.

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<sup>60</sup> Gilbert Cameron, “Dress Fit for Fitness,” *The Advocate* 270 (June 28, 1979): 22.

<sup>61</sup> *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for Golden Gate Health Club,” *The Advocate* 162 (April 23, 1975): 12.

Exercise and fitness routines were now part and parcel of a gay male's lifestyle.<sup>62</sup> Writer Scott Anderson asserted, "Gone are the days when limp-wristed sissies were banished to right field."<sup>63</sup> *The Advocate* included lists of leagues and corresponding activities such as boating, hiking, and softball available for all levels of interest in major American cities. Articles on soccer, racquetball, and tennis were also incorporated into editions. Additionally, a directory of stores that sold sporting gear and clothing, particularly aimed at the gay male consumer, were published. Gay men's visible immersion into the worlds of sport and exercise further challenged long held stereotypes that equated homosexuality with effeminacy, perversion, and being less than a real man. Writer George Mazzei commented that the growing visibility of gay men in the worlds of fitness and sport emerged also in part from traditionally celebrated "manly" men coming out of the closet like pro-football player David Kopay. As Mazzei explains about the influence of Kopay's autobiography, "The overwhelming acceptance of the book by the general public made a lot of us more comfortable with ourselves and gave us more confidence that we would not be laughed out of the gym, off the jogging cinders or wherever we decided to make our muscles sore."<sup>64</sup>

Gay men were simply one more group in American society that embraced the working out trend permeating throughout the nation. It was not uncommon to read exercise and sporting commentary from traditionally straight men's magazines such as *Esquire* and *GQ* which had been dispensing advice since the early part of the decade on

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<sup>62</sup> Ken Charles, "Shape Up!," *The Advocate* 258 (January 11, 1979): 53; and Ken Charles, "Shape Up!," *The Advocate* (August 23, 1979): 51.

<sup>63</sup> Scott Anderson, "Playing the Field," *The Advocate* 273 (August 9, 1979): 49.

<sup>64</sup> George Mazzei, "The Physical Fitness Kick," *The Advocate* 270 (June 28, 1979): 21.

workout routines, the benefits of jogging, rating the latest equipment, and the merits of devices like the nautilus. This was fairly routine reporting. Gay men certainly had access to these periodicals and did read them. However, now gay men received this information from a gay source aimed at instructing and assisting a gay audience only. Gay men's embrace of athletics made them look and feel like one of the guys and as George Mazzei notes, "Mostly it all melts down to a more assured confidence in one's masculinity, and the assurance that one can perform in traditional masculine areas of competition."<sup>65</sup>

Although on one level fitness and sport did attempt, even superficially, to eliminate societal boundaries between heterosexual and homosexual men, gay men sought out these new arenas of competition and brawn for other, more nuanced reasons as well. Gay men did not want to be mistaken for a straight man or emulate the very group that had oppressed, derided, and ridiculed them for decades.<sup>66</sup> In their leisure time, whether gay men dressed up as a cowboy or spent hours working out in a gym, they sought to move past historic accusations of being less than manly due to their sexual orientation. Now, gay men wanted to look, act, and behave like rugged, virile, manly, American men.<sup>67</sup> The upwardly-mobile gay man took on the persona of the clone to achieve these goals.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>66</sup> Shaun Cole, *'Don We Now Our Gay Apparel': Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 94-97.

<sup>67</sup> The previous chapter of this dissertation began the look into clone culture. For more information on clone and gay masculinity see Martin Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Martin P. Levine, ed., *Gay Men: The Sociology of Male Homosexuality* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979); Seymour Kleinberg, *Alienated Affections: Being Gay in America*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Michaelangelo Signorile, *Life Outside The*

The clone exuded macho masculinity. Fashion scholar Shaun Cole explained, “The term ‘macho’ implied overconformity to the traditional male gender role, which was generally regarded as more masculine than the modern male gender role.”<sup>68</sup> Clone masculinity differed from traditionally presented and demonstrated heterosexual masculinity even if both appeared to be of a similar nature at first glance. Gay men who adopted the clone look fastidiously put together their overall image, making certain they wore the right type of plaid shirt, leather bomber jacket, and jeans in order to draw positive attention and attraction.<sup>69</sup> There was “both parody and emulation” in this role.<sup>70</sup> Gay men were reared in a similar fashion to their straight heterosexual male peers and as such, had been indoctrinated according to the ideals, actions, and beliefs associated with normative masculinity. Embodying the clone mystique was simply a reaffirmation of the power and prestige the accepted male gender role still possessed in American society.<sup>71</sup> Despite protestations from some commentators about the “danger” in embodying traits and visuals associated with “one’s enemy,”<sup>72</sup> for many upwardly-mobile gay men, the

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*Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles and the Passage of Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997); Daniel Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997); Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Gay Culture in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Peter Nardi, ed., *Gay Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000); Jeff Hearn and David Morgan, eds., *Men, Masculinities & Social Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1990); Cole, ‘*Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*’; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; David Savran, *Taking It Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and Newton, *From Panthers to Promise Keepers*. This is only a sample list of texts on this subject matter.

<sup>68</sup> Cole, ‘*Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*’, 94.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>70</sup> Levine, *Gay Macho*, 59.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 82.

<sup>72</sup> Kleinberg, *Alienated Affections*, 146 and 155.

clone lifestyle and corresponding visuals imparted a measure of agency, esteem, and self-worth.<sup>73</sup>

Gay liberation bequeathed many political victories, but instead of continuing to advocate for greater political change, many upscale gay men retreated into a world of self-fulfillment accessible through articles of culture and leisure.<sup>74</sup> Integration and assimilation were no longer absolute goals. Happiness and individual contentment supplanted working as a unified community and self-proclaimed oppressed minority group. For too long gay men had lived under a shroud of secrecy about their true selves, lives, and sexuality. Now, due to the achievements and gains of gay liberation, gay men could reclaim this area back for themselves, using it as a platform to construct a positive and self-affirming masculine persona. Gay men now displayed their sexual attraction, desire, and allure brazenly and openly in direct opposition to all those years of living in a personal and societal closet.

For many upwardly-mobile clones, “sexual culture became the very center of gay life.”<sup>75</sup> Sexually laced and laden advertisements populated the pages of *The Advocate*. Readers gazed upon numerous inserts for men’s bathhouses each one seeking to entice men into their particular world of leisure, sex, and pleasure tinged with a Greek, Roman, or Turkish cultural theme. Baths had areas designated for sex, entertainment, sport, and recreation. Many by the end of the decade also instituted membership clauses in order to better protect and service the right sort of clientele. Sex clubs and baths even initiated

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<sup>73</sup> Cole, ‘*Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*’, 95.

<sup>74</sup> Signorile, *Life Outside*, 49-50.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 217.

dress codes, only permitting individuals who adopted overtly macho ensembles into their establishments, forbidding effeminate or even more androgynous looking gay men from entering the premises. Baths were an integral component in establishing the clone lifestyle.

The promotion of this sexualized gay macho lifestyle extended beyond advertisements for baths and health clubs in *The Advocate*. Gay men's sexual culture influenced the very structure and makeup of the magazine, including the alteration of the periodical's professional motto. In the early 1970s, *The Advocate* was known as "The Newspaper of the Homophile Community." However, by 1979, this adage had been replaced by "Celebrating Your Lifestyle." This seemingly insignificant alteration in this logo symbolized the greater shift within the gay male community. While stories continued to appear concerning politics, gay rights legislation, and incidents of discrimination among other weightier subject matters, more and more though, articles involving sex, culture, and pleasure seemed to infiltrate the magazine's pages with greater frequency. Upwardly-mobile gay men increasingly moved away from a life built around the symbols, protests, and events of gay liberation, and towards one that brought individual contentment, self-fulfillment, and happiness, especially through sex.

*The Advocate* recognized, acknowledged, and understood this cultural shift. The magazine published numerous articles, promotional literature, and information about many sexual topics at this time. In the "Opening Space" column from January 1977, editor D.B. Goodstein candidly stated, "The reality is that gay men are promiscuous."<sup>76</sup> Judging by the plethora of advertisements for sex toys, instructional leaflets, fashion

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<sup>76</sup> D.B. Goodstein, "Opening Space," *The Advocate* 207 (January 12, 1977): 5.



pieces, and actual articles regarding sexual activities, Goodstein's comment seemed understandable. For example, in the periodical's "Outrageous" section from 1975, the editors commented on how this new sexual environment affected underwear companies. The editors remark, "With fewer dudes sporting briefs under jeans these days, the men's underwear industry has fallen on tight times. To fluff drooping sales, Jockey and Fruit of the Loom are offering rebates to customers—as much as \$3 on the purchase of 6 pairs of briefs. And did you ever wonder how it's going with the pajama game."<sup>77</sup>

Sex was central to the fashioning of the new gay macho lifestyle. Accordingly, *The Advocate* informed its readers about the visible signals gay men could project to lure in potential partners, broadcasting their sexual proclivities and desires with the mere placement of an item as seemingly insignificant as a handkerchief. In "Color Your Handkerchief," the magazine declared, "It's no longer enough to remember just the keys, earrings and other hardware items which have been the various means by which a stranger could determine what he is/is not getting into or out of at the *Two Eagles*, *The Spike*, and *The Gold Coast*. No, there's now another means—the colored rag peeking out of either the left or the right hip pocket."<sup>78</sup> A handkerchief dangling from the left pocket meant that the person was "dominant" while one placed in a right pocket denoted an individual as "generally submissive."<sup>79</sup> Not only was the placement key in establishing this semiotic code, but the actual color of the small square garment indicated what type of sexual activity a man preferred, and what role he preferred to play in the process. For

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<sup>77</sup> *The Advocate*, "Shorts Subject," *The Advocate* 162 (April 23, 1975): 21.

<sup>78</sup> *The Advocate's Trader Dick & Friends Pullout Section*, "Color Your Own Handkerchief," *The Advocate* 163 (May 7, 1975): 4. See also Levine, *Gay Macho*, 60-70.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

example, a red handkerchief peeking from the left pocket signaled that a man liked to be a “fist fucker,” while the same item located on the right side meant one was a “fuckee.”<sup>80</sup> The magazine noted, “This takes the semantics out of cruising and reduces conversation to a barely necessary, ‘Yes or No’.”<sup>81</sup> Clothing and accessories helped cement the importance of sexual culture in the gay community.

The rise of more sexually adventurous activities embraced by many in the gay male community became reflected in other types of masculine dress.<sup>82</sup> The fashion material best representing this new sexual atmosphere present in the later 1970s was leather. Gay men started wearing leather and corresponding biking gear in earnest during the 1950s, signaling for many their actual participation in the motorcycle community.<sup>83</sup> However, by the late 1970s, the leather aesthetic became removed from this initial connection as gay men utilized this type of clothing either to exude an outwardly aggressive and tough masculinity or to announce their immersion in the world of S/M activities.<sup>84</sup> Leather garments projected an overtly masculine energy, linking them to the days of the cowboy.<sup>85</sup> This was gear designed for the rugged, domineering, virile American male, albeit now with a darker tone and meaning. *The Advocate* featured many advertisements for leather accessories and garb within its pages. Stores such as “Hell

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>82</sup> Kleinberg, *Alienated Affections*, 178.

<sup>83</sup> Cole, ‘*Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*’, 108.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Hennen, *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 140.

Bent for Leather” and “Leather Forever” promoted a myriad of leather items for sale including western-styled vests, t-shirts, motorcycle jackets, and gloves.<sup>86</sup> The taut, developed, and muscled male models displayed in these promotional inserts exuded a raw sexuality only magnified by the use of leather.

Leather and all of its greater symbolism and sexual connotations were known and understood by the larger gay community. The “leatherman” was a discernable and identifiable masculine image recognized by both gay men and *The Advocate*. In the August 1975 article “What Does the Average Homosexual Look Like? Does Anyone Have a Snapshot?” writer Arnie Kantrowitz declared:

Detractors dub it the ‘New Drag’ and its swelling rank and file are touchy about bad press, or getting into print at all. Because many leathermen are doctors, lawyers, and merchant chiefs by day, such public paranoia makes sense. Leather is more sexual costume than real lifestyle, since a minority of leather fanciers are actual cycle-owning bikers. One step beyond Butch, seeking after a masculinity to transcend even Macho, the Leather Fraternity is often into acronymed sex at its kinky outer reaches.<sup>87</sup>

Although Kantrowitz labeled this fashion trend as “costume,” the numerous articles and promotions about leather revealed that many upscale gay men integrated this textured item into their everyday lives, whether as a vest, pants, gloves, or jacket without veering too much into parody. Whether an upwardly-mobile gay man wore a vest or donned a leather cap, leather allowed him to project those desired qualities of command, power, and mastery integral to maintaining a macho masculine persona.<sup>88</sup>

Leather was not the only fashion item used for these ends. Upscale gay men

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<sup>86</sup> *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for Hell-Bent for Leather,” *The Advocate* 162 (April 23, 1975): 13; and *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for Leather Forever,” *The Advocate* 220 (July 27, 1977): 21.

<sup>87</sup> Arnie Kantrowitz, “What Does the Average Homosexual Look Like? Does Anyone Have a Snapshot?”, *The Advocate* 171 (August 27, 1975): 26.

<sup>88</sup> Cole, ‘*Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*’, 111.

continued to incorporate elements of the cowboy and frontiersman imagery into their wardrobes. Whether gay men donned cowboy-inspired gear or leather garb, they were cloaking themselves in historic symbols of true American masculine power and command. As men, they still retained power and privilege in society even as various groups and movements sought to chip away at the patriarchal structures of the country. Jeans, leather jackets, and flannels were only a few of the sartorial components that made up the typical clone image at this time. All of these garments connected to the historic, mythical American West, a place where manhood was challenged, proven, and demonstrated on a daily basis.

Advertisements found in *The Advocate* further propagated this legend and its accompanying aura of masculinity. Companies like Levi-Strauss frequented the magazine, promoting the merits of donning their Western-inspired gear. One particular promotion stated, “From the makers of the pants that won the West comes another fall/winter selection of men’s casuals certain again to win the world. Whether rendezvousing in the Northern California redwoods with the ADVOCATE’S favorite duo, or snagging the last boat for a final weekend fling on Fire Island, the Levi Strauss collection of jeans, chambrays and plaids promises total comfort and low-key style.”<sup>89</sup> In this fashion spread set against the great outdoors, one male model proudly displayed his toned chest that was partially covered by a plaid flannel shirt. Although he was technically not wearing jeans, the model’s “tan patch-pocket chambray slacks” were constructed in a manner similar to this iconic fashion article.<sup>90</sup> Another model with short

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<sup>89</sup> *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for Levi-Strauss,” *The Advocate* 173 (September 24, 1975): 28-29.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

hair and a moustache (two key ingredients of the clone look) exhibited a shearling-lined, boxy cut, denim jacket placed over a plaid Western-inspired snap shirt.<sup>91</sup> The male form was as much on view here as the featured clothing since these pieces were designed to enhance areas of male attraction like the chest and buttocks region. Since the clone stylized his Western wear, these pieces were presented in a crisp and sharp manner since shirts were tucked into pants neatly and were not perceived as being oversized or baggy.<sup>92</sup>

Western-inspired clothing was in vogue for the upscale gay male community. Cowboy boots, plaid flannel shirts, leather bomber jackets, and fur accented outerwear became staples within the clone wardrobe. All of these elements denoted a butch or supremely masculine mode of dress. Natural, primordial, brawny American masculinity was being honored and publicized through these types of fashion offerings. The professional gay man could integrate this mode of dress into his daily life by donning a white Stetson hat, light color single breasted sport coat, dark dress shirt akin to denim, and a bolo tie.<sup>93</sup> During leisure hours, gay men exuded the cowboy look with Calvin Klein dark jeans and denim shirts opened at the chest with rolled up sleeves to display their developed and pleasing exteriors.<sup>94</sup> Jeans were an integral component not only to the macho or clone aesthetic, but they “form the basis of the Western look.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>92</sup> Cole, ‘*Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*’, 95-99. See also Levine, *Gay Macho*, 59-61.

<sup>93</sup> Gilbert Cameron, “Go Western Young Man,” *The Advocate* 279 (November 1, 1979): 50.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 51.

Furs also reflected the Western look for the upscale gay male. A coyote fur coat with a “man-sized shawl collar” paired with boots and a Stetson hat, accentuated a solid, well-muscled, strong male frame.<sup>96</sup> Gay men exuded a virile and hardy exterior in fur coats produced in mink, otter, and raccoon as well. The masculine dress of the cowboy and frontiersman gave the gay male the proper tools with which to construct a truly macho persona to the world each and every day. The upwardly-mobile gay man now looked, acted, and performed like a true American man.

Macho masculinity reminiscent of the clone surfaced in magazines reviewed by straight males at this time. Even though *GQ* did not specifically use the term clone, many of their articles and fashion spreads implicitly acknowledged the existence of this masculine figure. Since *GQ*’s readership included both heterosexual and homosexual men, editors incorporated rhetoric and visuals that would prove relatable, comfortable, and recognizable to each group. The magazine attempted to explain the rise of what it termed the “new macho” in American society in the summer of 1975.<sup>97</sup> According to *GQ* writer Peter Carlsen, “leather jackets, military fatigue trousers, hooded sweat shirts, construction boots and army surplus gear are all elements of a fashion movement which had rapidly assumed the status of high chic in the same circles which a few season ago, were cultivating gardens of Italian silk shirts and snapping up velvet jeans from Paris.”<sup>98</sup> Most of these sartorial objects were identifiable by the greater gay community as indicative of clone masculinity. And, as Carlsen explained, “In a world that is

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>97</sup> Peter Carlsen, “Fashion Overview: Et Tu Brute? A Look at the New Macho,” *GQ* 45 (Summer 1975): 124.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 124.

democratically divided between the sexes, men obviously must compete as sex objects too.”<sup>99</sup>

The upwardly-mobile gay male put on overtly masculine attire to announce his claim to all the historic attributes associated with American manhood like dominance, strength, virility, and toughness. So how could *GQ* then turn around and both promote and explain this macho fashion trend to its heterosexual subscribers? Carlsen claimed, “A more negative outlook would be the interpretation that men are fighting a desperate rearguard action to preserve attitudes and esthetics that are specifically masculine.”<sup>100</sup> The upwardly-mobile male needed a means to demonstrate and prove his masculinity due to the successes of civil rights, feminism, and liberation movements that chipped away at his sources of patriarchal pride and power. Both straight and gay males perceived their manhood to be in jeopardy and under attack from a myriad of forces. The macho persona imparted a sense of security and power to both groups of men. And, for straight males, the existence of the gay clone engendered a heightened sense of gender anxiety since they were “more like a real man than straight men.”<sup>101</sup> In the end, both gay and straight *GQ* readers and American males could equally identify with the desire to project a macho masculinity in an ever-changing world.

The appeal of Western-inspired clothing for both the gay and straight upscale male was so apparent by 1975 that the editors of *Esquire* remarked, “Way back when,

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 107.

denim won the West. Today, casual wear geared for the Western outdoor lifestyle has won the whole shooting match and became the national favorite.”<sup>102</sup>

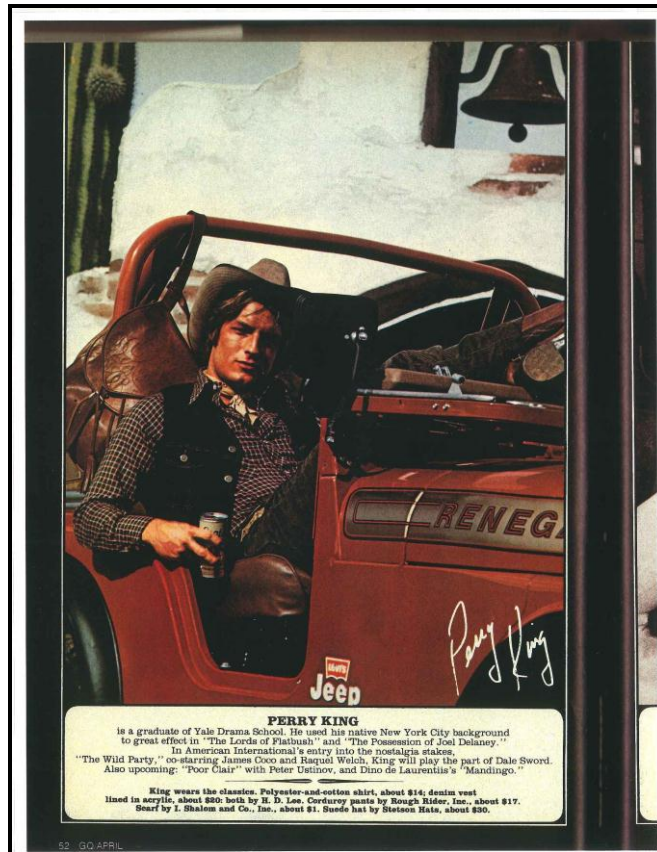


Figure 7. The Western Cowboy.<sup>103</sup>

*GQ* and *Esquire* promoted the western trend in men's fashion, showcasing garb representative of the cowboy and frontiersmen that included flannel, denim, suede, western shirts, and leather. For example, *GQ*'s April 1975 fashion pictorial, "The Winning West," featured up and coming Hollywood actors including Martin Sheen and

<sup>102</sup> *Esquire*, "The Way of the West," *Esquire* 83 (February 1975): 116.

<sup>103</sup> *GQ*, "The Winning West," *GQ* 45 (April 1975): 50-52.



Perry King in items such as Pendleton flannel shirts, dark denim vests, jeans, Stetson hats, and olive green corduroy pants.<sup>104</sup> Their clothing communicated a sense of strength, toughness, and vigor. Along with this type of traditional-inspired western attire, suiting ensembles also received a dose of western flair. One option presented in *Esquire* revealed a toned male model donning a muted tan western-styled jacket with matching straight leg trousers. This “linen-look sport suit” might not have readily conjured up images of the cowboy or frontiersman, but the color palette echoed the tones of the earth, the terrain, the dust—the elements of the Western half of the United States.<sup>105</sup> The pastels and outrageous color combinations of the early 1970s had no place alongside earthy, grounded colors in hues of brown and green.<sup>106</sup> These were “manly” colors evocative of the earth, environment, and elements. This neutral palette also properly highlighted a toned and shapely figure since garish and bold colors draw attention away from the body located underneath the yards of fabric.<sup>107</sup> Tan suits, denim jackets, and plaid shirts gave the upscale American male the confidence needed to tame and conquer the late 1970s terrain.

Companies commonly inserted advertisements in *GQ* and *Esquire* that further publicized the Western trend in masculine dress. Lee regularly presented their vision of modern cowboy gear. In one advertisement, a young, physically fit model displayed a bright yellow button down shirt tucked neatly into a pair of Lee jeans. A red bandana

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<sup>104</sup> *GQ*, “The Winning West,” 50-52.

<sup>105</sup> *Esquire*, “The Way of the West,” 123.

<sup>106</sup> Peter Carlsen, “Fashion Overview: The Rights of Spring: How to Look Freshly Minted This Season,” *GQ* 45 (April 1975): 116.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-118.

acting as a kerchief around the model's neck connected readers mentally to the days of the old West as did the model's pair of cowboy boots. Another male model sported the brand's denim "contempo Western" jacket layered over a yellow and orange western styled shirt. The inclusion of the traditional Stetson hat finished off this ode to the cowboy.<sup>108</sup> Companies such as Rough Rider Inc., marketed business suits infused with western elements. The logo for Rough Rider, Inc., stated, "Rough Rider Americana for today's frontiersman."<sup>109</sup> In one promotion, the company asserted, "There's a new frontiersman in today's complex society. He creates confidence and shows leadership. His dress portrays success. For more than 55 years Rough Rider of Napa has fashioned action-tailored sport suits, sport coat/slacks coordinates, leisure suits to fit his lifestyle."<sup>110</sup>

Companies like Lee and Rough Rider, Inc., produced Western-inspired attire uniquely suited to the needs and desires of the American male. Cowboy garb and Western dress not only conveyed macho masculinity, but according to American designer Ralph Lauren, "Western clothes are the most distinctively American."<sup>111</sup> With America's bicentennial occurring in 1976 and a host of programs, consumer goods, and spectacles coordinated to encourage American patriotism and pride, it is no surprise to see clothing so indicative of the American experience, traits, and imagery appearing with increased frequency. Designers like Lauren knew the allure and mythic nature the West

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<sup>108</sup> *GQ*, "Lee Advertisement," *GQ* 45 (April 1975): 13. Lee became popular due to their denim wares so jeans regularly appeared within their advertisements at this time.

<sup>109</sup> *GQ*, "Rough Rider, Inc., Advertisement," *GQ* 45 (April 1975): 31.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>111</sup> *GQ*, "True Blue," *GQ* 48 (August 1978): 113.

had in the American imagination and particularly in the male psyche. Lauren noted, “My attitude is American: functional, rugged, quality, non-trendy. The American man is honest and straight-forward, as opposed to the European who’s dandified and more suave.”<sup>112</sup>

Lauren’s image of the mythic West materialized in one fashion spread from *Esquire* in April 1979. A male model seated in a Jeep Wrangler posed in a “dusty-rose” Western shirt, dark jeans, brown bandana, and two toned orange cowboy boots. Another male model in the pictorial flaunted a light blue Western shirt, red bandana, dark jeans, and a white cowboy hat.<sup>113</sup> Alongside an array of Western shirts, colorful cowboy boots, and bandanas, the magazine also presented suede jackets, corduroy articles, plaid shirts, and bolo ties all created by Lauren for the discriminating upscale male consumer.<sup>114</sup> American men best expressed their true masculine and American selves with these sartorial artifacts modernized for a new era.

Other American designers also acknowledged the symbolic currency of the cowboy and frontiersmen at this time. Designer Bill Blass declared, “By far, the best-dressed person in our country is the cowboy.” The cowboy look gave America a unique fashion sensibility and pedigree since as Blass further claimed, “Outside of Brooks Brothers, Levis and Western clothes, it seems that we have nothing to offer Europe that they don’t have.”<sup>115</sup> The western look was not only distinctively masculine, but uniquely

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>113</sup> *Esquire*, “Riding the Range with the Urban Cowboy,” *Esquire* 91 (April 1979): 104.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 104-107.

<sup>115</sup> *GQ*, “True Blue,” 108.

American engendering a sense of national pride and patriotism otherwise lacking in this decade of cultural malaise and societal malcontent.

Along with western shirts, denim, and flannels, fur coats further publicized the cowboy and frontiersman image. The October 1978 fashion spread “Outward Bound” in *GQ* displayed a variety of fur coat options set against the rugged outdoors of Maine. The editors declared, “Think big this fall, because that’s how the season’s outerwear shapes up against the cold in all kinds of brawny, oversized coats and jackets.”<sup>116</sup> Men related to the words “brawny” and “oversized” as these are masculine terms that conjured up images associated with macho masculinity. One model enveloped his frame in a coyote fur coat that showcased a high and protective collar from Revillon at Saks Fifth Avenue.<sup>117</sup> Due to the bulky nature of this garment, the model’s body became augmented, making him visually appear larger and more imposing. Imposing also described an oversized coyote vest featuring an attached animal tail by Ralph Lauren for Tepper.<sup>118</sup> This sartorial item represented those days of trials and travails on the frontier when male settlers exuded a rough, domineering, strong, and commanding masculinity through their actions, behaviors, and style which sometimes included wearing animal skins and hides as they served both as protective layers and personal trophies. Fur coats acted now as a man’s shield, a form of daily battle armor that enabled him to face a colder economic, cultural, and political climate.

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<sup>116</sup> *GQ*, “Outward Bound,” *GQ* 48 (October 1978): 113.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-123. Along with fashion spreads, advertisements in *GQ* promoted fur coats. For a couple examples see *GQ*, “Advertisement for Revillon at Saks Fifth Avenue,” *GQ* 48 (November 1978): 94; and *GQ*, “Advertisement for Neiman Marcus,” *GQ* 48 (November 1978): 47.

Other clothing symbolic of traditional masculinity beyond cowboy gear attracted upscale male consumers. Famously masculine figures like writer Ernest Hemingway, whose manly exploits involved bullfighting contests, war reporting, and sexual conquests, influenced magazine fashion spreads. In the fashion pictorial “Hemingway Country Active Wear” from *Esquire*’s November 1975 issue, a variety of clothing items befitting a hunter and outdoorsman were displayed. Included were pieces such as a Pendleton wool coat done in a tartan plaid, durable corduroy pants, down filled vests, plaid shirts, and heavy tweed suiting attire patterned much after the styles once worn by the English country gentleman out for a fox hunt.<sup>119</sup> These were clothes designed for an active, competitive, and robust male ready to do battle with creatures of the wilderness both big and small. More importantly, these types of garments stood the test of time, never losing their place in the American sartorial pantheon. They reappeared in a man’s closet when needed, always there to provide security, comfort, and protection.

Traditional masculinity worked in the same manner for the upscale American male searching for constancy and assurance in an ever-changing world. Macho masculinity could be thrown on with ease and confidence just like a pair of well worn jeans or a broken in flannel. Men wanted to move away from clothing identified and labeled as feminine or androgynous. Garb symbolic of famous virile, tough, and authoritative masculine icons such as Hemingway and the cowboy gave men the tools with which to construct a masculine persona of their own making, one that made them perform, seem, and act like hardy men in an age of fluctuating and confusing gender roles and expectations.

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<sup>119</sup> *Esquire*, “Hemingway Country Active Wear,” *Esquire* 84 (November 1975): 136-143.

The pervasiveness of western attire also connected to the “reddening of America.”<sup>120</sup> The South of the later 1970s was not the same region that emerged broken from the ashes of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Due to an influx of people, industry, technology, and talent, the South had risen once again to take center stage in American society.<sup>121</sup> Southern or Sunbelt culture touched nearly every aspect of American life from elected presidents (Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Jimmy Carter) to the ascension of football as the “premier professional sport.”<sup>122</sup> With an ever growing population and sprawling cities, the South held real political, economic, and cultural power. Additionally, the South was no longer the only backdrop for racial resentment, brutality, and violence as the North dealt with the issues of affirmative action and school busing.<sup>123</sup> The South became the national model of how to best manage these matters that threatened to chip away at the sources of traditional white power and prestige.<sup>124</sup>

Subtle and discreet forms of resistance emerged as a response for many to the economic, political, and cultural achievements of black America. This was all part and parcel of the pervasiveness of “redneck culture” sweeping the country.<sup>125</sup> “Country music, cowboy boots, pickup trucks, and even the Confederate flag” symbolized to varying degrees the acceptance of redneck culture infiltrating American society.<sup>126</sup> Many

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<sup>120</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies*, 102.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

middle-and upper-class Americans embraced aspects of this cultural movement and its ethos. For some upscale white Americans becoming even a partial redneck allowed them a means to combat the feeling that racial, gender, and sexual parity was achieved at their expense. Western clothing transformed into a tool of protest and resistance against the tides of change that threatened to emasculate the once all powerful, commanding, and confident American white male.

Upscale black men gravitated towards western-inspired macho dressing just as their white peers did. The garb of the cowboy and frontiersmen, two historically recognized white masculine archetypes, appealed to upwardly-mobile black males.<sup>127</sup> Advertisements found within *Ebony* propagated the cultivation of macho masculinity. One 1975 promotion for the cigarette company Benson & Hedges, described as “America’s Favorite Cigarette Break,” presented a black model gazing into the camera’s lens holding a stack of freshly cut wooden logs while wearing tinted sunglasses, a black turtleneck, and a khaki button down western shirt over a pair of jeans.<sup>128</sup> Although the promotion clearly intended to entice consumers into purchasing cigarettes, the visuals projected within this spot sold another commodity altogether—masculinity. Rugged, strong, strapping masculine imagery was also on view in ads placed by Miller Brewing Company. In one 1978 advertisement, Miller positioned three, physically fit, and appealing black men sitting at a bar after what looked to be a long day at work outfitted in denim, plaid shirts, and bandanas. There was the further intimation of working class

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<sup>127</sup> The cowboy and frontiersmen look did receive press and coverage within *Ebony* but not on the same scale as *GQ*, *Esquire*, and *The Advocate*.

<sup>128</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Benson & Hedges,” *Ebony* 30 (February 1975): 19.

masculinity here as these workers seemed to be enjoying conviviality after their time spent laboring on the oil rig. Not only was the cowboy aesthetic exhibited, but so too were these men's bodies with shirts opened to showcase solid chests and sleeves rolled up to highlight muscular biceps and arms.

Some companies were less subtle in their promotion since they brazenly and blatantly tried to profit off of shifting gender ideals like Macho Musk Oil for Men. To attract future clientele, Macho Musk presented a photograph of a handsome, well-built, black male clothed in a patterned shirt. His top was left open not only to reveal a large and robust chest, but also a pendant emblazoned with the word "MACHO" in gold. The text stated, "Macho Musk Oil for men who want to exercise their natural prowess...there is a time to be a Macho Man."<sup>129</sup>

Men's clothing also propagated macho masculine imagery at this time. The cowboy and frontiersman aesthetic surfaced in fashion articles and pictorials in *Ebony*, drawing upon the iconography of these masculine symbols of the mythical Wild West. In *Ebony's* review of men's fashion for spring and summer 1978, denim materialized as suitable option for the professional male. One model posed in a matching H.D. Lee denim suit. The jacket evoked a bit of the West with details such as front gold buttons reminiscent of western snaps.<sup>130</sup> Fashion forward males might be persuaded to buy offerings that included "sateen" beige or light gray denim-inspired slacks perfect for dealing with weather in the warmer months of the year or on holiday.<sup>131</sup> Although not as

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<sup>129</sup> *Ebony*, "Advertisement for Macho Musk Oil for Men," *Ebony* 34 (November 1978): 42.

<sup>130</sup> Eunice W. Johnson, "Men's Fashions for Spring and Summer: They are Carefree, Casual, and Comfortable," *Ebony* 33 (April 1978): 162.

<sup>131</sup> Johnson, "From Morning 'til Nights Sports Lovers on Tropical Vacation," 116.



iconic as denim, but still indicative of western dress, corduroy too materialized as a sartorial option for both work and play. For example, in the pictorial “Menswear for Fall and Winter: Sculptured Males Visit Chicago Sculpture,” one black model sported a tan corduroy suit created by H.D. Lee while another model was clad in the designer’s navy version. Both selections were paired with plaid shirts and western-inspired vests. Colors like tan and navy harkened back to the professional suit options popularized during the earlier part of the century. More importantly, browns and blues along with colors such as khaki, rust, and sand projected an aura of life out in the West.<sup>132</sup> *Ebony* further promoted the cowboy mystique as models donned gear such as cowboy boots, leather, Stetson hats, quilted outdoorsman jackets, western shirts, and jeans for their many fashion shoots.<sup>133</sup>

By wearing these macho garments and accessories, the upwardly-mobile black male laid claim to his right to full American manhood. Not only were black Americans making space for themselves in the annals of white American history, but since there were actual black cowboys, black males were proudly inserting themselves and their “hidden” past into the national consciousness. Although as journalist Sarfraz Manzoor explains, “the most common image of the cowboy is a gun-toting, boot-wearing, white man—like John Wayne or Clint Eastwood” over a “quarter” of all cowboys in the Wild West were black.<sup>134</sup> Embracing western gear was about more than emulating white male

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<sup>132</sup> Johnson, “Menswear for Fall and Winter: Sculptured Males Visit Chicago Sculpture,” 152-162.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 160; Eunice W. Johnson, “Fashion’s for the Male Sports Lovers Active or Spectator,” *Ebony* 34 (October 1979): 154.

<sup>134</sup> Sarfraz Manzoor, “America’s Forgotten Black Cowboys,” *BBC News Magazine*, 22 March 2013 [available on-line]; available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21768669>; Internet; accessed 7 July 2013. Manzoor’s articles discuss the fact that black cowboys were minimized in the larger story of American history and the West due to the efforts of Hollywood who “whitewashed” this part of American history.

privilege and power since it also signified a visual expression of positive racial affirmation. Like their white and gay counterparts, black males also wanted the confidence, vigor, virility, and strength that exuded from the cowboy and frontiersmen figures. Upscale black males faced the same economic, political, and cultural troubles as their peers. They also struggled to live up to the expectations of dominant masculinity. Normative masculinity was based on a white, albeit middle-class, ideal.<sup>135</sup> All men that did not fit this mode, consciously or not, compared their masculine worth and regard in relation to this model which was not constructed to be inclusive. Black men started to challenge this masculine standard as they acquired many items, objects, qualities, and attributes associated with traditional, acknowledged, American masculinity. Masculinity became a field of competition as no side would willingly back down or compromise.

Males competed for the same resources, rights, and clout. So who would come out on top? Who would be the exemplar of masculinity? By the late 1970s, gay men looked, acted, and behaved more conventionally masculine than heterosexuals. Upwardly-mobile straight men realized this and incorporated macho masculine mores, values, and visuals into their daily lives in an effort to combat their personal and societal demons. Successful black men also had to figure out how to construct and demonstrate their masculine prowess otherwise they too risked losing access, recognition, and esteem associated with being a man. The cowboy served as more than a masculine archetype to these communities—it was a treasured and respected symbol of American masculinity.

Along with denim and corduroy, fur coats exuded macho masculinity. *Ebony* encouraged its male readers to purchase these items since, “There’s just something about

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<sup>135</sup> Kimmel talks about this in both editions of *Manhood in America*. See Kimmel, *Manhood in America Third Edition*, x-7.

a gorgeous Black man wrapped up in a lush white coyote or burnished bronze mink that causes heads to turn and women's minds to wander."<sup>136</sup> Raw, virile, sexual energy radiated from these garments. *Ebony's* editors asserted, "Centuries ago in Africa, a lion skin symbolized a boy's manhood. The leopard and cheetah were monopolized by chiefs, and tables of panther skins were cherished gifts in Egypt."<sup>137</sup> Donning a fur coat connected the upscale black male to his historical past just as had been the case for white American males. Black men could unite their African and American pasts clad in the ancient relics of exalted manhood and masculine prowess. Fur coats were available in an array of textures including mink, raccoon, nutria, and beaver along with price points ranging from \$300 to \$150,000. Noted masculine figures such as footballer Jim Brown, boxer Joe Frazier, and popular actor Fred Williamson were all listed in *Ebony* as owning furs with some of these individuals photographed posing in their possessions. Fur was not conceived of as a feminine or even effeminate fashion accessory; rather, fur was being promoted as an integral component in establishing a very masculine identity.

Fur coats projected a robust, potent, and poised black male form. In one advertisement from the American Fur Industry, the caption read, "Reach for the stars. Fur."<sup>138</sup> A man and a woman were pictured ensconced in sable and mink fur coats. The male model, however, clad his frame in a long, body augmenting white fur coat left open to reveal his boxing gloves, shorts, and shoes.<sup>139</sup> As much as the fur coat in this

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<sup>136</sup> *Ebony*, "Fabulous Men in Their Fabulous Furs," *Ebony* 34 (January 1979): 107.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>138</sup> *Ebony*, "Advertisement for The American Fur Industry," *Ebony* 34 (September 1979): 134.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

promotion was on display, so too was this man's body. This model's body was not slender and skinny; rather, the black body on view here projected elements of strength, confidence, and control. The model proudly and defiantly flaunted his toned and athletic frame. From the days of Reconstruction onward, black men endeavored to move past stereotypes levied against their bodies from white society. During the early years of the civil rights movement, the black body was purposefully desexualized and void of overt aggression and dominance in an effort to appeal to both a black and white audience. The presentation of the black body changed and transformed during the 1970s influenced by the concepts of authenticity, individuality, and self-fulfillment, not to mention the cultural shift towards black power and militancy. While not all upscale black men agreed with all of the actions and rhetoric of black power, some of its messages and beliefs resonated positively. Within the concept of black power there existed this belief that "power lay inherent in maintaining and expressing a distinctive culture through clothing, music, hairstyle, literature, cuisine, and the arts."<sup>140</sup> This was the era of diversity and not necessarily integration.<sup>141</sup> Each group be it Italian, Mexican, or African, wanted to maintain certain aspects of their specific cultural heritage while also participating in American culture and society.

For many black Americans, their cultural heritage included roots both African and American. Macho masculinity gave black men cultural power and agency. They rebuked past associations of their form by white society, and in turn, used these caricatures as a positive vehicle to construct their own masculine identity. What was

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 63-71.

once feared, derided, and ridiculed became the foundation for a vehicle of self-actualization. The black body no longer hid from society's glare. It was strong, muscular, and ready to take on all competitors in the boxing ring or beyond.

Wearing furs gave upscale black men a sense of power, control, and command. A bulky beaver or coyote jacket paired with jeans and cowboy boots created a commanding and authoritative masculine persona.<sup>142</sup> These coats emphasized a man's shoulders and chest due to their construction. A man looked brawny, virile, and forceful in designs like these. Slim and slender men would look foolish donning these articles since coats of this nature would swallow up their smaller frames making them appear child-like and weak. A strong, imposing, physically fit black male could properly pull off this type of macho look.

The upscale black male needed to possess a strong, well-built, and tough exterior. *Ebony* regularly featured many advertisements promoting this new physical ideal. Men could purchase items like Frederick of Hollywood's "Vibrating Tingle Exercises" if they wanted to "look good...f-e-e-l good."<sup>143</sup> These exercises started once an individual placed the company's vibrating belt on any part of their body needing attention including hips, stomach, thighs, or the waist. For men fighting to lose excess pounds, Fat Off Plus capsules provided the answer. According to their promo, "Our already popular lecithin, cider vinegar, kelp and B6 diet has been improved and put into a super-concentrated capsule." The company claimed that their pill "mobilizes fat cells and reduces excess

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<sup>142</sup> Johnson, "Fashion's For the Male Sports Lovers Active or Spectator," 155.

<sup>143</sup> *Ebony*, "Advertisement for Frederick of Hollywood," *Ebony* 30 (August 1975): 94.

water.”<sup>144</sup> Pills also formed the basis of Rush Industries, Inc., spots within the magazine. In their promotion for Hercuplan tablets, the lab asked *Ebony*’s male readers, “Too skinny? Don’t let poor eating habits rob you of a powerfully appealing body.”<sup>145</sup> If pills, pulsating devices, and other items like sauna suits did not offer tangible results, black men could also don body shaping garments to aid them in projecting a controlled, firm, and proper exterior. The New Miracle Duz-All was “The Ultimate in Men’s Control with an Exclusive Cotton Crotch.”<sup>146</sup> This undergarment declared it would make men “Look Manlier...Feel Younger Instantly.”<sup>147</sup> Additionally, the company listed promises such as, “No Bulgy Midriff,” “Slims & Trims Waistline,” and “No More Stomach Bulge.”<sup>148</sup> Alongside these pronouncements, the firm made certain to include a picture of what they deemed to be the epitome of masculine health and vigor—a muscular, brawny, and strapping black man.

### Conclusion

“Every man wants to be a macho man/  
 ...Macho, macho man/  
 I gotta be a macho man/  
 Macho macho man/  
 I gotta be a macho.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Fat Off Plus,” *Ebony* 30 (October 1975): 4.

<sup>145</sup> *Ebony*, Advertisement for Rush Industries, Inc.,” *Ebony* 34 (May 1979): 144.

<sup>146</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for New Miracle Duz-All,” *Ebony* 33 (November 1977): 69.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>149</sup> The Village People, “Macho Man” from *Macho Man* (New York, New York: Casablanca Records, 1978); A-Z Lyrics, “Village People Lyrics,” <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/villagepeople/machoman.html> (accessed 26 December 2012).

The Village People's hit 1978 single "Macho Man" signified more than just a celebratory gay anthem about sex and the male body. There is cultural currency behind these seemingly superficial lyrics. Upscale American men wanted to be "macho men" during the late 1970s. These were the men who earlier in the decade donned leisure suits, body conscious shirt jackets, and paraded around in unconventional masculine colors, cuts, and designs.

However, this grand experiment would not last. As the decade continued, so too did economic uncertainty, international decline, political cynicism, and cultural malaise. Wearing unconventional masculine dress had not made the upscale American male anymore confident, secure or successful in either his personal or professional life. Not only that, but, the softer masculinity postulated by society and radiating from masculine dress of the time seemed to be in direct contrast with qualities inherent in dominant or traditional masculinity. Many men simply could not adjust to these new gender alterations and longed for the familiar and reassuring. As such, upwardly-mobile men, gay and straight, white and black, gravitated towards clothing representative of true, authentic, American masculinity—the suit and western wear.

Manhood was a competition. Upscale American males all competed for access to this title and all of the rewards, privileges, and powers associated with it. Attire indicative of traditional masculinity helped upwardly-mobile men construct a rugged, commanding, manly exterior amidst an age of personal and professional insecurity and anxiety. This shift towards classic and nostalgia masculine dressing and gender formation was not a mere fashion blip or cultural anomaly. It would set the stage for the grandiose masculine extravaganza of what would become "The Reagan 80s."

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**SUITED UP FOR BATTLE:**  
**POWER DRESSING IN THE 1980s**

**Introduction**

In a small, but decadently decorated hotel apartment in Los Angeles, Julian is getting ready to complete his daily fitness routine. Clad only in revealing boxer shorts, Julian quickly attaches ankle weights to his tanned, toned legs before flipping himself upside down on his chin-up bar. The music of Blondie rages in the background as Julian crunches his abdominal region, while simultaneously working out his biceps with weighted dumbbells. His exercise session is soon interrupted by the ringing of the phone. After dislodging his legs from the chin-up bar, Julian rushes to answer his phone call, but does not stop attending to his body. Julian preens for the mirror in front of him clearly gazing with a mix of awe and pleasure at the spectacle that is his frame. With fanatical obsessiveness, Julian proceeds to jump up and down hurriedly, flexes his arm muscles repeatedly, and engages in a series of yoga like stretches for the duration of his phone conversation. Some time later, Julian abandons his fitness routine to choose his ensemble for the evening. Lined up on his bed are four suits ranging in color from navy to brown all accessorized with a blue or cream colored shirt and corresponding tie. His closet is full of Giorgio Armani suits carefully hung near pieces of the same color family. The bureau in the corner of his room is devoted to drawers of ties and shirts all



grouped with similar color palettes. Displaying the same intensity and determination demonstrated earlier during his workout, Julian mixes and matches clothing and styles on his bed. Julian's Armani clad exterior will soon be departing for a night of food and drink in his Mercedes convertible.<sup>1</sup>

Thousands of miles away in New York City, Patrick also gives unrelenting attention to his own physique. As the music of Huey Lewis and the News plays in the background, Patrick comments that he can now complete about 1000 stomach crunches a day. At the end of his morning workout, Patrick removes an ice pack from his eyes, and begins his daily skincare regimen which consists of deep pore cleansers, a gel body wash, an almond and honey body scrub, and an herbal facial mask. Before Patrick lathers his face in moisturizer, he methodically mentions that he only uses aftershave that contains little or no alcohol since, "Alcohol dries your face out and makes you look older."<sup>2</sup> Patrick enters his closet to select his work ensemble—a suit. His closet only contains suits designed by Giorgio Armani or Valentino. The eyeglasses Patrick places on his face bear the label of Oliver Peoples. Patrick's suits reveal his toned, tanned body lurking underneath layers of pinstriped gabardine. His red tie and crisp, striped shirt accented with a strong, white collar generate the image of power and control. Patrick proceeds to the door where he puts on his cashmere coat and expensive leather gloves before leaving for another day at work. Patrick's frame is a walking advertisement of consumption and style. Trading may be his day job, but image making is Patrick's vocation. He bows at the altar of finely crafted Italian suits and identifiable fashions.

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<sup>1</sup> *American Gigolo*, directed by Paul Schrader (1980; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2000), DVD.

<sup>2</sup> *American Psycho*, directed by Mary Harron (2000; CA: Lion's Gate and Universal Studios, 2005), DVD. Words spoken by actor Christian Bale who played Patrick Bateman.

Patrick and Julian are figments of popular culture. Julian is the main character in the 1980 movie, *American Gigolo* starring Richard Gere. Patrick is the work of writer Bret Easton Ellis's book on America in the 1980s, *American Psycho* published in 1991. In 2000, director Mary Harron adapted Ellis's novel for the big screen with Christian Bale in the title role of Patrick. Although both of these men are artistic inventions, they exist as cultural artifacts of the 1980s. The media overwhelmingly depicted this era as one of excess; a time of financial prosperity which bequeathed unlimited opportunities for material happiness for all Americans. Television programs such as *Dynasty* and *Dallas* promoted to the world an America that was obsessed by wealth and luxury.<sup>3</sup> More than cultural symbols of a bygone era, these men signified the upscale American male's growing need to promote a positive and strong outward persona to the world at large. These characters used their bodies to construct a masculine identity that projected attributes of control, sophistication, status, and confidence. More importantly, both Patrick and Julian used one item in particular to fashion together their masculinity—the suit.

American masculinity and the suit were immersed in a cultural transition at the beginning of the 1980s. Many upscale American men rejected the type of soft masculinity embodied by individuals such as President Jimmy Carter.<sup>4</sup> Social, economic, and political instability in the United States heightened men's anxiety and desperation. Some men feared that the very structures of their societal power were

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<sup>3</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 118.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 179.

under attack due to accelerating divorce rates, unemployment, corporate re-structuring, and challenges abroad to American global hegemony. Traditional sources of masculinity such as the workplace, battlefield, and home proved inadequate at securing masculine pride and self-esteem.<sup>5</sup> As upwardly-mobile men hunted for suitable models<sup>6</sup> of masculinity to emulate, one cultural tool emerged to offer relief. American men turned to the one area, the one domain in which they could exert complete control—their bodies.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Lynne Luciano argued that by the 1980s, “For the American middle-class man, the body is an icon of personal achievement and an unambiguous statement about where he stands in the competitive game of modern life.”<sup>8</sup> American men constructed their masculinity through interactions with commodities created to make the male body more attractive, youthful, and powerful. The desirable male form of the 1980s evoked power and strength. This masculine ideal was first to be achieved by a balanced diet and exercise. Then, the male body was to be clothed in conspicuous designer fashions.<sup>9</sup> Men’s involvement with the fashion industry highlighted the growing emphasis placed on the male body.

Male self-worth and value was asserted through fashion choices that acutely

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 194-196.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 212.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of this concept see Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Costantino, *Men’s Fashion in the Twentieth Century: From Frock Coats to Intelligent Fibers* (New York: Costume and Fashion Press, 1997), 121.

emphasized the male physique and high (real or imagined) economic status.

Additionally, men further needed to exude youthfulness in order to succeed in the professional, corporate world. Youth implied fitness and longevity. A fit, toned, and well-groomed man projected success and action. This need for a youthful exterior highlighted the booming fitness craze of the era and manifested itself most vividly in male fashions of the period, particularly in the presentation of the male suit.

Just as many American men discarded the problematic masculinity of the 1970s, so too did they negate outdated and irrelevant fashion styles. Sobriety, simplicity, and strength in dress were best symbolized in the suit. The Reagan administration provided the perfect backdrop for the revival of this fashion article. The suit's resurgence actually started in the late 1970s with the burgeoning trend towards nostalgia and classicism in men's attire. The 1980s only solidified and augmented this sartorial and gender transformation. Although cowboy gear never fully vanished from the fashion scene, its importance in the everyday presentation of a man's outward self lessened over the course of the decade even for gay men. The suit regained sartorial dominance. There was no need for excessive reliance on cowboy gear and its corresponding symbolism since the mentality, qualities, and ethos of the cowboy reigned throughout Reagan America. Historian Sean Wilentz explained that, "...translated into Reagan's America, it was the unfettered, hardworking entrepreneur who takes risks and, living by the inexorable market laws of supply and demand, either fails the test or makes a fortune."<sup>10</sup> The cowboy spirit lived on in these men who donned suits to tame the corporate wilderness throwing off all competitors and obstacles.

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<sup>10</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2008), 135.

“Power dressing” became a way of life for the upscale American male. Putting on a power suit infused the body with a confidence, self-assuredness, and potency that had been denied to it during the previous decade. As observed in *Esquire*, *GQ*, *Ebony*, and *Ebony Man*, the male suit materialized as not only fashionable, but as a medium through which upwardly-mobile men, regardless of differences in race or sexual orientation, could exert control, dominance, and command. Although *The Advocate* did not publicize the business suit on the same scale as the other periodicals, the need to project a youthful, strong, and sculpted body remained imperative to achieving personal and professional success, prosperity, and longevity for their upscale gay male readers. The magazine simply communicated other means to accomplish the same goals for its readership as many gay men received their professional information from either *GQ* or *Esquire*. The strength and power of the male body materialized through the double breasted suit jacket, a shirt with French cuffs, and tailored pants. Dress revealed that the male professional spent money and time on his appearance to transmit a look of youth and mastery. This visual was only achieved through a toned and fit body maintained with exercise and diet.

Suits were not the only garments that denoted strength, power, and potency at this time. Even though the suit dominated fashion advice and spreads, sportswear also showed off the male form to its best advantage emphasizing a man’s truly masculine assets. Sportswear visually communicated a man’s commitment to maintaining a healthy, robust, and forceful male form—the same masculine ideal propagated by the suit. These garments simply worked in concert with one another. They gave upscale men that extra advantage to attain success and prosperity both inside the boardroom and

on the court. Embracing fashion did not make men more feminine; rather, fashion surfaced as a tool of survival, a means to shape a masculinity grounded in traditional notions of power and prestige that appeared to be diminishing. The 1980s power suit was more than just a designer innovation; it was a symbol of a reenergized American masculinity. Men were now ready for battle.

### **The 1980s, Power Dressing, and Ronald Reagan**

In the August 1980 issue of *GQ* magazine, the fashion editors announced, “Against today’s uncertainties, the upcoming season’s clothes serve as a stable anchor, reaffirming such values as restraint and common sense.”<sup>11</sup> Men were encouraged to purchase “Clothes that speak with authority—crisp, authentic and totally wearable.”<sup>12</sup> The male consumer was further instructed a month later to, “Make the nation’s gloomy economic picture work for you by selecting a suit that can be dressed up with all the apt details that spell authority, yet whose message can also be cooled by softening the look with a sweater in lieu of a shirt and tie, spirited socks and pushing up the sleeves.”<sup>13</sup> One word is notably repeated in both of these monthly editions—authority. Why was there such an emphasis on projecting authority at the start of the 1980s? And, how could men’s clothing, or more specifically, the male suit, provide this desired attribute?

Authority seemed lacking in 1970s America. Frustration and anxiety blanketed the nation. Presidential scandals, ineffective leadership, military defeats, and international setbacks affected the nation’s prestige and global standing. Moreover,

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<sup>11</sup> *GQ*, “American Heritage,” *GQ* 50 (August 1980): 86.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>13</sup> *GQ*, “Suited for Mileage,” *GQ* 50 (September 1980): 173.

issues such as high inflation, unemployment, and corporate restructuring painted a gloomy picture of the country's future economic hopes and dreams. Americans hoped that the nation's declining domestic and international fortunes could be reversed due to the ascension of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1981.

The Executive Office certainly looked as if it needed an image overhaul at this time. The Gerald Ford and, more specifically, Jimmy Carter administrations lacked the formality, toughness, and aggressiveness of their predecessors.<sup>14</sup> A former actor, California governor, and hard-liner against the spread of communism during the postwar period, Ronald Reagan seemed to infuse the presidency with a new sense of confidence, self-assuredness, and purpose. American men were watching and listening. President elect Reagan offered a new and appealing model of masculinity to many Americans. One male observer wrote in *Esquire* magazine about this cultural shift, "Tough-guyism came into vogue. We began to wonder how we'd do in a fist fight in a bar. We began to *admire* the John Wayne ethic and principled brawling. Suddenly we heard about strength and power and superpower and Cold War...Cold War meant toughness."<sup>15</sup>

Reagan and his team of advisors understood that a president's image and persona was integral to the nation's perceived political, economic, and cultural recovery. Although Reagan received fifty-one percent of the popular vote along with 489 electoral votes, he did not necessarily receive a mandate to govern. His election was heavily based on the country's growing "anti-Carter" mood. Questions abounded as to whether

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<sup>14</sup> Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Peter W. Kaplan, "The End of the Soft Line," *Esquire* 93 (April 1980): 41.

Reagan was mentally and physically up to the challenge of leading the country, since at age 69, he was the oldest man to serve in that office.<sup>16</sup> Historian Gil Troy maintained that, “Armed with his easy grin, his sunny disposition, and an array of anecdotes trumpeting traditional American values,” Reagan skillfully employed all of these tools he had acquired in his acting and political careers to reassure voters that he was the best man for the job.<sup>17</sup>

Reagan visually endeavored to remove the cloud of despair and gloom that covered the American nation, starting with his inauguration. Four years earlier, the country watched as the Carter family walked the length of Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House in an effort to demonstrate their home-grown populist appeal. The mood was subdued and restrained. However, the Reagans were not the Carters. Gil Troy commented, “The president’s thousand-dollar morning suit, the First Lady’s \$10,000 gown, the sixteen-million-dollar inaugural price tag, the private planes landing at National (soon to be Reagan) Airport, the limousines deployed on the ground, and the decision to mount the inauguration facing west all signified Reagan’s new direction.”<sup>18</sup> Reagan moved to banish the ghosts of limitations, stagnation, and fragmentation from the American psyche with actions like these.

In an age where appearances mattered more than substance, Reagan and his aides carefully crafted his public image to signify power and authority. Reagan would not

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<sup>16</sup> Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 47-49

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 50.





Figure 8. Official Portrait of President Ronald Reagan.<sup>19</sup>

be found giving presidential addresses in a cardigan and jeans, nor would he remove the appendages of pomp and circumstance from the White House.<sup>20</sup> His standard fashion choice of wearing a black or dark toned suit accented with a red tie spoke to the gravity of his official duties for the office of the President. Fashion scholar Colin McDowell noted, “Black is the color of authority, intellectuality and probity.”<sup>21</sup> Formality was also infused into other levels of the government as well. Reagan pressed military men to start donning their proper military uniforms even if they were not assigned to active

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<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/photographs>.

<sup>20</sup> Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 100. For more on Reagan not believing in the concept of an “era of limits,” see Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001); and Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*.

<sup>21</sup> Colin McDowell, *The Man of Fashion: Peacock Males and Perfect Gentlemen* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 181.

duty.<sup>22</sup> The suit, tradition, and decorum were back in the national limelight. Learning from the missteps of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, Reagan actively displayed a masculine persona that combined traditional male beliefs in competition, strength, and duty with American culture's emphasis on youth and outward presentation of self. Reagan's hair never showed much gray conveying youthfulness and longevity to an American public. Additionally, he was frequently shown on horseback or working outside on his ranch in Santa Barbara, California.<sup>23</sup> This was a man of action.

Reagan projected a controlled and confident exterior in the face of all combatants and obstacles in 1981 including the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike<sup>24</sup> and a failed assassination attempt. The strike showcased Reagan's resoluteness, decisiveness, and determination in the face of a crisis while the assassination attempt highlighted other, very valuable qualities desired by the American public. In the face of near death, Reagan openly joked to his doctors about their political allegiances and apologized to his wife Nancy for not ducking out of the way sooner.<sup>25</sup> Americans saw their president face this puzzling and inexplicable event with aplomb, poise, and strength.

Many Americans prayed that Reagan's abundant optimism would transform the troubled economy. America was in the midst of a recession, which according to Reagan and his advisors, was brought on by too much economic regulation, high interest rates,

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<sup>22</sup> Costantino, *Men's Fashion in the Twentieth Century*, 127.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>24</sup> Schulman, *The Seventies*, 233.

<sup>25</sup> Troy, *Morning in America*, 75-76.

and soaring taxes among other items. Reagan and his team veered away from the Keynesian philosophy of having a government spend its way out of a recession and instead applied the theory of supply-side economics to the country's current economic situation.<sup>26</sup> By August 1981, Congress ceded to the president's wishes and passed the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 or ERTA.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to these tax measures, the administration implemented budget cuts, a tight money policy, and continued the deregulation of industries that began under Carter's watch. These policies were meant to foster more consumer spending and confidence in the economy while also reviving growth and productivity.<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, these acts also benefited the wealthier and more affluent segments of society. Reagan ascribed to the trickle down theory of economics<sup>29</sup> which espoused that giving wealthier groups situated at the top economic bracket incentives and tax breaks would over time result in more benefits and rewards for those at the lower levels of the wealth pyramid.

Initially, though, these policies and programs, in conjunction with those implemented under the Carter administration, triggered a recession that lasted from 1981-1982. While Americans many have been attracted to the glamour and confidence projected through Reagan's image and demeanor, the tangible, monetary benefits of Reagan's policies still proved a bit elusive. Americans were hesitant to fully embrace his optimistic ideology and vision until their pocketbooks garnered a bit more relief.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>27</sup> For more information on the specifics of this act, see Collins, *More*, 195-198.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 192-197. See also Schulman, *The Seventies*, 230-236.

<sup>29</sup> William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 459-461.

Men's suits and corresponding modes of dress reflected this cautious and conservative mood of the country. Suit styles worn and promoted to upscale American men were saturated with elements of nostalgia and traditional business attire.

*Esquire's* March 1980 article, "Basics at Any Price," separated fashions for men into four categories of purchasing power: \$1,500; \$3,000; \$6,000; and \$\$\$\$.<sup>30</sup> Suits represented investment pieces; clothing that does not have to be replaced frequently since it is designed for extended use and wear. These amounts were meant to show the professional male that style can be achieved at any price range—albeit those that fit into the upwardly-mobile price bracket. The suits featured were shown in colors of navy, gray, and brown.<sup>31</sup> These colors denoted tradition, formality, and longevity. A white Giorgio Armani cotton dress shirt, brown leather Bally shoes, and a Calvin Klein crewneck sweater all complimented the overall look of a well-suited, professional, American male. Included in this article were instructions on how to recognize a finely crafted shirt, a properly constructed suit jacket, and tailored pants. The rule for the *Esquire* man was not to be trendy, but to "buy quality." Simplicity in dress evoked security in turbulent times. The one rule promoted by this article that all men needed to follow was simply put, "Every man, for instance, should own a suit."<sup>32</sup>

The upscale male was instructed not only to own a suit, but to purchase a suit that emitted a modicum of restraint in color, cut, and design. When in doubt, men were encouraged by *GQ* to choose "an undeniable classic, the navy suit." The editors

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<sup>30</sup> David Epstein, "Basics at Any Price," *Esquire* 93 (March 1980): 54-60.

<sup>31</sup> This concept was discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>32</sup> Epstein, "Basics at Any Price," 56-58.

supplied information on how to break up a traditional navy suit for various occasions, crowds, and moods for greater flexibility and self-expression.<sup>33</sup> A man's fashion dollar went much further this way. For example, a navy Bill Kaiserman Design suit with a coordinated tie and shirt were paired with items such as a burgundy ribbed mock turtleneck sweater in one shot, while the matching navy suit pants were replaced by denim jeans constructed to resemble a pair of wool flannel trousers in another picture. For those consumers wishing to stick to a standard suit model, *GQ* provided a navy suit comprised of a double breasted jacket and matching pants properly accessorized with a white and gray striped dress shirt and a red tie emblazoned with navy and gold stripes.<sup>34</sup> The color navy reflected that a person is "well-balanced, hard working and trustworthy."<sup>35</sup> These were just the elements that the American male and American society hoped would proliferate in the new decade. These suit styles highlighted the strength and power of the male torso, focusing the eye on a man's shoulders and chest. *GQ* cajoled its readership to select sartorial models like these since, "Clearly, in the sober Eighties, when getting and keeping a reasonable level of employment is a priority, no one wants to look as if he jumps railroad cars as a way of life."<sup>36</sup>

Image mattered; clothing mattered in these recession filled times. If professional advancement and the acquisition of money proved untenable and a bit fleeting at this point in the decade, at least American men received comfort from the goods they

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<sup>33</sup> *GQ*, "Suited for Mileage," 173.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>35</sup> Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (New York: Random House, 1981), 199.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Carlsen, "The Fashion Tide Turns: Replaying Layered Dressing in a New Wavelength," *GQ* 53 (July 1983): 48-49.

purchased, wore, and used. More importantly, in an age that continued to endure corporate relocations, economic stagnation, and high unemployment, men's suits became utilized as a tool of personal and economic survival. Promoting an outward appearance of poise, success, and quality belied the reality of one's financial and personal situation. If the surface mattered more than the substance underneath the layers of cloth and thread, then American men could use dress to create a satisfactory and positive masculine identity to transmit to the outside world.

African-American men endeavored to achieve an outward display of poise, strength, and power through suits just as their white peers did. Suit styles marketed to the upscale black male made his frame appear a bit stronger and slightly more confident. Black men adhered to the same dictates as their white counterparts in "looking good" since "looking good and doing well are often linked."<sup>37</sup> Similar to *Esquire* and *GQ*, *Ebony* offered conservative and cautious suit styles to its readers before 1984 in shades of navy, gray, and brown. A Christian Dior for Hart Schaffner & Marx gray herringbone two-piece suit over a patterned shirt and tie exhibited the right blend of classicism and style for the modern 1980s male as part of the October 1982 fashion spread, "Man of Class." In this feature *Ebony* proclaimed, "A man of class has to have a lot more going for himself than good looks, a 'right' address, a new car and those other ingredients of a 'great lifestyle.'"<sup>38</sup> Fashion and clothing were deemed necessary components for any male who considered himself to possess class and style. If a Christian Dior suit proved to be still too expensive in these economically troubled times,

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<sup>37</sup> Jack Hyde, *Generation of Change: A History of Male Fashion Trends, 1956-1980, on the Occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Founding of the Men's Fashion Association* (New York: MFA, 1981), 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ebony*, "Man of Class," *Ebony* 37 (October 1982): 134.

then Sears had an appropriate stylish substitution. A gray three-piece Sears suit with white pinstripes complimented by a pink dress shirt and striped tie radiated tradition, longevity, and prosperity much in the same way that the more expensive Dior version did. Males that desired greater flexibility in their suiting attire looked to purchase items such as a tweed, two button blazer and blue cashmere cableknit sweater by Andre Olivier that paired nicely with a variety of trousers and shirts already existing in their wardrobes.<sup>39</sup> Even in these financially conservative times, men could still exude masculine virtues of authority and strength while exhibiting a hint of dash and flair in pieces such as Austin Reed's grayish-brown two-piece suit accessorized with a burgundy tie and chic scarf.<sup>40</sup>

Suits were more than just required elements of black masculine professional dress. Upwardly-mobile black men viewed suits as appropriate leisure attire as well. In "Fashions for a Summer Cruise" from *Ebony's* April 1980 edition, several suit styles were prominently showcased including a three-piece, light blue suit with a white pinstripe by Graham & Gunn. A white dress shirt, light blue check pocket square, a blue and yellow check tie, and stacked tan leather loafers pieced together the remainder of the look. Also included in this pictorial was a cream three-piece suit with a matching dress shirt and striped tie exhibiting colors of cream, yellow, and gray. These suit jackets did not contain wide lapels or a fitted waist evocative of early 1970s suit styles. Rather, these jackets drew attention to the shoulders of the male models due to the cut and extra padding afforded by the design. Straight leg trousers skimmed the contours of the lower

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 134-136.

<sup>40</sup> Eunice W. Johnson, "The Resort Look Cool and Casual," *Ebony* 38 (April 1983): 72.

half of the male body as well.<sup>41</sup> Whether a suit was used for work or leisure hours, the cut and design of these early 1980s ensembles projected a strong and confident black exterior.

Despite the shift towards traditional suit styles, leisure suits were still being promoted as acceptable attire for the upscale black man. Now, these were not the outlandish and polyester constructed styles of the early to mid 1970s as *Ebony's* fashion editors made clear through word and visual. Instead of focusing on a man's waist and buttocks, these leisure suits specifically drew attention to a man's chest and shoulders. *Ebony* encouraged its readers to, "Combine fun and fashion while sailing in Carlo Palazzi's two-piece mix or match leisure suits featuring the new 'above-the-ankle-length pants.'" Additionally, men were informed that, "bright lavenders, purples, and blues are no longer reserved for girls." One model donned a lavender leisure jacket with a short round collar opened at the chest, with dress pants in a bluish-gray tone.<sup>42</sup> These styles continued to reveal a man's figure, but without the exaggerated lapels, long tunic-like jackets, or slim-fitting cuts popular in the previous decade.

On the surface, colors like lilac and lavender, in addition to leisure type suiting, did not seem to represent strength, power, and confidence, especially with visions of 1970s color palettes and styles still fresh in American heads. Dress can be utilized to challenge the boundaries of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Colorful clothing in the 1980s worked as a device for upscale black men to acquire a greater visibility and voice in American society. This was not a matter of simply following trends dictated by

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<sup>41</sup> Eunice W. Johnson, "Fashions for a Summer Cruise," *Ebony* 35 (April 1980): 124.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121 and 126-127.



“white” society, but piecing together an overall suit look that was comfortable, appropriate, and livable. Black men drew from the expressiveness of African American culture and mixed in traditional modes and fashions of mainstream society just as they had in the 1970s, yet in a different manner with different ends.<sup>43</sup> The color, cut, and style of men’s suits gave black men a sense of pride, value, and esteem available for all to see.

The trend towards classicism and traditional suiting styles was acknowledged and recognized by upscale gay men, but not on the same scale as it was with straight, white and black men. In *The Advocate*’s March 1980 edition, writer Gilbert Cameron commented, “Avant-garde to the barricades! A new conservatism is rising in men’s fashions. Keenly alert to economic indicators, menswear makers are heeding those who urge a ‘play it safe’ policy, which means a lot less excitement and innovation in styling later this year.”<sup>44</sup> Cameron also informed readers that if they should desire to purchase a suit, “A more shouldered look is evident in designer suits and sport coats for spring.”<sup>45</sup>

Why the near absence then of information on men’s suits in *The Advocate*? This oversight can be ascribed to the fact that sex was the “most visible element of the gay men’s community.”<sup>46</sup> While this notion rang true during the late 1970s, it was also an appropriate manner to characterize gay male culture in the early years of the 1980s. Advertisements for bathhouses, leather bars, and venereal disease clinics continued to

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<sup>43</sup> Barbara M. Starke, Lillian O. Holloman, and Barbara K. Nordquist, *African American Dress and Adornment: A Cultural Perspective* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1990), 102.

<sup>44</sup> Gilbert Cameron, “Color It Conservative,” *The Advocate* 287 (March 6, 1980): 49.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>46</sup> D.B. Goodstein, “Opening Space,” *The Advocate* 296 (July 10, 1980): 5-6.

proliferate throughout the magazine's pages. And, as he did before, editor D.B.

Goodstein lightly admonished his fellow gay men to look for more in their lives than sex and where their next orgasm was coming from. Goodstein declared, "...the visible gay men's community has placed a high value on physical correctness. You are either a hunk or a wimp. Most wimps are trolls who don't make out in the baths—that's how you can tell who is what. Success is being the hottest stud in town—or at least making it with the hottest stud in town." According to Goodstein, this was in conflict with how most gay men were reared since as he argued, "Most of us grew up with an American cultural belief system that declared that the purpose of life is to raise a family, and to provide for it monetarily and spiritually...Success is measured by economic status and the achievements of children. This life purpose is characterized by marriage, mortgage, fidelity, infidelity, mid-life crisis, retirement, etc."<sup>47</sup> Goodstein encouraged his fellow gay peers to search for something more in life beyond parties, cruising, and looking good, but the magazine he edited persisted in propagating these elements.

The prominence of sexual culture within the gay male community linked directly to the continued visibility of clone masculinity. The garb of the cowboy and West still enticed gay men who wanted to project a more macho masculine persona in keeping with the popularity of the clone figure. Writer Mark Thompson explained, "Cowboys, like gay folk, have always been in the frontier. Whether carving out space in the American West or creating space to be in the minds of the American public, the two seem to go hand in hand—and frequently do."<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Thompson asserted, "In fact,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Thompson, "The Western Range," *The Advocate* 315 (April 16, 1981): T11.

the western scene's folksy simplicity and presumably truer grit may be the attractive catch for so many now shootin' it out with inflation, sagging morale and just plain complicated living."<sup>49</sup>

Outfitting one's body in articles reminiscent of the enduring true symbol of virile, tough, and commanding masculinity gave gay males agency and control over their lives. Stetson hats, cowboy boots, jeans, denim jackets, and leather pieces received a good deal of attention and promotion by *The Advocate* since "Western wear is macho, but it's much more. It's good-looking, wearable and not faddish."<sup>50</sup> Gay men could wear their western ensembles to a wide range of places, institutions, and arenas that propagated and encouraged the cowboy aesthetic to the larger gay male community. Western themed bars, rodeos, hoe downs, and dude ranches appeared in articles and advertisements. Cowboy attire stood for "more than a Saturday night costume."<sup>51</sup> Whether a gay male cloaked his frame in a snap front denim shirt, plaid flannel, or leather vest, he exuded macho masculinity, discernible for all eyes to see.

Part of projecting clone masculinity was showcasing a toned and developed body. Toned and developed bodies looked best in short jackets that accentuated the assets of the gay male frame. In September 1980, *The Advocate's* Gilbert Cameron maintained, "The jacket story for fall is a short one."<sup>52</sup> Short jackets like windbreakers and blousons revealed the contours of a man's lower torso. Clones dressed for allure

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., T11.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert Cameron, "Fashion," *The Advocate* 331 (November 26, 1981). Page number not legible in format examined.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, "The Western Range," T11.

<sup>52</sup> Gilbert Cameron, "Hooray for Hip Hip Lengths," *The Advocate* 300 (September 4, 1980): 46.

and attraction in addition to projecting a macho persona. Shorter jackets permitted a man's buttocks and thighs to be on full display while the relaxed fit augmented the size of a man's chest and shoulders. Whether gay men took Cameron's advice and purchased Daniel Hechter's leather bomber jacket with strong shoulders or a hip length, rabbit fur coat, these pieces were designed to boldly flaunt the gay male form.<sup>53</sup>

Only physically fit males though could properly don any of these looks. Gay men realized the necessity of acquiring a bigger and better body to keep up with fashion trends and community dictates. For some upscale gay men, it was no longer enough to follow information retrieved from *The Advocate's* regular "Shape Up!" column since bodybuilding became increasingly popular amongst the gay male community. Broom twists had been replaced by dumb bells and brawn. The magazine included lists of noteworthy gyms in cities across the country in places such as Chicago, Dallas, Seattle, and San Francisco to acclimate their subscribers to this new fitness development. Additionally, suggestions were provided regarding how to select the best gym for one's needs and the merits of acquiring a gym membership. The gym was more than just a place to exercise—it was now a place to demonstrate one's physical prowess, power, and fine masculine form. This was not a site for slender and weak bodies to present themselves. Writer Lenny Giteck explained, "I have a friend who is so ashamed of his physique that he bought a set of weights at Sears to use at home so he could build up his body enough to go to a gym."<sup>54</sup> Gay male culture required a strong, imposing, and well-

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 46. For more examples see Gilbert Cameron, "Summer Fashion," *The Advocate* 292 (May 15, 1980): 42; and Cameron, "Color It Conservative," 49.

<sup>54</sup> Lenny Giteck, "The Gay Pursuit of Muscle: To Have & To Hold," *The Advocate* 319 (June 11, 1981): 27.

developed body. Macho masculinity and its fashion articles simply enhanced this already hard visual during the early years of the 1980s.

By 1983, the sartorial picture for many upwardly-mobile men started to change as conditions in America improved. While the economy slumped along during the first years of Reagan's presidency, by 1983, the tides had turned. Nearly four million jobs had been created in the country while the economic evils of inflation, unemployment, and stagnation were seemingly curbed.<sup>55</sup> The combined effects of tax cuts, Federal Reserve Board policies, low oil prices, and recent foreign investment in the nation's infrastructure and institutions surged the economy along.<sup>56</sup>

At the beginning of Reagan's second term in office, unemployment had fallen to below six percent, inflation rates were lowered further, and the stock market was booming. This boom emerged as a result of the success of new industries like personal computers and the creation of Silicon Valley.<sup>57</sup> However, this perceived prosperity was not felt by all in America with over 33.7 million Americans living in poverty in 1984 alone.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, the shift towards a more service-oriented economy added to these numbers since it depleted the workforce at major firms like General Motors, Chrysler, and AT&T.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Troy, *Morning in America*, 119-123; and Schulman, *The Seventies*, 219-220.

<sup>56</sup> Collins, *More*, 210-212.

<sup>57</sup> Irwin Unger, *These United States: The Questions of Our Past Third Edition* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2006), 761-762. See also Troy, *Morning in America*, 117.

<sup>58</sup> Troy, *Morning in America*, 225.

<sup>59</sup> Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1999), 60.

College educated males looking for careers providing stability and security realized that opportunities in traditionally based companies had dried up as the service sector soared. Instead of searching for work in standard corporate America, some men became immersed in the world of junk bonds and trading. These were positions about making money, not about providing an actual product or becoming a productive member of society. Many of these traders and bankers soon materialized as yuppies or young, urban professionals.<sup>60</sup> Scholar Irwin Unger commented, “As depicted by the media, they were brash, materialistic, self-centered, politically and socially insensitive, and greedy.”<sup>61</sup> Reagan’s friendly policies toward the growth of business and the stock market encouraged an atmosphere of unparalleled greed, corporate takeovers, and mergers. This fit nicely with the yuppie commandment of “Thou shalt not kill whales or baby seals (save murder for the stock market).”<sup>62</sup> This was the age of the celebrity CEO embodied by men such as Ted Turner, Lee Iacocca, and Donald Trump. Even more telling was the fact that the number of millionaires in America “increased sixfold” while “Americans doubled the number of luxury car imports from 1982 to 1986, and lowered the age of first-time fur coat owners from fifty to twenty-six in ten years.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The term yuppie most likely originated with Alice Kahn, a San Francisco writer, who in an piece for the *East Bay Express* in June 1983, “wrote about how well-off young professionals—who worked long hours at basically unfulfilling jobs, but earned loads of money—formed their identities through leisure activities and consumption of big-name purchased goods.” See Schulman, *The Seventies*, 242.

<sup>61</sup> Unger, *These United States*, 751.

<sup>62</sup> Marissa Pressman and Marilee Hartly, *The Yuppie Handbook: The State of the Art Manual for Young Urban Professionals* (New York: Long Shadow Books, 1984), 71.

<sup>63</sup> Troy, *Morning in America*, 123.

*The Yuppie Handbook* defined a yuppie as, “A person of either sex who meets the following criteria: 1) resides in or near one of the major cities; 2) claims to be between the ages of 25 and 45; 3) lives on aspirations of glory, prestige, recognition, fame, social status, power, money, or any and all combinations of the above; 4) anyone who brunches on the weekend or works out after work.”<sup>64</sup> The very word yuppie signified a negation of the word hippie that held sway in the cultural psyche of America since the 1960s. This was not a group of Americans devoted to anti-materialism, consciousness-raising by returning to the land, or dressing in antiquated or torn up fashions. Yuppies celebrated consumerism, celebrity, and wealth, and did so with unabashed glee.

Fashion provided the yuppie with the opportunity to clothe his body as an accessory to the outside world. The yuppie phenomenon infiltrated the pages of *Esquire* and *GQ* before Reagan’s second term had fully begun. Influenced in part by Reagan’s new visual of masculinity, men’s suits fully transitioned back into symbols of prosperity and power. Giorgio Armani led the way with his deconstructed suit jackets that accentuated the length and width of a man’s shoulders to communicate an image of strength. The cut of his jackets skimmed the male body without being too clingy. The softer look and feel of the clothing did not imply that men wanted to be necessarily feminized; instead this look communicated that a man could be fashionable, wear fancy clothes, and still be comfortable in his own skin.<sup>65</sup> The suit was not wearing the man, he

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<sup>64</sup> Pressman, *The Yuppie Handbook*, 12.

<sup>65</sup> McDowell, *The Man of Fashion*, 190-195; and Costantino, *Men’s Fashions in the Twentieth Century*, 127-130.

was wearing the suit. When the jackets were worn loosely and openly, this offered men a chance to display their waistlines with snakeskin leather belts by Paul Garcia or rubber Armani<sup>66</sup> belts with the designer's insignia on the closure.<sup>67</sup>

The bodies of traders, businessmen, and investment bankers looked their best in clothes that drew attention to their physiques. Gone were the 1950s inspired suits made of simple gray flannel and the polyester, wide-lapelled, tight-fitting creations of the 1970s. Designer suits now utilized an array of materials including gabardine, cashmere, wool jersey, silk crepe, and rayon to achieve a modicum of elegance and movement with textures. Sartorially adventurous males took advantage of these developments as they ensconced themselves in non-traditional and costly suiting fabrics such as floral damask.<sup>68</sup> Critic Alison Lurie asserted, "Through the centuries, the most popular form of conspicuous consumption has been the use of expensive materials."<sup>69</sup> Menswear designers knew that their consumers were employed in the business world and needed clothes that would instill confidence and authority. Looking good assisted the professional man in getting ahead in the corporate world.

Men were instructed to always remember that one's image equated to success. Yuppies acknowledged this idea in their mantra, "The name of the game is THE BEST—buying it, owning it, using it, eating it, watching it, wearing it, growing it,

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<sup>66</sup> For a visual look at the career of Giorgio Armani from 1975-1990, see Richard Martin and Harold Koda's *Giorgio Armani: Images of Man* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990). The word "deconstructed" refers to the fact that the internal lining and extra detailing features of a jacket were removed to offer the wearer greater comfort and freedom of movement.

<sup>67</sup> David Epstein, "Waistlines," *Esquire* 94 (July 1980): 19.

<sup>68</sup> *Esquire*, "The *Esquire* Collection Spring 1985 Big Shots," *Esquire* 103 (March 1985): 25-40.

<sup>69</sup> Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, 126.



cooking it, doing it, doing whatever with it.”<sup>70</sup> The male yuppie had a plethora of designer labels at his disposal to achieve these goals including Yves Saint Laurent, Alexander Julian, and Ermenegildo Zegna. Suits styles ranged from Calvin Klein’s classically inspired, wool, three-piece ensembles in glen-plaid patterns to deconstructed Giorgio Armani linen suits.<sup>71</sup> The biggest dilemma for men was whether or not to purchase a pinstripe double breasted suit by Hugo Boss or one created by Brooks Brothers. Businessmen realized there were numerous options for ties beyond the “power” blue and red ties associated with Reagan’s image.<sup>72</sup> Men could wear a gray speckled Klein tie on Monday, a paisley tie by Paul Smith on Tuesday, and mix designs by Perry Ellis, Jean Paul Gaultier, and Pierre Cardin for the remainder of the week. Ties displayed a variety of patterns including plaids, stripes, and polka dots. Dress shirts exuded a plethora of colors spanning from creams to blues to khakis and pinks.

Suit accessories needed to project an aura of confidence, prosperity, and authority as well. Upscale men were advised to obtain gold pens from Cartier and Tiffany and Co., round shaped tortoise shell eyeglasses by Robert La Roche at A. R. Trapp, luxurious leather planners from Pineider, and show-stopping cufflinks by Gubelin featuring inlaid carnelian, gold, and onyx since these were required “tools of the trade to see you through a well-appointed day.”<sup>73</sup> *Esquire* even encouraged men to wear scarves to give their ensemble a bit of “flair.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Pressman, *The Yuppie Handbook*, 17.

<sup>71</sup> *Esquire*, “Requisites for the Executive Wardrobe,” *Esquire* 99 (March 1983): 30-61.

<sup>72</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 134. Although this is a common phrase associated with 1980s suits and suit styles, Steele specifically discusses how widely used and important this word was at the time.

<sup>73</sup> *GQ*, “The Business of Style,” *GQ* 53 (September 1983): 280.

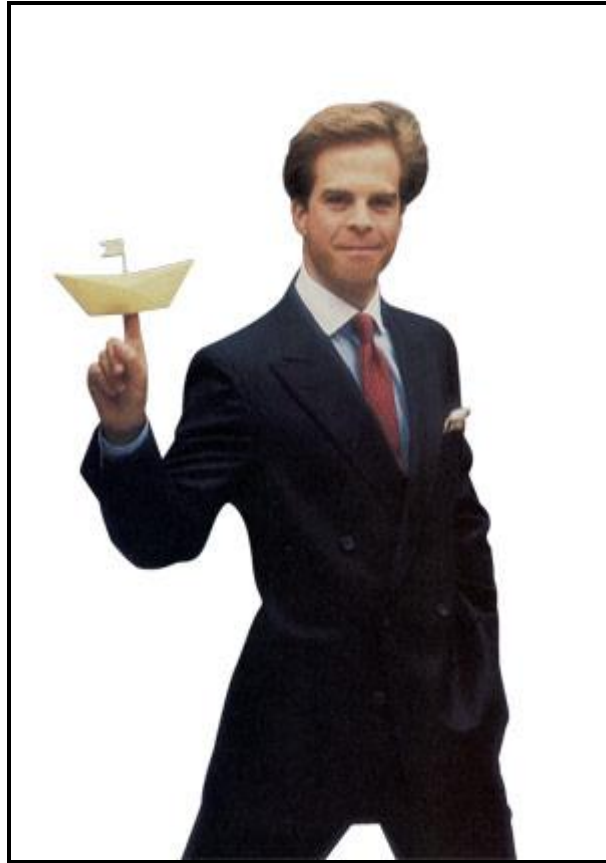


Figure 9. The 1980s Male Yuppie.<sup>75</sup>

Purchasing these types of stylish objects was part and parcel of living in the Reagan 80s. Men's suiting ensembles certainly embraced this type of American manhood grounded in consumerism. Through consumption, men assisted the country, its economy, and themselves. And just in case dark days lay ahead, at least they would be clad in Giorgio Armani, Hugo Boss, and Hermes to ward their troubles away. Men were not just finding happiness in buying designer wares; they were furnishing an

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<sup>74</sup> *Esquire*, "The Return to Elegant Dressing," *Esquire* 100 (September 1983): 89.

<sup>75</sup> See [www.esquire.com](http://www.esquire.com).

identity, one that was consumable and noticeable to the outside world. Magazines like *Esquire* and *GQ* represented image makers in the fashion industry, but they promoted these products in response to the needs and desires of the professional man.<sup>76</sup> Suits and their corresponding accoutrements linked masculinity with monetary success and power.

Along with monetary success and power, strength radiated from suiting attire.

*GQ* used words like strength and power repeatedly when describing suit styles to the American male consumer during this time. In January 1987, *GQ* asked its readers:

Why style? And why all the time? Because nothing puts you more quickly and surely into the right frame of mind for a particular endeavor than the right clothes. In the Middle Ages, jousting knights didn't make a ceremony of suiting up for battle for nothing—it made them feel superior to the opposition. For the same reason, a great worsted-wool suit prepares you for a corporate battle better than a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.<sup>77</sup>

Suits from the mid-1980s onward made the human frame seem more imposing and solid, with exaggerated shoulders and a roomier construction for pants and jackets. Double breasted suiting attire became popular with upwardly-mobile men in this cultural climate. Men who donned double breasted suits appeared larger to the eye, with brawn and imagined bulk added to the human body. The design of a double breasted suit intrinsically highlights the chest and shoulders of any individual. There is extra volume and fabric to this draped cut that makes the body look less vulnerable to its surrounding environment.<sup>78</sup> Fashion scholar J.C. Flugel argued that, “clothing, by adding to the

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<sup>76</sup> Luciano, *Looking Good*, 9. See also Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen's *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (Minneapolis, The University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 158-187.

<sup>77</sup> *GQ*, “Style All Ways,” *GQ* 57 (January 1987): 82.

<sup>78</sup> See Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1994), 134. Hollander argues, “Male dress throughout European history had kept men's bodies intelligible, but it had resolutely prevented them from looking too embracable or caressable, in order that they not seem vulnerable.” This

apparent size of the body in one way or another, gives us an increased sense of power, a sense of extension of our bodily self—ultimately by enabling us to fill more space.”<sup>79</sup>

Men literally looked as though they could take on the problems of the world in double breasted suiting ensembles. A Marzotto Principe light gray suit with light blue chalk stripes immediately commanded attention due to the sharp and padded shoulders found on the suit jacket.<sup>80</sup> A tan Valentino suit comprised of a boxy, double breasted jacket and loose fitting matching pants accessorized with a white dress shirt, leather loafers, and patterned tie magnified the male body underneath, adding layers of bulk to its frame.<sup>81</sup> Calvin Klein’s light gray, glen-plaid suit featuring a shoulder defining double breasted jacket with loose, matching pants also symbolized masculine potency, but with an aura of elegance and sophistication due to the inclusion of a white dress shirt, geometric shapes tie, and a black lizard watch.<sup>82</sup> Power dressing was the style of the day.<sup>83</sup> Suits communicated authority, strength, and confidence. American men had reason to embrace these attributes as the economy churned along even in the face of increased international competition and the stock market crash of 1987. The upscale American male commanded respect, attention, and notice clad in these suit styles. He was ready for battle in the urban jungle.

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general concept has been applied to suit fashions in the analyzed magazines in this dissertation and especially in this chapter.

<sup>79</sup> J.C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (New York: International Universities Press, 1969), 34.

<sup>80</sup> *GQ*, “The Italian Collection,” *GQ* 55 (April 1985): 215.

<sup>81</sup> *GQ*, “Italian Flair for the U.S. Male,” *GQ* 57 (March 1987): 218.

<sup>82</sup> *GQ*, “Easy Does It,” *GQ* 57 (February 1987): 154.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Upscale black men wanted to craft an outward persona that projected confidence, financial success, and power much like their white counterparts. They too desired the yuppie lifestyle. Although the word “yuppie” was never specifically invoked, much of the fashion pictorials in *Ebony* and its offshoot publication, *EM* or *Ebony Man*, clearly fit into this cultural mold. In “The Ebony Man: A Grooming Guide for Black Men” Alfred Fornay argued that in 1983 the black fashion and cosmetic sectors were the “most underrated and under tapped economic market in America.”<sup>84</sup> The “BUPPIE” or black yuppie would soon begin to rectify this matter. Advanced education, professional success, material possessions, and financial security were a few of the items acquired in the wake of the achievements and gains of the civil rights movement. Buppies existed as a result of these expanding fortunes for black America. According to *The Yuppie Handbook*, buppies were essentially the same as yuppies “except that they don’t have to worry about getting a tan.”<sup>85</sup> In terms of dress, male buppies preferred “custom-made business suits” and “never wear ethnic fashions like dashikis.”<sup>86</sup>

Buppies and upwardly-mobile black men flaunted their status and prosperity in power suits just as their white peers were doing. An advertisement for Hart Schaffner & Marx in the April 1985 edition of *Ebony* stated, “The successful businessman upholds a tradition of sound judgment that extends to his choice of what to wear.”<sup>87</sup> A successful

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<sup>84</sup> Alfred Fornay, “The Ebony Man: A Grooming Guide for Black Men,” *Ebony* 38 (August 1983): 140.

<sup>85</sup> Pressman, *The Yuppie Handbook*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Hart Schaffner & Marx,” *Ebony* 40 (April 1985): 151.

businessman might adorn himself in a navy pinstripe suit, blue and white stripe dress shirt, red tie accented with blue dots, and a burgundy hued pocket square like the model in the promotional insert. This suit's strong shoulders and larger overall cut transmitted the look of strength and power against a backdrop of raiders and corporate takeovers on Wall Street.<sup>88</sup> Proper professional dressing also materialized in a dark Dimitri of Italy suit styled with a blue dress shirt sporting white cuffs and a collar. Accessories such as a blue sheen laden tie and Cartier watch completed this picture of a confident, poised, and capable businessman.<sup>89</sup>

Dressing the body was serious business. Clothing was used as a means to showcase one's status and even ambitions. To this end, *Ebony Man* regularly offered advice and instructions on how to properly buy the right suit, dress shirt, shoes, and other accompanying pieces to the male suiting ensemble. Suits and their accessories were presented in a range of price points within the magazine in order to show black male consumers that style could be achieved without going into serious debt. For example, in "The Price is Right," *EM* informed its readership that "refinement and quiet sophistication" in male suits could be purchased for as little as \$400 or as much as \$1600.<sup>90</sup> Men on a budget could seek to acquire a black and white pinstripe suit by Pierre Cardin to be paired with a red paisley tie and gray and white dot patterned shirt.<sup>91</sup> If a male's wardrobe budget existed in a higher income bracket, then he could buy an

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>89</sup> *Ebony*, "Successful Dressing," *Ebony* 39 (May 1984): 144.

<sup>90</sup> *Ebony Man*, "The Price is Right," *Ebony Man* 3 (October 1988): 22-28.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

Austin Reed dark navy suit that would work well with a variety of colors, patterns, and textures in overcoats, ties, and shirts.<sup>92</sup> Upwardly-mobile black men could walk off confidently in the world ensconced in these masculine emblems of professional success produced by designers like Reed, Cardin, Gianni Versace, and Valentino.

Upscale black men desired suits styles that commanded respect and attention. Men wanted and needed to project a persona that was prosperous and composed. Double breasted suits allowed the upwardly-mobile black male to achieve all of these goals in a stylish and elegant manner. In the article “Suit Yourself Tailored Elegance,” the editors of *Ebony Man* stated that suits were required “to create a wardrobe of assurance.” More importantly, “line for line suits are not just garments but tools for living—fundamental necessities.” Accompanying this article was a fashion spread displaying a variety of double breasted suits perfect for the black male consumer or buppie. A Cerruti 1881 double breasted gray textured suit was paired with a white dress shirt and silk tie featuring blue, green, and white stripes by Ike Behar. This ensemble radiated sophistication and authority much like a Michael Savio herringbone, broad-shouldered, loosely constructed, two-piece double breasted suit accented with a cream shirt and paisley tie.<sup>93</sup> The upscale black male in these double breasted suit styles transmitted a masculine identity that exuded accomplishment, authority, and success.

Double breasted suits represented a very obvious type of conspicuous consumption. This style required more fabric for completion which in turn is presented to the consumer in terms of a higher price point. Gangsters were frequently linked to

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>93</sup> *Ebony Man*, “Suit Yourself Tailored Elegance,” *Ebony Man* 2 (September 1987): 21-27.

this type of suit style, as they too were fervent consumers of all items that denoted status, high visibility, and extravagance.<sup>94</sup> According to *EM*, “The epitome of savoir faire in the ‘30s, the style of the double breasted has often been misunderstood to belong only to the lofty world of glamour on one hand, or the undesirable network of crime syndicate types on the other.”<sup>95</sup> While upscale men were not necessarily modern day gangsters, they too were using clothing to impart their own version of masculinity, one based on conspicuous consumption.

Suiting attire imparted a sense of esteem and pride to the black professional. *EM* and *Ebony* readers were familiar with stories that compared the black male to “an endangered species” in the 1980s.<sup>96</sup> Writer Walter Leavey listed numerous factors contributing to this concept including the fact that black men faced higher suicide and incarceration rates alongside other determinants such as poor health care, enlistment in the armed forces, unemployment, and greater alcohol and drug use and its byproduct dependency.<sup>97</sup> While he acknowledged that life expectancy for black men had increased, Leavey emphasized that regardless of these gains, black men encountered numerous obstacles to a long and successful life that he and other authors believed were not as evident in the lives of white men or black women. Leavey attributed “negative socialization” as the number one reason for black males to be categorized as an

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<sup>94</sup> Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 39.

<sup>95</sup> Jeffrey Tay, “On the Double,” *Ebony Man* 3 (November 1987): 15.

<sup>96</sup> Walter Leavy, “Is the Black Male an Endangered Species?,” *Ebony* 38 (August 1983): 41.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.



“endangered species” in a nation overwhelmingly committed to maintaining power through the patriarchal organization of society.<sup>98</sup>

Other black commentators spoke out similarly regarding the plight of the black male as they were wary of Reagan’s domestic policies since he cut budgets and implemented more stringent requirements for programs that impacted many groups of color.<sup>99</sup> Reagan failed to appoint special aides or representatives to the black community since he perceived this as contradictory to his notion of America as one color blind society, one large community. This coincided with his belief in not showing preferential treatment to certain interest groups at the expense of others.<sup>100</sup> This type of thinking reflected his support of individualism and the American Way. And, while many scholars affirm that Reagan slighted groups of color, by the later part of the 1980s, other commentators point to statistics that corroborate the growth and productivity of the black middle class and upwardly-mobile populations. The sartorial offerings presented in *EM* and *Ebony*, along with those worn by upscale black men, challenged the 1980s image of the black male as an “endangered species” by asserting strength, power, and visibility through dress and consumption, signifying the personal and professional growth many black males had obtained by this time.

When men clothed their bodies in suiting attire in the mid to late 1980s, they were not doing so solely for individual gratification. This was certainly part of the goal in donning certain suit styles and their corresponding accessories, but men were also

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>99</sup> Troy, *Morning in America*, 91.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 92.

exhibiting a competitive streak attuned to the masculinity engendered during the Reagan years. Reagan implemented policies and programs to restore confidence in the American economy and domestic affairs, but he also attempted to restore the prestige and standing of America abroad. Disliking the policy of détente propagated in the 1970s, Reagan reinvigorated the Cold War, labeling the Soviet Union the “evil empire,” and increased defense budget spending from \$171 billion to \$229 billion in his first term in office.<sup>101</sup> Reagan’s administration provided visible and covert support to regimes across the world embroiled in conflicts against communism in places ranging from Poland to Nicaragua, rejecting the policy of containment that had sustained American Cold War policy since the era of President Harry Truman.<sup>102</sup> Although there were missteps with Reagan’s foreign policy these transgressions did not tarnish his image or perceived success in bringing prestige back to America in the international realm. Reagan stood up to dictators across the globe like Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi who threatened American lives, interests, and global security.<sup>103</sup> The underlying message to the world was clear; American military power, might, and nerve were back.

The American male faced increased competition for prosperity and success in the 1980s. Many men grew tired of what they perceived to be the growing entitlement society of America. Generally speaking, men as a sex, or more specifically white men, had been attacked for having privilege, power, and possibilities not open to other groups

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<sup>101</sup> Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 151-154 and 162. “Evil empire” was a term used by Reagan at the Association of Evangelicals meeting in March of 1983 in Orlando, Florida.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 155-157. See also, Troy, *Morning in America* for more on Reagan’s Cold War actions, policies, programs, and beliefs.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 157-159.

including women and those of color. A “backlash” germinated as some men responded with “resentment” and anger over gains from feminism, affirmative action, and other protections afforded to groups and individuals at the perceived expense of the male.<sup>104</sup> To them, this did not signify a culture based on equality for all. Many men who joined the growing men’s movements were angry over how they were treated in divorce proceedings, child custody hearings, the workplace, and in society in general.

Women seemed to draw particular ire for the host of privileges they were given in terms of children, alimony, and abortion among other areas. A burgeoning anti-woman or even anti-feminist mood festered among some American males at this time. This growing surge of resentment fostered the creation of men’s groups including the National Organization of Men, started in 1983 by divorce lawyer and *Penthouse* columnist Sidney Siller. Sociologist Michael Kimmel stated, “NOM opposed affirmative action, forced collection of alimony and child support, and a single-sex military.”<sup>105</sup>

Men additionally faced daily battles in the professional sphere, especially as women started dressing similarly to men in their own version of “power suits.”<sup>106</sup> As more women entered the corporate world, men faced even greater competition for employment. For some upwardly-mobile and professional men, “Cultivating a powerful body sends a message that even though men have to share the workplace with women,

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<sup>104</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 217-218.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 221-224.

<sup>106</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 13-19.

they are still stronger and physically superior.”<sup>107</sup> Power suiting helped formulate a hard, tough, potent masculine exterior. Men incorporated more color, accessories, and stylish flair to their suit ensembles not to become exactly like women, but to garner attention and admiration just as women had historically in their finery. The upscale male did not mind now being placed on display and gazed at, as long as it bequeathed the requisite personal and professional rewards.

Upwardly-mobile men were not just in competition with women, but they were also competing against one another for notoriety, success, and financial rewards. Traditional ways of conveying masculinity through work, the breadwinner role, and the battlefield might not all have practical sustainability in modern America. However, American men realized that through fashion, they could incorporate these traditional ways of expressing masculinity through clothing consumption and utilizing the suit as their sartorial emblem of masculine power and prestige. The brand, color, and cut of one’s suiting attire disclosed to the public a man’s financial status, values, and personal well-being. The suit represented the worlds of business, politics, and prosperity.

Power suits only looked elegant, refined, and tailored on a fit and toned male body regardless if they were designed by Giorgio Armani or Calvin Klein. Overweight or portly men just appeared larger in suits with broadened shoulders and relaxed trousers. Starting in the late 1970s, a fitness boom exploded throughout the country.<sup>108</sup>

Jim Fixx among others wrote popular books conveying the benefits of running and

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<sup>107</sup> Lynne Luciano, “Muscularity and Masculinity in the United States: A Historical Overview,” in *The Muscular Ideal: Psychological, Social, and Medical Perspectives*, eds. J. Kevin Thompson and Guy Cafri (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2007), 58.

<sup>108</sup> See Michael S. Goldstein’s *The Health Movement: Promoting Fitness in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992).

jogging. By 1982, actress and activist Jane Fonda produced the first of her workout books and tapes. Even children realized the importance of looking fit as popular toy figurines from G.I. Joe and Star Wars underwent a physical transformation from lanky and thin to muscled and toned. This was the era when Hulk Hogan and the wrestlers of the World Wrestling Federation received nationwide popularity based upon their antics of smashing, crashing, and pummeling an opponent with their brawn over brains.<sup>109</sup>

Working out was not a team effort, but an individual endeavor done to increase happiness, health, and professional rewards. Health clubs and gyms took over the role of singles bars for men and women. Looking good was paramount to being healthy, but also to enjoying an active single life with willing partners in this age of divorce. In addition, most men no longer displayed virility and strength on a daily basis in the workplace due to factors such as corporate restructuring, automation, and relocation so many upwardly-mobile men focused on their bodies as a site to control and master through diet and exercise. According to a poll conducted in *Psychology Today*, in 1972 fifteen percent of men claimed to be dissatisfied with their bodies. That number jumped to thirty-four percent by 1985.<sup>110</sup> Men's public selves necessitated proper crafting and maintenance in order to project attributes of masculine power and prestige.

Image makers grasped the importance of the fitness craze and disseminated its benefits to the masses. For men, according to psychologist Sarah Grogan, "The slender, muscular shape is the masculine ideal because it is ultimately tied to Western cultural

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<sup>109</sup> See Harrison G. Pope Jr., M.D., Katherine A. Phillips, M.D., and Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D., eds., *The Adonis Complex: The Secret Crisis of Male Body Obsession* (New York: The Free Press, 2000) for a further discussion of the fitness craze and its influence on children.

<sup>110</sup> Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, *The Cult of Thinness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 196.

notions of maleness as representing power and strength.”<sup>111</sup> Maintaining a fit body showed the world self-control and mastery. The clothes displayed in the pages of magazines such as *GQ*, *Esquire*, and *Ebony*, only looked good on male bodies shaped through proper diet and adequate exercise. As one *Esquire* writer acknowledged about his process for selecting fashionable clothing, “Like many men, I put off buying new clothes until I’ve lost a few pounds.”<sup>112</sup>

Dieting typically implied a female activity. Yet, by the 1980s, many men, and increasingly businessmen, started dieting. Dieting for men was not about weight necessarily, it was about having defined muscle tone and stature. Sarah Grogan said, “Being overweight is linked to laziness, lack of will power, and being out of control.”<sup>113</sup> The typical dieter fit the profile of being employed, educated, and between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-four. This description of the dieter more than likely applied to many of the *Esquire*, *GQ*, *The Advocate*, *Ebony*, and *Ebony Man* readers.<sup>114</sup> Diet and health were two items necessary for the corporate climb. Corporations such as Xerox and IBM started to implement health and well-being programs designed to educate employees on the benefits of exercise and a balanced diet. Both Pepsi Company and the headquarters for Domino’s Pizza<sup>115</sup> established large-scale fitness centers on site to

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<sup>111</sup> Sarah Grogan, *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women, and Children Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 82. For more on men and muscularity see Thompson and Cafri, eds., *The Muscular Ideal: Psychological, Social, and Medical Perspectives*.

<sup>112</sup> *Esquire*, “The Economics of Dieting,” *Esquire* 94 (December 1980): 120.

<sup>113</sup> Grogan, *Body Image*, 9.

<sup>114</sup> Hillel Schwartz, *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies and Fat* (New York: Macmillian Inc., 1986), 242-254.

<sup>115</sup> Roberta Pollack Seid, *Never Too Thin: Why Women Are at War With Their Bodies* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1989), 14-15.

encourage employees to include fitness in their list of daily activities. According to the editors of *Esquire*, “The recent upsurge in corporate fitness programs reflects a recognition by company management that a fit employee is a more productive one.”<sup>116</sup>

While the fitness boom certainly affected the growth of the diet and exercise industries, it also transformed another profitable American industry in the process. Historian Roberta Pollack Seid declared, “The craze has revolutionized fashion.”<sup>117</sup> Sixty percent of all Americans surveyed used running shoes and sweat suits as everyday, casual wear in 1982.<sup>118</sup> The January 1980 edition of *Esquire* was filled with sportswear in the fashion section. One tanned, fit, white model wore a yellow thermal crewneck t-shirt with dark maroon sweatpants, and purple sneakers with a tennis racquet in one hand. On the other page, another model looked ready to hit the weight room in an all gray ensemble that included New Balance sneakers, a thermal knit, and sweatpants. Gene Pressman of Barney’s All-American Sportswear commented that sportswear was now making a “fashion statement.”<sup>119</sup>

Sportswear appeared in dance clubs, corporate fitness centers, and on city streets. Men wanted to wear clothes that evoked images of muscle and control. In 1983 *GQ* announced, “Exercising is supplanting the three-martini lunch and singles-bar hopping, not to mention undermining sex and the stock market as the leading topic of

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<sup>116</sup> Barbara Hey, “A Fitness Agenda for the Harried Man,” *Esquire* 99 (March 1983): 80.

<sup>117</sup> Seid, *Never Too Thin*, 10.

<sup>118</sup> Schwartz, *Never Satisfied*, 255.

<sup>119</sup> David Epstein, “Winter Warm-up: A Man Needs Well-Designed Clothes for His Winter Sports Fashion,” *Esquire* 93 (January 1980): 72.

conversation.”<sup>120</sup> Both *GQ* and *Esquire* regularly published articles discussing windsurfing, tennis, racquetball, rowing, and running which only served to emphasize the importance of adopting a fitness regimen and routine into one’s lifestyle. By 1983, *Esquire* produced one edition a year solely devoted to exercise and fitness. Working out was not a passing trend, it was a prerequisite to get ahead in the corporate world.

The male form was vividly on display in sportswear since it came in a variety of colors, cuts, and patterns designed for every imaginable fitness activity. T-shirts and sweatpants were now awash in tones of turquoise, teal, pink, purple, and red in addition to basic gray, white, and black offerings.<sup>121</sup> Fuchsia appeared on many lycra-spandex workout pants for aerobic enthusiasts and cyclists that could easily be paired with brightly colored tank tops that brazenly exposed both a man’s shoulder and abdominal muscles.<sup>122</sup> Patrick leather sneakers, Calvin Klein sweatshirts, Jantzen shorts, and Jockey tank tops commonly filled fashion pictorials and men’s closets at this time as well. Clothing allowed men to express themselves through color palette and sport style; it also displayed the level of wealth they acquired or economic bracket they would soon enter. Sportswear supported the daily performance of masculinity just like a man’s suit.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *GQ*, “Fashion Gets Physical,” *GQ* 53 (February 1983): 105.

<sup>121</sup> Vincent Boucher, “Snow Brights,” *Esquire* 100 (October 1983): 100-105.

<sup>122</sup> Vincent Boucher, “Power Play,” *Esquire* 103 (May 1985): 198.

<sup>123</sup> *GQ*, “Exercising in Style,” *GQ* 51 (August 1981): 128-129; and *GQ*, “Dressed for Action: Active Wear Now Goes Anywhere,” *GQ* 53 (September 1983): 301.



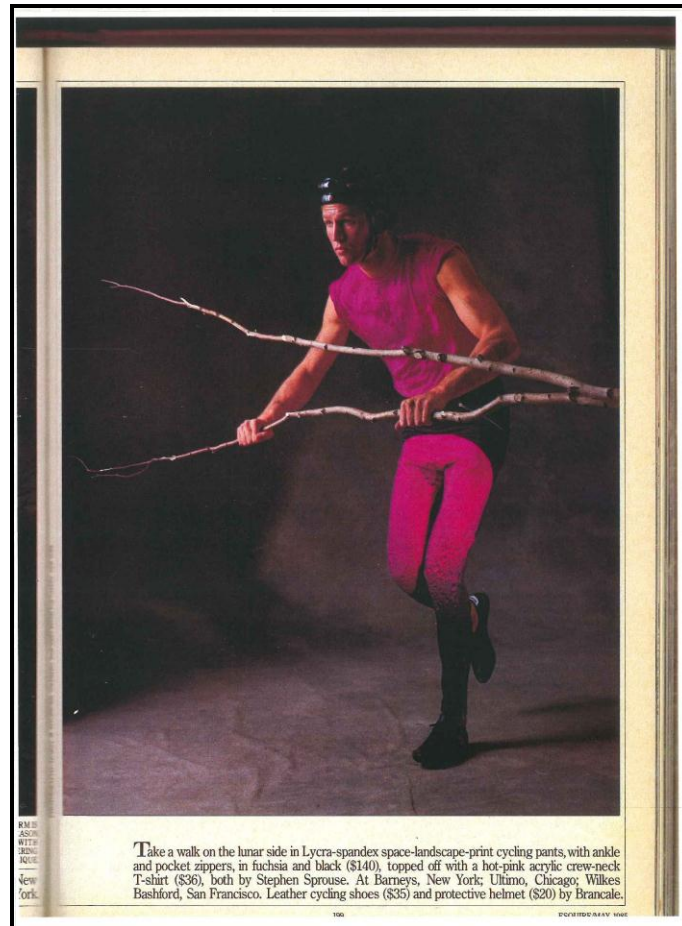


Figure 10. Workout Gear.<sup>124</sup>

Working out was technically done as a solo activity, but the upwardly-mobile male never forgot that he was in competition with other men each time he entered a club or picked up a free weight. Just as the professional upscale male dressed for battle in the corporate world, he also had to properly shield his body for battle amongst all the onlookers in his gym. Physical prowess has always been an arena of masculine competition. Men were simply crafting and honing those attributes of command,

<sup>124</sup> Boucher, "Power Play," 199.

dominance, and strength they needed in the professional world through activities performed in an exercise studio, gymnasium, baseball diamond, soccer pitch, and bicycle path. Men who embraced colorful exercise attire clearly had a positive self-image and confidence in themselves and in their bodies. They exuded a sense of control, power, and potency just by virtue of the expressive garb they selected.

Companies also propagated the fitness craze and its male bodily aesthetic. In a Macy's advertisement from 1981, the company declared, "Men of action wear assertiveness easily. It comes as naturally to them as competing...to win. Here, a very front-runner look: the look of confidence. The Camera design jacket by Style Auto."<sup>125</sup> This short, cropped, racing jacket featured padded shoulders and a relaxed cut all the better for the upscale male to exhibit his toned and amply muscled form. Men understood and recognized the importance of words like "assertiveness," "competing," and "confidence." These were all qualities that the 1980s male wanted to project especially at the beginning of the decade with uncertainty looming over political, economic, and cultural matters. Russell Athletics promoted their wares with the statement, "In this fast-paced world, you have to dress for success. And at Russell Athletics we've been dressing America's best athletes for generations." Donning the company's white shorts and body hugging violet tank top was required to beat any competitor while still looking good. These types of garments radiated the "classic combination of style, durability, and performance" needed to survive in 1980s America.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *GQ*, "Advertisement for Macy's," *GQ* 51 (September 1981): 1.

<sup>126</sup> *GQ*, "Advertisement for Russell Athletics," *GQ* 57 (May 1987): 19.

Attire was only half the story as companies promoted workout equipment to discerning and eager male consumers. Soloflex advertisements gained prominence over those for the 1970s favorite, the nautilus, within magazines like *GQ*. In one insert, Soloflex cautioned its potential consumers, “Warning: The Use of This Product May Be Hazardous to Your Shirt Collection.”<sup>127</sup> Pictured against this logo was a well-built model flexing his arm and abdominal muscles with a ripped shirt hanging from a bicep muscle.<sup>128</sup> To compliment this workout, upwardly-mobile men could purchase “Gravity Guiding Inversion Boots” that came with their own specialized fitness routine.<sup>129</sup> These boots received a good deal of attention due to their appearance on Richard Gere’s body in the film *American Gigolo*. Men had all the right tools with which to construct a powerful, strapping, and confident persona in order to survive psychically, economically, and socially in America.

The upscale black male also understood the intrinsic value and worth in working out and adopting a fitness regimen. According to *Ebony*, “If you want your knock-out pleasure clothes as well as your all-important business suit to look their best, you have to work on your body and keep it toned and fit.”<sup>130</sup> Toned and fit in the 1980s did not refer to slender and slim looking male frames. Rather, black men needed to develop proper muscle tone, endurance, and power through varied exercise routines while simultaneously wearing fashion conscious sporting attire. Sportswear contained a new

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<sup>127</sup> *GQ*, “Advertisement for Body by Soloflex,” *GQ* 51 (November 1981): 112.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>129</sup> *GQ*, “Gravity Guiding Inversion Boots,” *GQ* 53 (January 1983): 145.

<sup>130</sup> *Ebony*, “Body Fitness Section,” *Ebony* 39 (May 1984): 146-147.

vibrancy and energy in color and design. According to *Ebony Man*, “The present breed of consumer is looking not only for active wear that works but also clothing that makes them feel and look good while playing their favorite sport.”<sup>131</sup> A Tom Benedict one piece workout suit consisting of a muscle tank and tight shorts paired with white fingerless gloves, red socks, and red, white, and black sneakers exemplified this notion. Cyclists or track enthusiasts would eliminate any elemental resistance outfitted in a yellow, green, and blue geometric patterned pair of spandex pants under a yellow Nike tank top.<sup>132</sup> For those men seeking proper swim wear for beach and water activities, *EM* promoted acquiring the one piece male suit. This bathing suit was not styled in the same manner as a traditional woman’s one piece item. Rather, the suit displayed an open chest area between its straps and its length fell below a man’s hip akin to a pair of extremely short, boy brief shorts that hit at the upper thigh.<sup>133</sup> If this type of style proved too unconventional, swimwear companies like Speedo offered exuberant brief and bikini cut options awash with visual interest in purples, greens, whites, yellows, and blacks.<sup>134</sup>

Sportswear boldly displayed the black male body. *EM* acknowledged, “Yes, clothing does comment on you. You are what you wear...What you wear and how you wear it makes direct reference to who you are and how you want to be perceived.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> *Ebony Man*, “Fit to Win in Active Wear That Combines Fashion and Function,” *Ebony Man* 3 (February 1988): 52.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-56.

<sup>133</sup> Eunice W. Johnson, “Fashion Fair Men’s Wear,” *Ebony* 35 (April 1980): 120-128.

<sup>134</sup> *Ebony*, “Body Fitness Section,” 146-147.

<sup>135</sup> *Ebony Man*, “To Each His Own,” *Ebony Man* 3 (September 1983): 20-21.

Accordingly, models in fashion spreads within the pages of *Ebony* posed in the middle of actual fitness routines undergoing activities like abdominal crunches to give readers a sense of how they would look and perform wearing these sartorial articles. For example, one model doing sit-ups sported yellow “lightweight” shorts with red and orange stripes around the stomach and thigh regions.<sup>136</sup> Another model engaged in exercise clothed his sweaty frame in a bluish-purple pair of sweatpants.<sup>137</sup> Both males were pictured topless in order to showcase their built and brawny exteriors. Moreover, both of their bottom garments focused the eye squarely on their athletic posteriors and shapely thighs due to the slimmer cut of the material. The upscale black male outfitted in snug jogging suits and colorful workout gear announced to the rest of the world his positive sense of self and his own frequent participation in the arena of conspicuous consumption.<sup>138</sup>

Health based companies promoted this black body aesthetic. The company “Wate-On” claimed in 1980, “Skinny. Self-conscious. Gain pounds, inches, confidence. Too skinny because you don’t eat right? Wate-On’s calories help fill-out, shape your entire body.”<sup>139</sup> A shirtless black male with defined abs and chest muscles preens at the camera next to the tag line “Shape a new you.” “Wate-On” offered interested black men the means to mold and perfect their bodies with their diet plan that included “liquids, bars, and tonics.”<sup>140</sup>

Beyond actual promotions for firms specializing in nutrition and fitness,

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<sup>136</sup> *Ebony*, “Body Strategy,” *Ebony* 38 (January 1983): 108.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109.

<sup>139</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Wate-On,” *Ebony* 35 (April 1980): 72.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

magazines such as *EM* and *Ebony* regularly featured advertisements for services and commodities that used sports and the sporting mentality to market their products. For example, one All State Insurance spot seemed to publicize the fitness fad over purchasing their actual insurance since the visual focus was solely on what appeared to be a married couple walking briskly together clad in jogging suits in black and burgundy.<sup>141</sup> Gatorade, the drink of true athletes both on and off the court, frequently appeared within *Ebony* as well. One notable picture exhibited an athletic, brawny, and healthy black male in the midst of a sporting endeavor as sweat dripped from every part of his viewable body. Clad only in short blue workout shorts and a gray tank, the model's body was as much on display as the hydrating beverage since the man's hand held up part of his top revealing ripples of abdominal muscles.<sup>142</sup>

Gay men were already familiar with the heightened sense of body consciousness experienced by their straight, white and black peers in the 1980s. During the 1970s, many gay men modified and molded their physiques to counter past stereotypes and images of them as being less than manly due to their sexuality and sexual practices. The macho masculinity symbolized in the clone figure exuded a raw, tough, confident, and assertive persona through clothing and bodily proportions. Clones spent a considerable amount of time building muscles and brawn. This emphasis on a toned and fit exterior had not changed in the earlier part of the 1980s, nor did it lessen as the decade continued. One *Advocate* reader wrote into the magazine in 1983 about the importance of a possessing a good body in the gay male community. The reader asked:

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<sup>141</sup> *Ebony*, "Advertisement for All State Insurance," *Ebony* 39 (May 1984): 166-167.

<sup>142</sup> *Ebony*, "Advertisement for Gatorade," *Ebony* 42 (December 1986): 87.

I would like to know if there is hope for us less attractive guys out in the gay world. I am an average-looking guy with an average build who just turned 25 a few months ago. I read so much in gay publications about men who are attracted to those who are gorgeous with their muscular bodies and big baskets. Frankly, it is depressing. I am planning on “coming out” some day soon, and now I am beginning to wonder if it is worth it.<sup>143</sup>

Unfortunately for this male, the ideal presentation of the gay male form radiated notions of youth, control, muscularity, and mastery. Beefy muscles triumphed over slender and slim forms. The strapping and well-built gay male looked best in clothing that showed off all the contours of his hard-earned body.

Traditional clone attire such as denim, leather, and jeans continued to be worn by gay men along with being promoted within the pages of *The Advocate* in both advertisements and articles. However, after 1983, there was an increased presence within the periodical of exercise garments designed not only to further propagate the fitness craze, but to also properly display gay men’s efforts at the gym. In one article entitled “Fashion Fly,” writer Andrew Fezza encouraged men to purchase snug fitting boxer-like workout shorts that were “equally suitable for warm weather running or for just relaxing in the sun.”<sup>144</sup> Made of high quality fabrics like Irish linen or Italian yarn, this item was akin to a tight piece of underwear which permitted no movement or space for bulging extra pounds. The magazine paired this body revealing garment with a short sleeve, striped, ribbed top that was equally as body revealing and striking. Also popular were sleeveless tops without fabric holding the sides together that nipped in at a man’s waist. For example, in one 1983 spread, writer Jack Hyde placed a male model posing on the beach in one of these vented creations with tight short shorts on his bottom torso.

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<sup>143</sup> *The Advocate*, “Advisor,” *The Advocate* 362 (March 3, 1983): 24.

<sup>144</sup> Andrew Fezza, “Fashion Fly,” *The Advocate* 367 (May 12, 1983): 63.

Due to the design of these shirts, a man's abdominals, oblique muscles, and rippling chest muscles would be easily accessible for all to gawk and stare. While there was an oversized nature to the construction of this item, only well-developed males could parade around in this garb since thin and slender bodies would become swallowed up by the movement of cloth.<sup>145</sup> Even though these types of outfits seemed to be a marked departure from the macho gear of the clone, the same visual objectives were achieved. Body revealing vented shirts may have replaced plaid flannels, but a man's body still needed to exude youth, strength, and power if he was to attain any personal or professional success.

Sportswear such as this was deemed acceptable attire for both leisure and professional activities. *The Advocate's* writer Tancredo Freeze in 1985 declared, "These taste makers are insisting that the semitropical, semiclad look is now not only appropriate for the beach, but often for the boardroom as well." Wearing "jams" and longer shorts with graphic patterns and in bright colors received the mark of approval in lieu of ensconcing one's frame in a suit. Freeze commented, "The favorite fabrications are simple cotton blends, and the proportions are generous, sometimes oversized, but most importantly, they tend to be body revealing."<sup>146</sup> A sleeveless top sans side fabric appeared next to this text complimented with a pair of jams done in a poppy motif. The top was purposefully tucked into the shorts in order to highlight the model's exterior.<sup>147</sup> Just as heterosexual, upwardly-mobile males wore oversized, shoulder emphasizing

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<sup>145</sup> Jack Hyde, "Fashion," *The Advocate* 370 (June 23, 1983): 85.

<sup>146</sup> Tancredo Freeze, "Summer of '85 Seductive Southern California Fashion," *The Advocate* 425 (July 23, 1985): 39-40.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



business suits to work with hints of bold color and pattern combinations, so too did the gay male frame his form in oversized attire that revealed his developed musculature with splashes of color and prints.

Many gay men read *GQ* and *Esquire* and certainly followed their pronouncements regarding professional wear. *The Advocate* even commented on the fact that gay men had been reading magazines like *GQ* for years. George DeStefano acknowledged about *GQ*, “It was a magazine that fashion-conscious homosexuals bought regularly in the belief that it was aimed, however covertly, at them and their brethren.” Although DeStefano believed that *GQ* was starting to sacrifice the interests of the gay community in order to secure the straight male dollar, *GQ* stated that it was only “broadening” its audience to be more inclusive and remained committed still to its gay readership.<sup>148</sup> The fact remained that many upscale gay professionals donned business suits and corresponding attire similar to their heterosexual counterparts and would more than likely follow advice provided in *Esquire* and *GQ*.

Other observers reflected on this notion that gay and straight men appeared to be dressing more similarly in the mid to late 1980s. Writer Edmund Carlevale claimed, “What has been commented upon—it’s rather new—is the Americanization of the homosexual.”<sup>149</sup> Carlevale continued, “Gays have decided that the current level of liberation is enough. They can walk down the street and survive. At work they can

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<sup>148</sup> George DeStefano, “Does GQ Hate Gay Men? Or Why the Fashion Magazine Straightened Up Its Act,” *The Advocate* 429 (September 17, 1985): 26.

<sup>149</sup> Edmund Carlevale, “Springsteen’s Ass—And Why You Can’t Tell the Straights from the Gays,” *The Advocate* 466 (February 17, 1987): 9.

discuss a lover. And straight men now look like them. Having reached this sunny plateau, gays don't perceive a need for a distinct look."<sup>150</sup>

For those gay men who chose not to review other journals, the fact remains that a periodical devoted to a gay audience rated casual styles as business appropriate. This speaks greatly to the extreme emphasis placed on exhibiting an ideal male frame projecting elements of youth, muscularity, and vigor. Advertisements also perpetuated this new body standard for the upwardly-mobile gay male. California Surplus Mart lured in clientele with the line "sweat in a new style." The caption read, "Uniquely styled SWEATS have arrived at California Surplus Mart...The new styles pictured are- a pullover sleeveless sweatshirt with rounded neckline & open sides- \$9.98. A sleeveless, hooded, & zippered sweatshirt with pockets- \$14.98. A sleeveless, zippered sweatshirt with pockets- \$12.98." Three trim, toned, and buff models posed in these listed items presenting the visual merits of purchasing such garb.<sup>151</sup> The store Headlines plastered garments designed by the noted sporting brand Russell in their promotions. In one advert, Russell Athletic body conscious t-shirts, tank tops, and thermal crewnecks emblazoned in shades of blue, purple, black, and red splashed across the page. Side revealing shirts, sleeveless sweatshirts, snug sweatpants, and sport vests also materialized in this spot.<sup>152</sup> These types of clothes properly framed and accentuated the physique of the upscale gay male.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>151</sup> *The Advocate*, "Advertisement for California Surplus Mart," *The Advocate* 361 (February 17, 1983): 21.

<sup>152</sup> *The Advocate*, "Advertisement for Headlines," *The Advocate* 367 (May 12, 1983): 3-4.

Workout attire radiated a sense of confidence, assertiveness, and pride in one's outward appearance. Exercising and fitness were part and parcel of the upscale gay male existence. Writer Stephen Greco commented, "Bulk and definition carry a symbolic charge in our culture. They can represent presence and identity, respectively; they can even promise to function as the kind of protective shell I felt (for awhile) my strength gave me. With bulk and definition, gay amateur body builders can compensate for the powerlessness and invisibility some say are ours as 'marginal' member of society."<sup>153</sup> Gay males did not necessarily have to be burgeoning bodybuilders to appreciate the physical and psychological benefits derived from crafting an exercise routine, lifting weights, or joining a gym. For some upwardly-mobile gay males, perfecting their bodies was done in an effort to look good and get ahead in the professional world much in the same manner as their heterosexual counterparts. Others used their enhanced attractiveness as a means to secure further sexual partners and opportunities.

Maintaining an imposing, strong, and sturdy form was integral to warding off any associations with the growing AIDS epidemic that beset the gay male community by 1983. *The Advocate's* August 20, 1981 edition featured Scott Anderson's article "New Viral Cancer Stirs Gay Fears" which discussed the appearance of Kaposi sarcoma. This illness used to be incredibly rare and typically affected African-American, Italian, and Jewish men over the age of sixty.<sup>154</sup> Based on these factors, gay men should not have been overwhelmingly alarmed by the emergence of this illness. However, medical

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<sup>153</sup> Stephen Greco, "Strong Bodies Gay Ways: Creating New Self Image," *The Advocate* 371 (June 7, 1983): 27.

<sup>154</sup> Scott P. Anderson, "New Viral Cancer Stirs Gay Fears," *The Advocate* 324 (August 20, 1981): 9.

professionals observed that individuals with compromised immune systems seemed to contract this “cancer.” Anderson elaborated, “Researchers theorize that many urban gay men with their high incidence of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, may have what doctors call ‘suppressed immunity.’”<sup>155</sup> Many of the reported cases also revealed that infected individuals suffered from some type of sexually transmitted disease like warts, herpes, or hepatitis. While no discernible evidence existed at this time regarding its level of contagion, Anderson and the magazine wanted their readers to be aware of this developing situation.

By 1983, *The Advocate* labeled this illness a “crisis.”<sup>156</sup> This illness first received the label of “GRIDS” or Gay Related Immune Deficiency Syndrome. GRIDS morphed into AIDS or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome by 1982. In 1983, over \$2.6 million was given to fight the growing AIDS crisis as Congress overrode a presidential veto to ensure a bill’s passage for this purpose. Reagan would be slow to discuss and initiate legislation for this disease until his friend, actor Rock Hudson, died in 1985.<sup>157</sup> The Center for Disease Control reported nearly 775 cases of AIDS as of November 26, 1982 with 294 deaths. Hudson’s death would end up being the catalyst for more press coverage, lobbying, and federal aid to find a cure. This event also sparked a great deal of conversation amongst heterosexual communities who witnessed a rise in their reported cases due to blood transfusions and unprotected one night stands. More importantly for *The Advocate* readership, the CDC found that 75% of all cases

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>156</sup> Word taken from the article “Coping with a Crisis: AIDS and the Issues it Raises” by Nathan Fair from *The Advocate*’s February 17, 1983 issue.

<sup>157</sup> Troy, *Morning in America*, 199-202.

involved gay men.<sup>158</sup> Articles on AIDS flourished within the periodical not only during 1983 and 1984, but from 1985 onward, coverage of this disease and its impact on the gay male community proliferated. AIDS seemed to be part of nearly each issue in actual articles, references, and in the overall tone of the magazine.

Sexual culture with its bathhouses, clothing, semiotics, and cruising information no longer took a place of overt prominence as some of these items were banished to the special fold out or insert section. The mood of both the magazine and gay male culture appeared to change. Sociologist Martin Levine commented in 1984, “Whether we gather—at our gyms, in bars, at parties—clone banter is switching from the four D’s (disco, drugs, dick, and dish) to who is the latest victim of Kaposi’s sarcoma.”<sup>159</sup> As more and more information trickled down from the media, some gay men in turn altered their behaviors and lifestyles accordingly due in part to the fact that much of the societal “blame” for the AIDS epidemic was being placed squarely on the clone and his associated set of “risky” practices and activities.<sup>160</sup>

Clothing and accessories indicative of this shift started to surface. *The Advocate* publicized t-shirts emblazoned with condoms covering several penises. These penises were decked out in formal wear, sporting top hats, and given human features. The concept behind this was the slogan “Safe Sex is Great Sex.” Pendants that displayed a condom covered penis in either gold or silver also showed one’s commitment to

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<sup>158</sup> *The Advocate*, “News on AIDS and Health and Human Services Bill,” *The Advocate* 359 (January 6, 1983): 8.

<sup>159</sup> Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 138.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 139; and Michael Signorile, *Life Outside: The Signorile Report on Gay Men Sex, Drugs, Muscles, and the Passage of Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 61-62.

eradicating AIDS and instituting a new gay male culture.<sup>161</sup> The concept behind these items was “Safe Sex is Great Sex.”<sup>162</sup> New gay businesses and companies further emphasized this ethos amongst the gay male community. In examining the Castro district of San Francisco, one commentator noted, “I think the new businesses that are emerging in this neighborhood reflect a new domesticity in the gay community. Men are coupling, sticking closer to home and really looking at living the rest of their lives beyond the AIDS crisis.”<sup>163</sup> Gay consumers allocated more of their incomes on “health and home” goods in addition to historical favorites involving “food and fashion” instead of spending money on bathhouses, discos, escorts, and cruising bars.<sup>164</sup> This does not mean that all gay men modified their lifestyles, but, a cultural change appeared to be developing for many upscale men.

One distinct element of clone masculinity did remain prevalent and present in the gay male community from 1983 onwards—a hard body. Many upscale gay men built their bodies to combat any lingering associations with effeminacy and unmanliness. While some of these justifications for becoming physically fit remained true in the 1980s, the rise of the AIDS epidemic intensified the need for gay men to acquire this bodily ideal. Gay men now lived in a world where death hung over their heads on a daily basis since in 1987, adult males constituted ninety-three percent of all AIDS cases

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<sup>161</sup> *The Advocate*, “The Safe Connection,” *The Advocate* 467 (March 3, 1987): 46.

<sup>162</sup> *The Advocate*, “Fast Forward People Places and Things Section, Signs of Life...,” *The Advocate* 463 (January 6, 1987): 34-35.

<sup>163</sup> Mark Vandervelden, Peter Freiberg, and Dave Walter, “The Surprising Health of Gay Business,” *The Advocate* 467 (March 3, 1987): 43.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-49, 108.

with seventy-three percent of this amount comprising gay men.<sup>165</sup> By 1989, in New York City, AIDS was the main cause of death for gay males in the 30-44 age category.<sup>166</sup> Gay men turned inward and focused on presenting a powerful and healthy body to the world at large in an effort to deter any inference or suggestion of HIV or AIDS. HIV and AIDS wreaked havoc on the body causing a whole host of ailments and illnesses that particularly affected the physical form with lesions, rashes, and considerable weight loss. Doctors prescribed steroids to some of their patients suffering from some of these problems including wasting. Other gay men endured testosterone therapy for their HIV or AIDS diagnosis.<sup>167</sup> Both of these treatments ended up providing afflicted individuals with beefy and brawny forms which contrasted sharply with images of infected men dying in hospitals. A strong and well-built frame supplied a defense and shield against the prying eyes and whispers of society.

There was a stigma attached to acquiring AIDS during this period and a considerable amount of discrimination, intolerance, and condemnation swirled around individuals who became either HIV positive or actually had AIDS. One could not be accused of having AIDS or treated as such if he looked to be healthy, sound, and robust. Advertisements and articles within *The Advocate* noted this reasoning. One promotion for The Athletic Club in Hollywood featured a model clad in tight shorts engaged in a right arm stretch with a chiseled and sculpted form next to the line, “The most sophisticated piece of equipment in our gym...our staff...they are experienced and

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<sup>165</sup> Levine, *Gay Macho*, 143.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>167</sup> Signorile, *Life Outside*, 140-148.

compassionate.”<sup>168</sup> The word “compassionate” might seem odd or out of place, but in this age of AIDS, the club understood their audience and the issues they faced. Along with promotions like these, the magazine inserted articles on religion, spirituality,<sup>169</sup> and alternative medicine or healing practices like massage therapy.<sup>170</sup>

*The Advocate* continued to provide advice to its readers about sports, fitness, and exercise programs like aerobics, while also incorporating information regarding skincare, vitamins, and other health and nutrition related matters. Readers listened since one *Advocate* survey revealed that seventy-four percent of respondents took vitamins, sixty percent used mineral water, and close to sixty-eight percent worked out on a regular basis.<sup>171</sup> These figures reflected the fact that “Gay consumers...are spending increasingly large sums on gym memberships, vitamins and other health-care products.”<sup>172</sup> An imposing, muscular, and robust body symbolized more than simply trying to get ahead in the professional or corporate world for the gay male. A hard body was psychologically imperative to keeping AIDS at bay—and key to thwarting any stigma or societal glare.

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<sup>168</sup> *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for The Athletic Club,” *The Advocate* 463 (January 6, 1987): 3.

<sup>169</sup> In 1987 there was a noticeable increase in articles on these topics.

<sup>170</sup> Carl Maves, “Massage: Singing the Body Electric: New Paths to Healing Found Through the Tao of Touch,” *The Advocate* 469 (March 31, 1987): 42-43.

<sup>171</sup> *The Advocate*, “Profile in Gay Buying Power,” *The Advocate* 467 (March 3, 1987): 44-45.

<sup>172</sup> Vandervelden, Freiberg, and Walter, “The Surprising Health of Gay Business,” 44.



## Conclusion



Figure 11. 1980s Masculinity in *American Psycho* (2000).<sup>173</sup>

The clothes upwardly-mobile men wore denoted who they were, where they were going, and what they did in the 1980s. Command, purpose, and direction were best exhibited through the male suit. The suit allowed many upscale men to produce a masculinity grounded in notions of strength, prosperity, power, and competition. Men donned sportswear and fitness attire to likewise transmit an assertive, robust, and forceful masculine persona outside of work and the corporate race. Correspondingly, men gravitated towards outfitting their frames outside of the boardroom in body revealing sportswear that affirmed a man's commitment to maintaining a healthy, strong, and fit form ready to take on all competitors and combatants in life. The suit and exercise gear worked in concert with one another to give men a sense of control,

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<sup>173</sup> See [http://www.film.com/photos/screen-shots-christian-bale/attachment/bale\\_americanpsycho](http://www.film.com/photos/screen-shots-christian-bale/attachment/bale_americanpsycho).

purpose, and self-esteem necessary to battle the stock market, the dating scene, societal fluctuations, male competitors, and grave illness.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**SUITED UP TO EXTREMES:**  
**THE SUIT AND MASCULINITY IN 1990s AMERICA**

**Introduction**

Fashion historian Robert E. Bryan claimed of the 1990s, “As the decade came to a close...one thing was certain: The authority the business suit had long enjoyed was finished.”<sup>1</sup> What happened to the sartorial dominance of the male suit at the end of the century? Well, the 1990s were not the 1980s. The decade had barely begun and a new suit aesthetic was crowned. *GQ*’s September 1990 proclaimed, “Time was, high-powered business guys thought suiting up for work meant preparing for battle—the war motif approximated by armor like suits in rebuffering hues, such as steely blue and battleship gray.” The fashion editors continued, “Maybe it’s the much ballyhooed demise of the greed era that’s softened our stance on this, but it looks like today’s high roller may well inherit the earth in earth tones: olives, taupes, tans and browns that are far more worldly than woodsy.”<sup>2</sup> The era of casual suiting was now underway.

Was this new style simply a response to the power dressing of the 1980s?<sup>3</sup> Although the power suit achieved prominence and popularity in the 1980s, no one suit

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<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear* (New York: Assouline, 2009), 119.

<sup>2</sup> *GQ*, “The Fast Track Suit,” *GQ* 60 (September 1990): 344.

<sup>3</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 145.

style garnered this same type of sartorial spotlight during the 1990s. Political, economic, international, and cultural factors, along with the implementation of a more casual American business environment, all worked to dethrone this emblem of masculine power and professional pride. This was a decade where trends came and went with such speed and alacrity that a whole host of styles and fads infiltrated the marketplace in record time. Men could choose to embrace different styles of dress for each day of the week if they so desired. Identities were not fixed. Masculinity was not fixed. Designers sent models down the runways in grunge, hip-hop, “monastic,” gothic, minimalist, and “fetish”-inspired clothing (to name only a few styles), which signified that no one fashion could possibly control and hold a consumer’s fancy for too long.<sup>4</sup>

Despite such obstacles, the suit persevered. Fashion scholar Cally Blackman theorized, “The suit may be the most successful and enduring fashion garment ever devised...it is precisely the suit’s perennial adaptability that makes it such a dynamic garment.”<sup>5</sup> The severity of the 1980s power suit soon gave way to a more relaxed and informal suit aesthetic early in the 1990s that mirrored the changing social, political, and cultural landscape of America. However, even as relaxed suiting attire proliferated throughout the nation, by the end of the decade, there was the reemergence of glamour; a return to those days of gangster-inspired and sophisticated dressing that exuded wealth, extravagance, fun, and prosperity. These oppositional suit styles, casual and gangster, represented men’s attempts to locate a proper masculinity through dress. Masculinity

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 145-163. See also Rebecca Arnold’s *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), for a discussion on the fashion styles of the 1990s.

<sup>5</sup> Cally Blackman, *One Hundred Years of Menswear* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2009), 5.

was viewed as once again problematic, as many men struggled to continuously project the tough-guy masculinity propagated during the Reagan years. At the same time, the more open and tolerant masculinity ushered in as a result of all those liberation movements from the 1960s and 1970s made other men feel uncomfortable and resentful. Men oscillated between these gender ideals, hoping to balance societal expectations with individual needs and desires.

The fragmented suit styles of the decade epitomized this dilemma. There was no one dominant type of masculinity in the 1990s, just as there was no one type of suit style utilized by upscale men for complete security and stability. Men who abandoned their power suits replaced them with the relaxed suiting wear representative of the George Herbert Walker Bush era, before then opting at the end of the decade to once again exude masculine power, class, and confidence through finely tailored, gangster-inspired, slimmer silhouette, glamorous suits. Suiting styles in the 1990s allowed men to select from a variety of options in order to create a patchwork masculinity—one that fluctuated between elements of traditional masculinity and a more open, expressive, and modern masculinity that even flirted with the more feminine aspects of a man's nature. Men desired greater flexibility and freedom in negotiating gender ideals and expectations.

This merry-go-round ride of the suit and masculine identity formation permeated the pages of men's magazines like *Ebony*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, and *The Advocate*. Two other men's magazines, *Ebony Man* and *Vibe*, also noted this trend. *Ebony Man*, officially launched by 1987, was an offshoot of its parent periodical, *Ebony*, and was part of John H. Johnson's publishing empire. Sensing a void in the marketplace, Johnson wanted *Ebony Man* to be a true men's only magazine, one that he described as a “fashionable-

living magazine for black men.”<sup>6</sup> According to writer Shonitria Anthony, *Ebony Man* aspired to be a “black *GQ*.”<sup>7</sup>

Created by Quincy Jones in 1993, *Vibe* was packaged as a different breed of publication than *Ebony Man* since its audience reached members of both the white and black communities into the worlds of hip-hop and rap. *Vibe*’s readership tended to be a bit trendier, hip, and more creatively-inclined. Yet, many of the individuals reading and buying *Vibe* were or sought to be within the same economic bracket as the other aforementioned magazines due to the inclusion of high-end designers and extremely high fashion, artistic, glossy fashion spreads situated within its pages. Issues provided information on the latest gadgets, tips on living well, celebrity gossip, fashions, music, and style. Even the male models used within *Vibe* were of different races, ethnicities, and backgrounds so as to appeal to a broader audience and consumer base than traditionally labeled African American magazines like *Ebony* and *Ebony Man*. *Vibe* may not have been specifically marketed as a true men’s magazine, but it definitely was a lifestyle magazine with a huge masculine focus evident in both words and images.<sup>8</sup>

These selected men’s magazines vividly punctuated the conflicted nature of American masculinity and masculine dress at this time. All of these periodicals, irrespective of their racial and sexual differences, utilized fashion as a tool of masculine expression, validation, and identification. Suits provided American men with a means to

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<sup>6</sup> Shonitria Anthony, “Wanted: A National Magazine for Black Men,” *The New York Review of Magazines* (May 10, 2012); available from <http://nyrm.org/?p=111>, Internet, accessed 4 August 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Sisario, “Vibe Magazine Is Sold and Likely to Become Online Only,” *The New York Times* (April 25, 2013); available from [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/26/business/media/spinmedia-buys-vibe-magazine.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/26/business/media/spinmedia-buys-vibe-magazine.html?_r=0), Internet, accessed 17 August 2013. See also *Vibe*’s website [www.vibe.com](http://www.vibe.com)

challenge, combat, and affirm their own brand of masculinity in confusing and conflicted times.

### **Casual Elegance vs. Glamorous Gangsters**

*GQ*'s March 1989 fashion preview, "Easy Elegance," declared, "The only problem with Thirties men's style was that hardly anyone could afford it at the time—with soup lines and all. Nowadays the average American man can afford great clothes, as well as the plane fare to the hot social spots." The editors continued, "Thank God it's the late Eighties: the time of green mail and venture capitalism, when the common refrain is 'Buddy, can you spare a diamond—for my gold stud?'"<sup>9</sup> Even though Ronald Reagan's second term officially came to a close that year, it appeared as though the decade commonly characterized by the words greed, excess, and individualism would persist especially since Reagan's Vice President, George H. W. Bush, assumed the mantle of the presidency. However, as the country would soon come to discover, George Bush was not Ronald Reagan.

When Bush decided to run for the office, he endeavored to run a middle course between finding his own presidential path and honoring that of his predecessor. Historian Gil Troy argued that Bush, "would fulfill Reagan's vision by appearing to be the "real" Ronald Reagan—a rooted, church going WASP, not an arriviste Hollywood celebrity; a war hero, not a celluloid soldier; a businessman, not an actor; the long-married head of a warm, famously cohesive family, not the once-divorced head of a feuding, infamously dysfunctional crew. George Bush's walking advertisement for a WASP restoration continued Reagan's crusade for a moral renaissance while distancing

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<sup>9</sup> *GQ*, "Easy Elegance," *GQ* 59 (March 1989): 295.

the seemingly loyal vice president from his still popular, but somewhat flagging commander-in-chief.”<sup>10</sup>

Bush’s presidential campaign and early years in office were plagued by what psychologist Stephen J. Ducat called “the wimp factor.”<sup>11</sup> Bush’s patrician and prep background garnered much of the blame for this characterization. Historically, leaders immersed in this type of lifestyle have been attacked for a lack of true manhood since the implication is that one born into this environment is neither a man ready for battle, nor a man of action exuding toughness and a competitive drive. Wealth and privilege equated to sedentary and leisure pursuits which ran afoul of the qualities postulated by traditional masculinity. Although Bush served his country admirably as a pilot during World War II, the head of the Central Intelligence Agency, and ambassador to China among other noteworthy posts, his manhood was constantly questioned by government officials and the American public.

Bush moved past the label of a “wimp” in his handling of foreign affairs. He oversaw the first post-Cold War successful military operation in Panama in 1989.<sup>12</sup> Along with this military engagement, Bush showcased his diplomacy skills through holding conferences with the Soviet Union, engaging in relations with China, and participating in the efforts towards the implementation of German unification, among

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<sup>10</sup> Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 298.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen J. Ducat, *The Wimp Factor: Gender Gaps, Holy Wars and the Politics of Anxious Masculinity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), vii, 84-94.

<sup>12</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 2008), 292-294.



other items.<sup>13</sup> His crowning achievement though was in waging the Gulf War against Iraq. Not only did patriotism soar in the United States but so too did Bush's approval ratings.<sup>14</sup> Bush appeared strong, authoritative, and decisive in the face of foreign foes, dictators, and global politics. To the American public, Bush may not have as easily embodied the tough, competitive, commanding masculine persona of Reagan, but he skillfully demonstrated his similar brand of masculinity all the same.

Although Bush displayed the attributes of authority, control, and command in terms of foreign affairs, he could not keep up this masculine image in the domestic realm. Bush's campaign promise of "Read My Lips, No New Taxes," would crack under the economic realities of a ballooning deficit and waging a war against Iraq.<sup>15</sup> Many of Reagan's economic policies and defense spending caused the federal deficit to rise at an enormous rate. Bush had to manage this issue along with the savings and loan crises begun under Reagan's terms as well. The boom of the Reagan years started to bust further as automakers began incurring more losses than profits, businesses imposed mass lay-offs, and firms underwent structural downsizing. Unemployment hovered at seven point eight percent at the mid-point of 1991. The country became embroiled in yet another recession. This recession technically lasted for the "ten months" that Bush predicted it would, but Americans never quite felt as though the economy fully recovered during the Bush years.<sup>16</sup> Bush incurred accusations that he was slow to act

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 294-297.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 297-303. See also William H. Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century: The United States from 1890-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 264.

<sup>15</sup> Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century*, 264. See also Troy, *Morning in America*, 317.

<sup>16</sup> Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 306-309.

and present strong leadership in managing the economy in face of serious economic turmoil.<sup>17</sup> With each foreign policy triumph, there were missteps in the domestic arena. And, when Bush was successful in having legislation passed such as the Clean Air and Americans with Disabilities Acts, these victories were virtually forgotten by the general public.<sup>18</sup>

Americans felt more alienated and dislocated from the world and communities around them. All the advances in technology only made people more isolated and individualistic. A growing cynicism not seen since the travails of the 1970s infiltrated the American psyche. Americans looked out across the globe and saw famine, genocide, warfare, recession, and discord. Bush's image did not help matters as Americans perceived their national leader to be "emotionally aloof" from these concerns and troubles.<sup>19</sup> American men struggled to acclimate in this confusing and bewildering environment. During the Reagan era, American men gravitated towards power dressing in an effort to construct a masculine persona that projected resolve, determination, power, and potency in order to triumph over all competitors both inside and outside of the boardroom.

This hard masculinity embodied by Reagan and the 80s upscale male seemed outdated and insufficient to meet the challenges of the new decade. American men no longer felt invincible and potent in and out of the boardroom especially after the stock market crash of 1987 and the subsequent bailout of the Savings and Loan industry. As a

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<sup>17</sup> Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century*, 265.

<sup>18</sup> Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 304-306.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

result, many upscale men veered away from power suits since they could not provide them with a proper sense of security, stability, and esteem. Masculinity and all of its cultural appendages were in flux including that time honored symbol of masculine strength, power, and dress—the suit. Bush’s presidential style reflected this changing cultural mood. Commenting on Bush’s presidential style in *GQ*’s July 1990 issue, writer Owen Edwards asserted, “George Bush, current exemplar of presidential style, clings resolutely to the all-purpose prepster look that dominated male fashion in the Fifties (as the trilobites once dominated the earth). With his shapeless, natural-shouldered suits, innocuous Yale ties, one-size-fits-all golf hats, baggy L.L. Bean khakis and poly-blend outdoor jackets, the man is a square pal in a Oval Office.”<sup>20</sup> If Reagan represented the yuppie, then Bush certainly symbolized the preppy.<sup>21</sup> The more casual suit and preppy style evoked by Bush seemed a stark contrast to the status conscious, extremely broad-shouldered, sharp dressing of the Reagan 80s. While Bush certainly would not be labeled as a trend-setter, his preferred suiting attire acknowledged the shift occurring amongst suit styles for the American man over the course of his presidency.

Suit styles adopted by upwardly-mobile American men mirrored the highs and lows of the Bush presidency. Magazines such as *GQ* and *Esquire* showcased and promoted this sartorial development in masculine dress. Initially, suits in 1989 still conveyed a sense of command and might as they were patterned more after the drape suit of the 1930s. While this type of dress was similar to the power suits of the 1980s,

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<sup>20</sup> Owen Edwards, “Head Men Don’t Wear Plaid: How to Dress Like a World Leader,” *GQ* 60 (July 1990): 124.

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Banks and Doria De La Chapelle, *Preppy: Cultivating Ivy* (New York: Rizzoli 2011), 3-4.

the cut and construction of the materials was not as overly severe in look or tone.<sup>22</sup> In *GQ*'s January 1989 edition, the fashion editors proclaimed the drape suit as once again fashionable. According to *GQ*, "One of the lesser-known casualties of the Second World War was the drape suit. Favored by the most stylish men in America during the Thirties, the full-cut, easy-drape suit with generous lapels, multiple pockets, a detached vest and deep pleated and cuffed trousers was cut to ribbons by the War Board in the general effort to conserve material for the more uniform dressing going on overseas." Now, *GQ* pronounced that "suits with those generous features are staging a comeback."<sup>23</sup> An Alexander Julian cream double breasted suit signified this new manner of dressing. Worn with a Joseph Abboud dress shirt, diamond patterned Hugo Boss tie, and leather lace-up shoes by Church's, this suit continued the 80s obsession with designer labels and affluence.<sup>24</sup>

However, the overall fit of these sartorial articles was less oversized and angular. Gone were the excessively exaggerated shoulders and extra padding found in the decade's earlier suit styles. Less bulky designs could also be found in examples such as a light brown double breasted Gianni Versace suit paired with a light green Charvet dress shirt, a Modules brown tie accented with yellow leaves, and a white pocket square.<sup>25</sup> A Ralph Lauren ensemble consisting of a glen-plaid suit, black and white striped dress shirt, paisley bow tie, and blue pocket square generated a look of class,

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<sup>22</sup> Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 117.

<sup>23</sup> *GQ*, "Easy Street," *GQ* 59 (January 1989): 109.

<sup>24</sup> *GQ*, "Call for Philip Marlowe," *GQ* 59 (January 1989): 113.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

sophistication, and authority, but made the male body more identifiable and approachable.<sup>26</sup> This style was also less hyper-masculine than the decade's earlier suit offerings that were more akin to a suit of armor. These clothes were now designed for comfort, ease, and livability over brawn and braggadocio.

Soon, though, suits emanated an even more casual nature. *GQ* editors announced in the magazine's July 1989 issue that the sack suit was indeed "back." According to the editors, "the suit has a new silhouette for business: Easy, Fitted, Buttoned at the Middle for Subtle Elegance."<sup>27</sup> A navy chalk-stripe Ralph Lauren suit worn with a red patterned tie and white dress shirt vividly flaunted this new aesthetic just as a Lubian charcoal suit in a glen plaid pattern of red, black, and orange did.<sup>28</sup> Sack suits like these displayed within the pages of *GQ* may not have necessarily lived up to past characterizations of being "unsexy" and "undifferentiated," but these models certainly connected to the needs of the Bush era consumer wanting movement, comfort, and ease from the clothing he purchased and wore.<sup>29</sup> Feeling good in one's cloth skin projected an aura of poise and security during unpredictable and changing times. Comfort in clothing translated outwardly to a level of confidence and assurance in one's own masculine persona. Donning exaggerated power suits simply did not feel natural or effortless any longer.

Men tired of rigid material, societal, and gender boundaries. The upscale consumer needed an alternative manner of dressing to reflect this mindset. Men might

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 116-120.

<sup>27</sup> *GQ*, "The Sack Is Back," *GQ* 59 (July 1989): 116.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Flusser, *Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion* (New York: itbooks, 2002), 81.

feel more at ease with themselves and the world embracing neutral colors like olive, khaki, and taupe for their professional wardrobe while also abandoning the practice of wearing a tie.<sup>30</sup> One such option crafted by Giorgio Armani showcased a matching “olive” hued double breasted suit jacket and pants paired with an open collared linen-looking dress shirt.<sup>31</sup> Armani was praised by the magazine editors at *Esquire* since he “removed construction in the jacket, softened the shoulders, and relaxed the fabrics. The result was a new male armor, sensuous but no less impervious.”<sup>32</sup> The Armani buyer also looked fashionable and smart adorned in the firm’s single breasted gray and brown suits that humanized the male body with softer shoulders and loose fitting pants. According to *Esquire*, “Comfort and utility have replaced the status and power dressing of the ‘80s.”<sup>33</sup>

Traditionally-inspired suit patterns continued to be produced except that now these creations exuded a sense of comfort and ease to make them more palatable and acceptable for a new decade and male consumer. One example of this trend included Perry Ellis’s loose, matching, broad pinstripe suit in a bluish-gray tone accented by a gray linen shirt.<sup>34</sup> Even the famous suit archetype of the corporate world, the buttoned up navy suit, received a makeover as well to acclimate to this new era’s needs. An Ermenegildo Zegna matching navy suit with light pinstripes still projected respect and

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<sup>30</sup> *Esquire*, “The Power of Armani,” *Esquire* 119 (March 1993): 161.

<sup>31</sup> *Esquire*, “The Italian Touch,” *Esquire* 113 (February 1990): 88-89.

<sup>32</sup> *Esquire*, “The Power of Armani,” 161.

<sup>33</sup> Woody Huchswender, “The Mudding Crowd,” *Esquire* 120 (July 1993): 108.

<sup>34</sup> *Esquire*, “The American Man’s Wardrobe, 1990” *Esquire* 113 (March 1990): 155.

confidence, but now with a more casual, subtle, and playful nature due to the inclusion of a slate colored dress shirt and maroon polka dot tie.<sup>35</sup> Old suiting standards were modernized to be less formal, rigid, and aggressive in tone, color, texture, and cut. Men wanted to move and breathe freely in their choice of cloth and fabric, not be bound in by extra layers of padding, sharp angles, and sartorial armor. *Esquire* believed their advertised suit selections to be so free from construction that in one spread from 1991, the editors picked a ballet dancer to perform in suiting attire that included a Zegna, matching, “light tan” double breasted draped suit that featured a crewneck t-shirt in place of a formal suit and tie combination.<sup>36</sup>

This relaxed approach to masculine dress favored by upscale men also materialized in the increased popularity of broken up suit combinations. Mixing and matching sport coats and trousers gave upwardly-mobile males the ability to not only keep up with this casual aesthetic trend, but also allowed them to break with traditional rules, expectations, and conventions associated with proper suiting attire at their own pace and according to their individual needs. Magazines such as *Esquire* and *GQ* highlighted the fact that broken up suiting ensembles could integrate easily with pieces from a man’s existing wardrobe. Breaking up a conventional two-or three-piece suit gave the upscale male greater fashion versatility and also stretched his dollar even further in these economically troubled times.

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<sup>35</sup> *Esquire*, “Top of the Game,” *Esquire* 119 (March 1993): 108.

<sup>36</sup> *Esquire*, “Europe’s Next Step,” *Esquire* 115 (February 1991): 112.



Figure 12. A Relaxed Suiting Ensemble.<sup>37</sup>

Sport coats received a great deal of magazine coverage for this very reason. Men that still preferred more conventional suit colors like browns and grays could find a plethora of jacket options available to them. For instance, a YSL Rive Gauche brown herringbone sport coat superficially seemed to radiate tradition and classicism. However, when paired with a dark yellow vest, lemon yellow shirt, and light trousers, this ensemble transmitted a more casual and laid back aesthetic especially due to the “slouchy” shoulders and movement of the generously draped jacket and trouser fabric.<sup>38</sup> Giorgio Armani merged tradition with modernity in one outfit comprised of a “chevron-weave” brown jacket, chocolate brown open collared dress shirt, and subtle gray and

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<sup>37</sup> See [www.esquire.com](http://www.esquire.com).

<sup>38</sup> *Esquire*, “Easy Street,” *Esquire* 116 (August 1991): 113.



white stripe baggy trousers.<sup>39</sup> These colors may have referenced standard suit styles, but the shape and clothing combinations reflected 1990s dress.

However, for those men interested in pushing sartorial boundaries, firms such as Byblos, Missoni, and Perry Ellis crafted an array of vibrant and colorful sport coats in shades such as Kelly green, magenta, yellow, bright blue, and flame red.<sup>40</sup> An even bolder style statement could be made wearing a Gianni Versace “psychedelic” printed sport coat in hues of red, black, green, and yellow highlighted with the inclusion of midnight blue, loose, “linen trousers.”<sup>41</sup> If 1960s psychedelic motifs proved too unconventional, men had familiar patterns like plaid available. These plaids were certainly not akin to the prepster plaid favored by Bush and his monied followers. Versace’s bright yellow and black sport coat teamed with a black polo shirt and dark pants definitely was not a suitable fashion choice for the faint of heart. This casual approach to suit attire was also reflected by the emergence of mixing suit jackets with shorts in the warmer months. Baseo displayed one notable example of this trend. The firm’s navy sport coat was casually matched with a pair of similarly hued “Bermuda shorts” and orange crewneck t-shirt.<sup>42</sup> The upwardly-mobile man eschewed tradition and formality by outfitting his frame in these ensembles. The comfort, flexibility, and ease of this clothing reflected men’s inner desire for peace, tranquility, and calm in their own lives. Men donned these casual sartorial symbols in an effort to locate a masculine

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>40</sup> *Esquire*, “Look on the Bright Side,” *Esquire* 119 (June 1993): 112-114; *GQ*, “Local Color,” *GQ* 60 (February 1990): 170; and *GQ*, “The Good Sports of Paris: French Designers Unveil Some Spiffy Sport Coats,” *GQ* 60 (October 1990): 298-305.

<sup>41</sup> *Esquire*, “In Living Color,” *Esquire* 115 (February 1991): 108-109.

<sup>42</sup> *Esquire*, “The American Man’s Wardrobe,” *Esquire* 113 (March 1990): 153.

persona that could be effortless replicated on a daily basis. The suit's shifting aesthetic exemplified masculinity's shifting boundaries and ideals.

In conjunction with images of relaxed suit ensembles, during the 1991-1992 recession men's suits displayed a more streamlined and visible male form, rather than one that had been padded and primed to head off into battle. Men were not instructed to purchase double breasted suits that exaggerated the body with excessive padding and over articulated shoulders; rather, men looked classic and confident in an array of suit options that humanized the once overly brawny male frame. *GQ* asserted in March 1991:

With wool prices high and the economy taking a dive, a businessman trying to find bang for his buck in the suit department just might end up whimpering. (Try a couple grand for a top-notch wool-flannel number.) Which is why the smart money says to invest in something that, except on the muggiest and the chilliest days, can be worn virtually year-round. The ten-month suit is made of lightweight natural fabrics- silks, worsted wools, wool crepes and wool gabardines- or state-of-the-art blends that won't let you fry in the summer or freeze in the winter.<sup>43</sup>

As such, the magazine featured suits that would also stand up to the rigors of travel, since its fashion editors were cognizant of the fact that business was a global enterprise with firms relocating out of the U.S. at higher rates in the 1980s and 1990s. And, in this economic climate, a man's fashion dollar now needed to stretch much further than before.

Suits now needed to convey confidence and composure along with comfort in these times of economic uncertainty. The male body still had to be in shape and properly developed, but, these clothes spoke to people who understood the fragility and

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<sup>43</sup> *GQ*, "The Ten Month Suit," *GQ* 61 (March 1991): 281.

fleeting nature of life, success, health, and prosperity. There was no excess of fabric, no wall of padding, no exaggerated double breasted jacket to separate man from his environment or from another individual.

*GQ* presented more of these “longer, leaner-cut suits” throughout the remainder of the Bush term, paralleling the leaner times.<sup>44</sup> The magazine explained, “This much-heralded recession has made you think twice about laying out serious bucks to satisfy your clothing craving...”<sup>45</sup> In the fashion pictorial “Back to Natural,” *GQ* affirmed, “The new shape in fall suits from American and European designers is softer than ever, with a natural, sloping shoulder.”<sup>46</sup> A Giorgio Armani single breasted, gray suit reflected this trend. An Armani paisley tie with hues ranging from purple to burgundy to brown complemented the designer’s gray and white striped dress shirt.<sup>47</sup> This ensemble was stylish, yet projected a sense of decorum and stability that was needed in this time of flux.<sup>48</sup> Lean was also reflected in Cerruti 1881’s double breasted blue suit. Instead of accentuated shoulders, the cut of the jacket emphasized a man’s waistline and girth. The suit was outfitted with a checked shirt, white pocket square, and blue patterned tie all by the same designer.<sup>49</sup> The male torso appeared longer. Men conveyed a sense of inner strength, control, and polish through clothes that showcased a fit, well-proportioned, and healthy exterior.

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<sup>44</sup> *GQ*, “Back to Natural,” *GQ* 61 (August 1991): 153.

<sup>45</sup> *GQ*, “Real Dash for Less Cash,” *GQ* 61 (April 1991): 236-237.

<sup>46</sup> *GQ*, “Back to Natural,” 153.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>48</sup> Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (New York: Random House, 1981), 206.

<sup>49</sup> *GQ*, “Back to Natural,” 155.

A Barneys New York suit advertisement expressed these sentiments, “The 1991 suit. This is a vintage year for suits. A new silhouette is here to stay: easy body, realistic shoulders, trimmer trousers. It’s innovative but classical and easy to wear.”<sup>50</sup> These sentiments continued to be expressed as the decade wore on. In the fall of 1993, *GQ* claimed, “Gone is the shoulder-padded uniform that fairly proclaimed, look at me, I’ve expensively riveted myself together for today’s business battles. Instead, the Nineties suit is a symbol of understated savvy in dress: Less-in-your face, more shaped and refined.” Additionally the magazine noted, “Almost all are narrower through the body—no more of that “the bigger the suit, the bigger the man” nonsense—with softer, sloping shoulders, narrower arm holes and a high button stance.”<sup>51</sup>

These casual suits complemented, not grossly amplified, the body underneath all those layers of wool crepe and gabardine. This was realistic, not idealistic dressing. Men were still instructed to partake of a regular exercise and fitness regimen in order to look appropriate in this new silhouette. Even though suit styles made the male form more approachable, men’s bodies still needed to be molded into well-proportioned, toned, and healthy frames by hours spent exercising indoors or on an athletic field. One popular Nike advertisement expressed this sentiment. The promotion featured a snapshot of life in a big city (presumably San Francisco due to the inclusion of cable cars, the bay, and streets forged out of hillsides) with a small male figure attempting to run amongst the traffic, landscape obstacles, and blinking lights. The text read, “He’s fat and he’s soft, And he’s wearing your clothes, And he’s gotten too old, And he was

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<sup>50</sup> *GQ*, “Advertisement for Barneys New York,” *GQ* 61 (October 1991): 14-15.

<sup>51</sup> *GQ*, “Fall 1993 Preview,” *GQ* 63 (July 1993): 66.

born on your birthday, And you're afraid if you stop running he'd catch up with you.

Just do it.”<sup>52</sup>

Fitness attire populated the pages of *Esquire* and *GQ* during this period in advertisements and fashion spreads. One L.A. Gear promotion broadcasted the benefits of fitness through publicizing their crewneck t-shirts, high top sneakers, and lycra pants. One fashion spread from *GQ* entitled “The Caddie and the Champ: Get Tough with These Six Knock Out Wear Looks,” featured well-built models posing in cap sleeve tight fitting shirts tucked neatly into body-conscious lycra shorts appropriate for running, biking, or cycling.<sup>53</sup> Lifting weights was made chic in an Asics lycra bodysuit in shades of blue, red, and black.<sup>54</sup> Small and slender frames could not wear these looks with confidence or aplomb as all parts of the male form were on full display. A man needed to possess musculature to properly fill out these types of garments otherwise his parts would appear saggy, wobbly, or even child-like. There was a plethora of attire available for every imaginable sport and activity for the upscale male.<sup>55</sup>

Along with fashion pictorials and adverts, these magazines regularly included information on basketball, running, weightlifting, body conditioning, proper athletic training, and how to both prevent and then recover from injuries. Advice such as this would not be incorporated on a regular basis unless a built in audience and a cultural need existed. According to *GQ* writer Lamar Graham, 17 million men admitted to

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<sup>52</sup> *Esquire*, “Nike Advertisement,” *Esquire* 113 (April 1990): 44-45.

<sup>53</sup> *GQ*, “The Caddie and the Champ: Get Tough with These Six Knock Out Wear Looks,” *GQ* 59 (April 1989): 301-303.

<sup>54</sup> *GQ*, “Advertisement for Asics,” *GQ* 59 (May 1989): 66.

<sup>55</sup> *GQ*, “Good Sport,” *GQ* 60 (May 1990): 180.

dieting in 1992 out of a total pool of 48 million. Americans spent nearly \$7.1 billion on health clubs with another 2.3 billion allocated towards buying healthier and lower calorie foods.<sup>56</sup> The upscale American male needed and wanted to project a solid, fit, and strong exterior while working in the office or working out on the court. This idea had not changed since the previous decade. What did change was the second skin men put on each day. The excessively exaggerated shoulders and brawn visually created through power suits placed on top of a man's gym-defined body was no longer the ideal fashion aesthetic. Men needed easy modes of dress for complicated times.

The influence of exercise crept into professional dress as well. Crewneck t-shirts were commonly paired with traditional suits and broken up suiting combinations since these styles reflected the casual and relaxed fashion atmosphere of the time. However, other sartorial items began emerging as proper accessories for suit ensembles. For example, *GQ* reported in the early 1990s about the growing trend of pairing hooded sweatshirts with sport jackets and suits to infuse a more casual, but still tasteful sensibility into suiting attire. Designers like Giorgio Armani, Jean-Paul Gaultier, and Ronaldus Shamask all sent versions of this aesthetic down their runways in the early 1990s.<sup>57</sup> Even the once baggy jogging suit was transformed into acceptable professional wear for the upscale male. *GQ* editors reported in 1990, "Classic jockwear gets a workout this spring as designers weigh in with new twists on the hooded sweatshirt and the old gym favorite pull-on pants...An obvious advantage is the comfort this loose look affords, yet is it too casual for anywhere but the beach? Richard James may have solved

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<sup>56</sup> Lamar Graham, "Fat City: Hard Data on the Soft Stuff," *GQ* 63 (June 1993): 219.

<sup>57</sup> *GQ*, "Getting Fleeced," *GQ* 60 (May 1990): 176.

this drawback of drawstring fashion with a cashmere version for fall that when paired with a matching sportcoat, works just as well on the town.”<sup>58</sup> This inclusion of sporting attire only served to further loosen up and relax the traditional image, cut, and personality of the suit.

Upscale black men also gravitated towards the casual aesthetic in suiting attire just as their white counterparts did. Broken up suiting combinations became a popular fashion choice for many black males during the Bush presidency. Magazines such as *Ebony* and *Ebony Man* guided their readers through this sartorial shift as they displayed mix and match suit combinations that departed from those qualities of rigid formality and conformity propagated in 1980s power dressing. One *Ebony* fashion spread featured a model wearing a tropical Hawaiian inspired silk shirt neatly tucked into a pair of loose, draped black trousers accented with a green belt. The unconventional jacket resembled a blazer, that bastion of preppy chic, but was done in a “banana” colored hue that would certainly garner much attention at work or play. Additionally, the jacket featured the pocket square opening on the right side of the chest which the magazine admitted was an “unusual position.”<sup>59</sup> Cecilia Metheny’s pinkish hued sport coat topped off by a pair of purple, pleated dress trousers would supply a shock of color for any man’s wardrobe. This suit style could be worn with a yellow vest emblazoned with various geometric shapes in colors of red, purple, and green. All of this color was best shown off with a neutral, cream colored dress shirt.<sup>60</sup> For men not as sartorially daring, sport jackets in

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<sup>58</sup> *GQ*, “The New Draw of Pull-on Pants,” *GQ* 60 (May 1990): 175.

<sup>59</sup> Eunice W. Johnson, “Spring Fashions for the Global Man: Ebony Fashion Fair,” *Ebony* 46 (March 1991): 92-93.

<sup>60</sup> *Ebony Man*, “The American Way,” *Ebony Man* 5 (April 1990): 30.

time-honored patterns as houndstooth offered a middle ground between traditional and trendy.<sup>61</sup> The look of high status surfaced in an Ermenegildo Zegna creation that featured a silk, vibrant blue sport coat, red and white stripe dress shirt, and white, linen-looking pants.<sup>62</sup> These casual looks were not haphazardly put together. A man wearing these items identified himself to the world as a fashionable, stylish consumer. He projected status, worth, and achievement. Broken up suits provided the upwardly-mobile black male with an opportunity to experiment with unique color combinations to highlight self-expression and individuality, while still adhering to fashionable rules of cut and fit.

Broken up suiting combinations were just one example reflective of the growing popularity amongst upscale black men for adopting a more relaxed approach to masculine dressing. In *EM*'s March 1990 issue, the magazine notified its readers that "a relaxed turn" had occurred in men's suits.<sup>63</sup> This relaxed turn included suits with softer and more natural shoulders just like the versions found in *GQ*. According to *EM* the best route for the well-dressed professional to travel was to "make an impression in tailored clothing that takes on a less rigid look."<sup>64</sup> A two-piece, gray pinstripe suit by Henry Grethel echoed this dictum. A white and gray striped dress shirt, flower-patterned red tie, and white pocket square with black polka dots completed the relaxed suit style. Men who opted for a bit more color in their pinstripes had Friedberg of

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<sup>61</sup> Eunice W. Johnson, "Fashion with Passion Thrills 1500 Patrons at Milwaukee Showing," *Jet* 80 (October 7, 1991): 14-15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ebony Man*, "Cleancut: The Freshness of the Uncommon Sport Coat," *Ebony Man* 12 (April 1997): 28.

<sup>63</sup> *Ebony Man*, "Dress for Success: The EM Report – March 1990," *Ebony Man* 5 (March 1990): 20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ebony Man*, "Power Play," *Ebony Man* 5 (March 1990): 24.



Boston's navy two-piece suit with contrasting red pinstripes. A white dress shirt provided a subdued palette for the accompanying tie that featured yellow, red, and brown swirl-like patterns. Bold color resonated in the Imperial Handkerchiefs pocket square in shades of rust, brown, and gold.<sup>65</sup> Nino Cerruti's blue double breasted suit veered away from the double breasted power dressing of the 1980s with its draped and streamlined fit. A paisley gray and orange tie, gold pocket square, and striped cotton shirt finished off the look of a well-groomed and attired successful black male. Relaxed suits became even more casual as evidenced by the growing number of ensembles lacking the inclusion of a tie such as one creation by Jeffrey Banks that consisted of a linen, cream colored, two-piece suit worn with a mock turtleneck under a yellow cardigan featuring a plethora of circles in colors of blue, tan, and white.<sup>66</sup>

Companies and firms for commodities unrelated to fashion and clothing publicized the lure and cultural worth of casual suiting attire. In a commonly published Kool cigarette advertisement in *Ebony*, a black male wore a forest green, loose fitting, sport jacket paired with mustard yellow roomy-looking dress trousers.<sup>67</sup> The lack of a tie on the silk, open-collared shirt made this outfit relaxed. Additionally, ads for products like Seagram's gin displayed America's fascination with sporty and casual masculine dress. In one Seagram's gin promotion, a black man sat in a wicker chair outdoors. Ensnared in a cream, two-piece, draped, matching suit with a crewneck cream shirt and cream baseball cap serving as accessories, this model radiated ease and

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 25-27.

<sup>66</sup> *Ebony Man*, "The American Way," 26.

<sup>67</sup> *Ebony*, "Advertisement for Kool," *Ebony* 48 (January 1993): 93.

informality. The suit appeared rumpled to give the observer the idea that it was constructed from linen or a similar fabric associated with summer, sport, and leisure. The tagline read, “A personal statement.”<sup>68</sup>

Casual suiting attire certainly made a statement. Relaxed suits avoided exaggerated shoulders and excessive amounts of fabric. Instead, their power and authority came from a male’s confidence in displaying his gym developed and toned frame which was properly decorated with designer fashions. Casual suits looked best on fit, trim, and streamlined bodies. Bulk did not translate into professional or personal success. *EM* advised, “While most executives are busy watching their bottom line, their waistlines are expanding into growth areas. Sooner or later an expansive waistline will have an impact on the bottom line.”<sup>69</sup> The upscale black male may have been more colorful and playful with his suits, but just like his white counterpart, his bodily ideal was a healthy, toned, and well-maintained exterior. An orderly body assisted a man in negotiating the challenging conditions of the day.

An orderly, well-proportioned, and pleasing black male frame was deemed imperative to achieving personal and professional success. Casual dress did not imply acceptance of a slovenly or neglected black male form. *Ebony* proclaimed, “The man of the ‘90s should be just as concerned about his appearance as his female counterpart.”<sup>70</sup> The *Ebony* male received advice on skin care, manicures, and other hygiene practices since looking good and becoming successful were culturally linked. Although

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<sup>68</sup> *Ebony*, “Advertisement for Seagram’s Gin,” *Ebony* 50 (June 1995): 21.

<sup>69</sup> *Ebony Man*, “Executive Workout,” *Ebony Man* 5 (March 1990): 66.

<sup>70</sup> *Ebony*, “Skincare Tips for the Black Man,” *Ebony* 46 (December 1990): 100.

traditionally partaking in discussions about facials, soaps, and lotions fell within the realm of the feminine, *Ebony's* editors assured the upscale black male that, "Practicing good hygiene and adopting a sensible skin-care regimen enhances a man's appeal rather than diminish his masculinity."<sup>71</sup> In addition to skin care, the prosperous black man also needed to engage in regular exercise and fitness.

*EM* explained, "More often than not, impressions are made before any word is exchanged. In these instances, your physical attributes do the silent introduction. Your body assets and condition do not necessarily use words in their communication. What is clear, however, is that a strong, healthy body gets across a strong point."<sup>72</sup> Men were encouraged to run, cycle, lift weights, shoot hoops, and play tennis among other activities at least three times a week for a minimum duration of one hour each session.<sup>73</sup> What better way to become inspired to partake of these types of routines than in gear that made a man psychically feel and look good? *Ebony* and *EM* presented an array of exercise garments for cyclists and joggers designed to highlight the upwardly-mobile black man's best assets including tight lycra tanks, short sleeve shirts, and pants awash in colors like black, red, blue, and purple from companies like Reebok and Nike. Men could hit the court or spike a volleyball in options including draped sweatpants, loose tanks, and colorful high tops in shades of yellow, purple, blue, red, and green by Nike, Adidas, LA Gear, and Reebok.<sup>74</sup> Even though these selections projected a relaxed fit, a

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<sup>71</sup> *Ebony*, "Skin Care for Today's Black Man," *Ebony* 50 (April 1995): 70.

<sup>72</sup> *Ebony Man*, "Impressions EM Report – July 1991," *Ebony Man* 5 (July 1990): 20.

<sup>73</sup> *Ebony*, "Winter Fitness Tips," *Ebony* 45 (February 1990): 174.

<sup>74</sup> *Ebony*, "Fitness with Style," *Ebony* 47 (August 1992): 110-111; and *Ebony Man*, "Body Works," *Ebony Man* 5 (July 1990): 42-49.

man's body was still firmly on view due to these bold color combinations. Men with defined musculature could only truly wear these sartorial articles since those with slim, slender, or petite forms would look small and miniature as the material swallowed up their slightly frames.

Suit pictorials in *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Ebony Man* mirrored the casual and relaxed aesthetic found in *GQ* and *Esquire*. As these magazines spoke to one another based on similar class and aspirational levels, their images of masculinity and masculine dress had remarkable cohesiveness and consistency. In addition, *GQ* had made strides since the mid 1970s to incorporate more black models, fashions, and celebrities into the magazine in an effort to expand its audience beyond white American males. During the 1980s, *GQ* even instituted a "Distinctively Black Column" to speak to the needs of their black male readers. However, by the 1990s, black male celebrities including Will Smith, Eddie Murphy, Tiger Woods, and Michael Jordan graced the covers of monthly editions with greater frequency, visibly marking the disintegration of racial boundaries within the magazine's format and content. It is no surprise then with historically viewed white mainstream periodicals such as *GQ* and *Esquire* opening their pages and focus to a black readership that white and black men's styles would have such continuity and similarity.

Upwardly-mobile black men may have been dressing much in the same manner as their white peers, but there was another objective behind embracing the casual and relaxed suiting aesthetic. Suits permitted black men to reproduce a masculine identity of their own choosing. Black men who read *GQ* or donned clothing by traditionally deemed "white" designers were not neglectful of the larger picture of racism in the country; they were combating it in a different manner. Upscale black males exhibited

their status, their high degree of living, and their professional success through designer fashions and quality suiting styles. Through the use of bold colors in suit jackets, sport coats, and their corresponding accessories, black men reasserted their claim to the full social, cultural, political, and economic benefits of American citizenship. Clothing leveled the playing field. It was part of the process of democratization in America as men purchased new identities and furnished new images of themselves. The casual male suit of the 1990s imparted a sense of value, worth, and esteem to the black male and his body.<sup>75</sup>

The trend towards relaxed or informal dressing continued throughout the remainder of the decade. Noted menswear designer Alan Flusser (the man responsible for clothing Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street*) was asked by *GQ* in March 1993, “Has American style become too casual, in your opinion?” Flusser responded, “Definitely. Once people started wearing sweat suits on airplanes, a certain aesthetic was lost. There has been a homogenization of tastes. As a designer, the trick is to give both comfort *and* appropriateness in tailored clothing to men who have become accustomed to wearing sweatpants and t-shirts on the weekend. The consumer has spoken clearly: He wants comfortable clothing that flatters him but is not character-  
ish.”<sup>76</sup> Industry figures comparing items considered as casual wear versus those as suitwear confirmed this transition. *GQ* reported that in 1992, \$1,570,054,000 was spent by the American male on suits and nearly \$40,604,000 on ties. In contrast,

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<sup>75</sup> This argument was also made in previous chapters of this dissertation, specifically in chapters 2, 3, and 4 that also dealt with suits and masculinity in the 1970s and 1980s. Please see those chapters for more information.

<sup>76</sup> *GQ*, “Lunch with...Alan Flusser,” *GQ* 63 (March 1993): 187.

\$2,253,167,000 was spent by men on jeans in the same year.<sup>77</sup> Words like “loose,” “slouchy,” and “simple,” frequently appeared especially during the early to mid 1990s.<sup>78</sup> Much of the blame or credit for this stylistic shift rested on the rise of Silicon Valley and the computer industry.<sup>79</sup>

During the 1990s, computers became integral to American lives, households, and businesses. In “Casual Friday without Tears,” *GQ* addressed the new fashion climate infiltrating American culture in its July 1995 issue. *GQ* commented, “As computers became a bigger part of our lives, so did the people who built them. And as more and more civilians encountered men so dressed, a seed was planted: ‘If that guy can do business in khakis and a polo...’”<sup>80</sup> Many American businessmen questioned the validity and usefulness of donning a suit and tie when tech wizards and computer specialists were making large salaries, but doing so attired in items such as short sleeve shirts, turtlenecks, polos, jeans, khakis, and sneakers. This relaxed approach to masculine professional dress adopted by the tech industry had not negatively affected profits or employee productivity. As a result, a variety of companies not necessarily associated with the worlds of computers and Silicon Valley instituted casual dressing by 1995 in the workplace including Cellular One, General Motors, General Electric, Motorola, American Express, American Airlines, and Pepsi Co.<sup>81</sup> Designers such as

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<sup>77</sup> *GQ*, “Seventh Avenue: Facts on Style,” *GQ* 63 (June 1993): 132.

<sup>78</sup> *GQ*, “Fall 1993 Preview,” 66.

<sup>79</sup> Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2011), 117.

<sup>80</sup> *GQ*, “Casual Fridays without Tears,” *GQ* 65 (July 1995): 75.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

Ralph Lauren, Nautica, Tommy Hilfiger, and even Brooks Brothers all produced attire to aid the professional male in negotiating this cultural change. Brands like Dockers made one billion dollars in profits due in part to the popularity of their khakis which flourished in this new corporate climate.<sup>82</sup>

Designers recognized that the shift towards relaxed dressing was growing more entrenched in American society, so they accordingly updated suit styles, cuts, and fabric choices to keep the suit relevant and integral to the professional man's life. Giorgio Armani said of his fall 1995 suit collection, in *GQ*, "A well-tailored suit isn't necessarily uncomfortable or rigid... The jacket has been entirely designed and constructed with comfort in mind."<sup>83</sup> Armani's tan, double breasted, pinstripe suit embodied these words with its more realistic looking shoulders, easy movement, and softer look.<sup>84</sup> In discussing her approach to suit styles for fall 1995, Donna Karan told the magazine, "Tradition is apparent in the suit's handmade fit... But it's modern in fabric—its natural-twist wool yarn gives it a stretch, so it feels like a sweater, with so much comfort. And it's modern because it's flexible. Its style is defined by how you wear it: with a t-shirt and jeans, with a cashmere sweater, as a black tie outfit..."<sup>85</sup> Karan's dark, navy double breasted suit corroborated her comments to the magazine. The male form appeared more at ease with itself. Although these suits evoked elements of the power dressing of the 1980s, *GQ* stressed, "The fall 1995 suit, it turns out, has more in common with 1935

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>83</sup> *GQ*, "The Power Suit Redux," *GQ* 65 (July 1995): 109.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 116.

than 1985. Sure, it may have bold shoulders reminiscent of a double breasted hostile-takeover uniform, but it's more flattering by far than those sandwich-board garments" due to its "human-scale shoulder."<sup>86</sup>

This casual suiting aesthetic represented in many ways a rejection of the more traditional model of masculinity projected in the Reagan era. Men may have rejoiced in Reagan's revitalization of America's standing at home and abroad, but these same males faltered in their attempts to replicate Reagan's masculine attributes in their lives on a daily basis. Reagan's masculine image denoted those prized masculine qualities of confidence, strength, authority, composure, and command. His bravado and demeanor were celebrated even as they were deemed problematic in application.

Bush, a war veteran, stable provider, and national leader, would not fully live up to the expectations and ideals set forth from the more traditional-oriented masculinity postulated by Reagan and the 80s era. The façade of the tough, macho, powerful, all-commanding male projected during the Reagan years had a difficult time sustaining itself in 1990s America. Bush's masculine persona appeared a bit conflicted since on the one hand, he emerged as a strong, authoritative, decisive military leader procuring victories against the nation's enemies in Panama and Iraq. Yet, at the same time, Bush was pictured as a family man, a believer in time honored simple values, a leader who envisioned a "kindler, gentler," America heading into the new millennium.<sup>87</sup> Simultaneously soft and hard, Bush's masculinity proved to be a difficult and confusing model for American men to emulate.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>87</sup> Troy, *Morning in America*, 305.



Some men started to seek solace and comfort in men's groups and movements, such as the mythopoetic wing of the men's movement. Sociologist Michael Kimmel explained, "All across the country in the first few years of the 1990s, men were in full scale retreat, heading off to the woods to rediscover their wild, hairy, deep manhood."<sup>88</sup> While masculinity was not technically in crisis, many American males perceived a significant shift in their societal power similar to one identified by men at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century. At that time, men's fears stemmed from a variety of factors such as industrialization, urbanization, rising immigration, claims of race suicide, a growing women's movement, and the closing of the mythical frontier among other items. Men were encouraged to remove themselves from these feminizing and emasculating features of American life in order to once again become strong, powerful, potent, stoic men like the symbol of this age, Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>89</sup> The current movement wanted men to focus on their own growth and personal development

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 208 and 211.

<sup>89</sup> The literature on this "crisis of masculinity" is vast. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but provides a starting look at this event and issues. For more information, please see Kimmel, *Manhood in America Second Edition*; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and the Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Peter G. Filene, *Him/ Her/ Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988); John S. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978); Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformation in Masculinity from Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); and Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Construction of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

after “twenty years of feminism” which made them “more receptive to women’s needs and emotions that their own...”<sup>90</sup>

Men connected to the mythopoetic movement removed themselves from emasculating family, urban, and professional environments to regain their strength, confidence, and power among a like-minded community of males as this was the only way to induce personal growth and find a solution to what it meant to be a man in the 1990s. There were no easy solutions or models supplied. Mythopoetic members wanted men and society to realize that men suffered from gender indoctrination just as women did and now was their time to reflect, analyze, and work towards new gender ideals, behaviors, and actions. Men attempted to find a middle ground between hard and soft masculinities, fluctuating between these two gender poles for authenticity and a means to combat the economic, cultural, and social problems present in America. In the end, many of these men longed to simply “take pride in their masculinity” without incurring condemnation and derision.<sup>91</sup>

While some men sought solace in the woods, others sought comfort and security through consumption. All of these endeavors were focused inwardly at the core of the individual and his psyche. Howling around the campfire and putting on a stylish suit achieved the same ends. However, getting dressed is a daily process, a daily ritual that can be replicated and reproduced continuously. Upscale male professionals utilized the suit to construct an acceptable masculine persona of their own design.

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<sup>90</sup> Michael Stanton, “Inward, Ho!” *Esquire* 116 (October 1991): 113.

<sup>91</sup> Christopher Harding, ed., *Wingspan: Inside the Men’s Movement* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), xi.

American men had embraced the laid-back and relaxed approach towards suitwear, but by the end of the decade, another style garnered considerable visibility and attention. The gangster look or the return to more glamorous male dressing was back in vogue once again. While this style evoked traditional suits of yore, the overall look brought an increased sense of sophistication and flair to suiting attire. While many men welcomed the shift towards more casual and informal garb in the workplace, others decried that it signified the “slackification of America.”<sup>92</sup> *GQ* writer Terence Monmany in his article “The Suit Fits So Wear It” from the August 1995 issue compared casual Fridays to “institutionalized slobbery.”<sup>93</sup>

Designers like Ralph Lauren picked up on this cultural undercurrent, infusing their latest menswear collections with a bit more allure, formality, and masculine strength. Drawing upon the style of men such as the Duke of Windsor, Lauren’s Purple Label channeled old-school masculine glamour and tailoring.<sup>94</sup> Lauren was quoted in *GQ* as stating, “Everyone is into slouch and big fit and no shoulders. I’m not doing this to go against the wind. I’m just doing it because I think this is what looks cool.” He went on to explain, “I feel like young guys want to get dressed again. People are active and concerned about their bodies. They want to show them off, and they want to look sexy.”<sup>95</sup> A dark navy, chalk-stripe, double breasted suit featuring wide lapels and cuffed trousers radiated extravagance and style when combined with a white dress shirt,

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<sup>92</sup> Terence Monmany, “The Suit Fits So Wear It,” *GQ* 65 (August 1995): 47.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>94</sup> *GQ*, “He’s the top!...,” *GQ* 65 (September 1995): 262-263.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

navy and white polka dot tie, and white pocket square. The white shirt displayed French cuffs which afforded men another opportunity to communicate their class and taste level with an exquisite pair of cuff links. Even though the suit jacket highlighted the model's shoulders, it did not resemble the power dressing, armor-like designs of the 1980s. This double breasted suit had more in common with suit styles of the 1920s and 1930s than those of the Reagan era. For men hoping to shy away from any association with 80s power dressing, Lauren's line contained many single breasted suits that were equally as elegant and polished as their double breasted counterparts. For example, Lauren's two-piece suit in a black, white, and gray glen-plaid pattern transmitted sophistication and refinement when paired with a stark white dress shirt and dark tie.<sup>96</sup> None of these suits made a man appear oversized or enlarged; his natural assets, confidence, and poise were on display.

Gangster-inspired and glamorous suit offerings appealed to upscale American men. *GQ* and *Esquire* regularly publicized this trend in their monthly editions by the middle of the 1990s. The January 1995 edition of *GQ* exclaimed that it was "The Year of the Suit." The example provided in the "Gangster Suit" section was a dark, chalk-striped double breasted suit by Gianfranco Ferre accented with a blue and pink stripe dress shirt and a gold striped tie.<sup>97</sup> *Esquire* likewise glowingly praised the merits of the gangster-inspired suit inserting numerous examples from designers such as Dolce and Gabbana into fashion pictorials.<sup>98</sup> The magazine produced a whole fashion spread

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 262-264.

<sup>97</sup> *GQ*, "The Year of the Suit," *GQ* 65 (January 1995): 73.

<sup>98</sup> Woody Huchswender, "Glamour Guys," *Esquire* 123 (April 1995): 130.

dedicated to gangster style entitled “Spring Suits: Sicilian Style.” Single and double breasted offerings from Dolce and Gabbana and Tommy Hilfiger represented what the editors labeled as a “fifties suit with a hint of Mediterranean menace and glamour.”<sup>99</sup> Dolce and Gabbana’s suiting attire was classified as embodying the “Sicilian mobster look” with its pronounced pinstripe suits in dark colors accessorized with fedoras, stark white dress shirts, and chic pocket squares. Suits such as these were reminiscent of the gangster age of the 1920s and 1930s, a time noted for being the pinnacle of masculine style and flair. A Hermes dark gray, pinstripe, double breasted suit also exemplified glamorous dressing even without the inclusion of a tie. Men could feel luxurious pairing this suit with a cashmere pink turtleneck underneath the suit jacket, which kept this suit style modern, but definitely not relaxed or laid-back, especially with a \$2,915 price tag.<sup>100</sup> While certainly not a traditional gangster suit, Gucci’s two-piece velvet suit in burgundy screamed extravagance and conspicuous consumption, evocative of gangster type dressing found in men’s magazines and worn by upscale men at this time. Paired with a fuchsia dress shirt and tie, the suit showed off the model’s trim physique.<sup>101</sup> This suit paraded wealth and sophistication since the unusual color and nature of the fabric meant that those clothed in this style had means, income, and taste, whether they were a gangster or a matinee idol. None of these suiting options reflected a return to power dressing though as suit jackets nipped in at the waist and did not overly exaggerate the male form. Yet, all of these fashions exuded status, money, and conspicuous

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<sup>99</sup> *Esquire*, “Spring Suits: Sicilian Style,” *Esquire* 123 (April 1995): 132-133.

<sup>100</sup> *GQ*, “The Essential Suit,” *GQ* 67 (July 1997): 100-101.

<sup>101</sup> *GQ*, “Gucci Advertisement,” *GQ* 67 (March 1997): 199.

consumption—all hallmarks of gangster living.<sup>102</sup> More importantly, both the suit and the male body garnered attention.



Figure 13. Glamorous Suiting Attire.<sup>103</sup>

Suits like these dramatically displayed the male form. Just because jackets and trousers were not as draped or oversized as earlier in the decade, did not mean that men had to abandon their workout routines and embrace skinny bodies. The male form looked more streamlined, but certainly not weak and unhealthy. Magazines like *GQ* underscored the notion that gangster and glamorous suiting styles still necessitated

<sup>102</sup> *Esquire*, "Spring Suits: Sicilian Style," 132-133.

<sup>103</sup> *GQ*, "The Essential Suit," 100-101.

regular hours spent exercising in the gym. Many of the suits were cut closer to the human form, showing off a man's curves, shapely appendages, and best assets. Skinnier cuts necessitated proper maintenance of the male body as the visual would otherwise appear saggy, unattractive, or even distorted. Clothing was more tailored so the body had to be tailored to meet the requirements of this fashion style and sensibility. Even the models found within the pages of *GQ* and *Esquire* in the later years of the 1990s lost the gargantuan girth and hyper-masculine edge they once possessed. The male form was less bulky and massive just as the garments that graced its contours and skin.

*GQ* promoted exercises more in keeping with this new body ideal. Writer Robert Moritz remarked, "It was not long ago that tackling a buddy—or at least risking cardiac arrest—was considered a minimal requirement for a physical activity to be even considered a sport. But times have of course changed, and it is a new, kinder, gentler set of priorities that has taken over our nation's athletic departments. Gone are the days of the "no pain, no gain" workout. In its stead, we have low impact aerobics, languorous stretching sessions, and, now, *power walking*."<sup>104</sup> Articles on spinning, yoga, and marathon training populated monthly editions alongside advice on specific exercises like squats which were beneficial to achieving a strong and shapely exterior that looked best in narrower cut trousers and pants.

If working out failed to mold and shape one's form enough to hide "love handles" and loose skin, then men could purchase aides like "Double Agent Boxers." The company Bodyslimmer behind this invention also created the Double Agent Brief, Double Agent Thighliner, Ab Fab Cincher Tank, and Butt Booster. The Double Agent

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<sup>104</sup> Robert Moritz, "Walking the Walk," *GQ* 65 (November 1995): 119.

Boxers were, according to writer Scott Omeliank, “the control-top type.” This item featured “nylon-lycra panels” that promised to “tuck my tummy, slim my seat, and trim my thighs.” The Super Shaper even contained butt pads inside of the garment to give slender men a buttock that would better accent slim trousers.<sup>105</sup> In order to be a gangster and exude a bit of glamour, men had to make “sure that their pecs don’t resemble pudding and that their abs *do* resemble rock.”<sup>106</sup>

Gangster-inspired suits represented the slimmer aesthetic sweeping through men’s fashion. Writer Woody Huchswender noted, “After years of floppy suits, men’s fashion is returning to a more structured look.”<sup>107</sup> Designers ranging from Calvin Klein to Ralph Lauren and Richard Tyler all promoted this new visual ideal in one way or another. Dolce and Gabbana, Tom Ford, and Prada all produced suiting attire with an emphasis on a slimmer male silhouette. Men with excess pounds of flesh could not look their best in slim suits paired with tight lycra “Ban-lon-type sport shirts” and body hugging sweaters worn under slim suit jackets.<sup>108</sup> This new fashion sensibility implied “very strict tailoring.” Accordingly, “Jackets are slim, close to the body...Trousers are narrow, low slung, and plain in front—a clear reaction to the full-cut, pleated pants of the last decade.” Not only did trousers appear narrower, but most designers included stretch in their wool for these items which resulted in a “tight fit.”<sup>109</sup> Lycra and stretch

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<sup>105</sup> Scott Omeliank, “Packing It In,” *GQ* 67 (April 1997): 176.

<sup>106</sup> *GQ*, “Men in Tights,” *GQ* 67 (June 1997): 225.

<sup>107</sup> Woody Huchswender, “On Fashion: Men’s Wear Shapes Up,” *Esquire* 123 (May 1995): 123.

<sup>108</sup> Woody Huchswender, “Turn-of-the-century-chic,” *Esquire* 124 (October 1995): 152-153.

<sup>109</sup> *Esquire*, “Slim Jims,” *Esquire* 124 (October 1995): 162.



were also incorporated into many of the jackets since as *Esquire* explained, “Slim suits, often in iridescent, shark shiny fabrics, usually single-breasted and double-vented with a bit of lycra in the ribcage to make motion feasible.”<sup>110</sup>

Skinny suits were not simplistic and humdrum. Rather, these types of ensembles were sleek and chic. Costume Homme’s “double-windowpane,” two-piece, black and white slim fitting suit radiated elegance with a retro edge when paired with a white spread collar shirt and dark tie.<sup>111</sup> Like many other slim suits of this period, this suit was reminiscent of mod style from 1950s and 1960s. Even *Esquire* understood that the slim suits shown in their magazine were evocative of mod which they said was a “young look, surely,” built around garments that were “tight and sexy.”<sup>112</sup> Mod style constituted “Savile Row tailoring” mixed with “an Italian edge.” Men who donned mod clothing were conscious of their appearance and “obsessively concerned with issues of personal style.”<sup>113</sup> This assessment certainly seemed appropriate to apply to the upwardly-mobile late 1990s American male.

The emergence of slim and glamorous suiting reflected the upscale American male’s complicated search for his own manhood at this time as well. While shark skin slim suits were certainly more stylish and trendy than the oversized and relaxed suiting styles publicized during the early years of the 1990s, they too visibly symbolized masculine insecurities. Men donning gangster-inspired or glamorous suiting attire cared

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<sup>110</sup> Huchswender, “Turn-of-the-century-chic,” 153.

<sup>111</sup> *Esquire*, “Slim Jims,” 162.

<sup>112</sup> Woody Huchswender, “Straight and Narrow,” *Esquire* 124 (November 1995): 135.

<sup>113</sup> Steele, *Fifty Years of Fashion*, 57-58.

about their looks, wanted to show off their status, and were ready to move away from the social, political, and economic gloom that hung over the Bush years. But just because men seemed to be more economically confident and fashionably inclined does not mean that their own masculine problems and issues were solved.

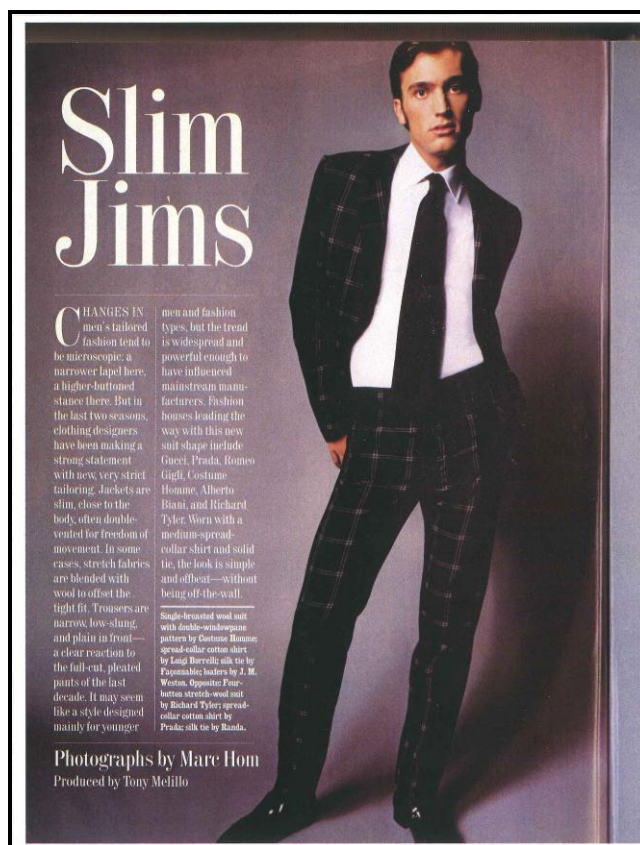


Figure 14. Slimmer Suit Aesthetic.<sup>114</sup>

The American male did not have more answers to the basic questions that plagued the construction of his masculine persona. Even though the economy may have been doing better, societal conditions seemed to improve, and life appeared a bit brighter

<sup>114</sup> *Esquire*, "Slim Jims," 162.

for many men, this progress did not assuage one's internal doubts about what constituted proper manhood at the turn of the century. The hard masculinity of Reagan was just as problematic as the soft masculinity embodied by Jimmy Carter in the 1970s. Bush's public mix of both masculine extremes symbolized American men's doubts over masculinity and masculine prowess. The shift towards glamorous suits and their slimmer silhouettes visually epitomized men's struggles over fluctuating between the masculine and feminine found deep within themselves. Men no longer looked like super human creatures as their frames seemed more human, approachable, and vulnerable. Slim suits even made the male frame appear younger and smaller. These types of attire were not a retreat or longing for childhood as was the case with some ensembles donned by men of the 1970s. Men's bodies still had to be molded and sculpted through diet and exercise if they wanted to look good in tighter fitting suits and corresponding gear.

Additionally many of the models pictured in magazines like *Esquire* and *GQ* looked prettier and less physically overpowering. Models were still fit and displayed ample muscle tone, but with the inclusion of longer hair, bronzer, and more decorative accessories, the feminine aspects of a man's nature were illustrated and revealed. Even the construction of these stylish suits followed the curves of a man's form much in the same way that the eye historically was brought to a woman's body. Men were not becoming feminine, but they were flirting with more androgyny in their wardrobes and presentation of their outward self.<sup>115</sup>

Gender boundaries blurred in these magazines. Many of the designers publicized in magazines like *Esquire*, *GQ*, and even *Ebony Man* included those who were openly

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<sup>115</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire, and Anxiety*, 123-124.

gay, had a gay following, or were discussed in regards to gay fashion in *The Advocate* including Tom Ford, Gene Meyer, and John Bartlett. The boundaries between gay and straight, the masculine and feminine were receding. Suits were once identified as a truly manly and masculine emblem and now, masculinity was in flux alongside gender boundaries being contested and hazy. These stylish, retro-inspired suits signified that the upwardly-mobile male was still negotiating a comfortable, livable, and suitable masculine identity and persona that could withstand the needs and demands of 1990s America.

Magazines specifically catering to the black male consumer illustrated this return to more stylish and debonair dressing. For many African Americans, the mid to late 1990s was a time of exuberance as they personally identified with Bush's successor, Bill Clinton. Noted poet Toni Morrison, in a now infamous interview with *The New Yorker*, labeled Clinton as a "black president." Morrison stated, "Years ago, in the middle of the Whitewater investigation, one heard the first murmurs: white skin notwithstanding, this is our first black President. Blacker than any actual black person who could ever be elected in our children's lifetime. After all, Clinton displays almost every trope of blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone-playing, McDonald's-and-junk-food-loving boy from Arkansas."<sup>116</sup> Many African Americans perceived a connection to Clinton as he endeavored to make civil rights a priority in his administration. According to writer DeWayne Wickham, this made the African American community feel that they "became players in Washington politics. We

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<sup>116</sup> Toni Morrison, "Clinton as the first black president," *The New Yorker* (October 1998); available from <http://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/clinton/morrison.html>, Internet, accessed 17 February 2012.

weren't in the stands, we were on the playing field."<sup>117</sup> With a supportive and understanding president now in the White House, many African Americans had reason to believe that a time of great fortunes, achievements, and triumphs was on its way.

Fashion visually symbolized the upscale African American's satisfaction with the current state of the country's affairs. Elegant and glamorous dressing projected value, worth, and pride—all qualities experienced by many African American males at this time. *Ebony* reminded its readership, "What motivates a Brother to dress well? There are many correct answers, but perhaps the truest is simply a Black man's desire to use his clothes to make a statement about who he is and what he is all about, to have a Sister or Brother say to him that he looks good, that he's 'clean.'" The editors continued, "Brothers are meticulous about the details of dressing—the shine on the shoes, the tuck of the handkerchief, the crease in the pants. Because as any student of fashion knows, it's not what a man wears, but *how* he wears it."<sup>118</sup>

Upwardly-mobile black men understood that possessing a strong, healthy, and physically fit body was paramount to successfully donning glamorous and stylish suit offerings. Both *Ebony* and *Ebony Man* continued to inundate their readerships with information on sporting trends, health concerns, and skin care regimens. Men were encouraged to undertake exercise routines that would impart a shapely and robust male form. Just as was the case with *GQ* and *Esquire*, *Ebony* and *Ebony Man* promoted fitness activities like yoga that did not necessitate overtly macho postures, behaviors,

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<sup>117</sup> Suzy Hansen, "Why blacks love Bill Clinton," *Salon* (February 20, 2002); available from [http://www.salon.com/2002/02/21/clinton\\_88](http://www.salon.com/2002/02/21/clinton_88), Internet, accessed 17 February 2012.

<sup>118</sup> *Ebony*, "What Brothers Are Really Wearing," *Ebony* 54 (September 1999): 93.

and aggression.<sup>119</sup> Sport endeavors such as yoga developed a man's arms and chest region without the excess bulk associated with weight lifting and bodybuilding. The ideal male form was fit, robust, and defined—not exceedingly brawny and hyper-masculine.

Form followed fashion. The slimmer cut to fashions necessitated the black body to project musculature and strength, without exaggerated size and stature. For example, one fashion spread for *Ebony Man* entitled “Bright Ideas Hot Color for Cool Summer” presented faceless models posing in body-conscious athletic-inspired gear. One model flexed his defined bicep muscles in a Paul Smith yellow, ribbed mesh polo shirt that featured cut out panels to showcase his appealing abdominal section. Bright, matching, yellow slim pants completed this ode to the strapping male form.<sup>120</sup> Another headless model donned a color-blocked crewneck sweater in light blue, olive, orange, and navy stripes. This ensemble by Patrick Cox visibly highlighted the black form as the model's chest and arms were fully on view due to the tighter fit of the garment.<sup>121</sup> The model did not appear gargantuan or as though he was a bodybuilder on the side. Instead, the black model looked strong, powerful, and confident in displaying his well-earned exterior. These designer fashions radiated conspicuous consumption and status. Exercise and fitness bequeathed not only a strong black body, but a strong and assertive masculine persona which served as the best foundation for the return of glamorous suiting styles.

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<sup>119</sup> *Ebony Man*, “Yoga: The Ultimate Mind/Body Workout,” *Ebony Man* 12 (September 1997): 57.

<sup>120</sup> *Ebony Man*, “Bright Ideas Hot Color for a Cool Summer,” *Ebony Man* 12 (June 1997): 28-29.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Glamorous or gangster-inspired suiting attire exuded a powerful and confident black male form. *Ebony* regularly promoted this imagery to their readers. Basketball star Shaquille O'Neal was selected as one example of stylish dress by the magazine in the late 1990s. O'Neal was photographed wearing a "chestnut" double breasted suit, derby hat, Superman diamond ring, diamond earrings, and a brightly hued geometric pattern tie.<sup>122</sup> Double breasted suit options like these frequently appeared in *Ebony*, *Ebony Man*, and *Jet*. In *Jet*'s article "Chicagoans Thrilled by Ebony Fashion Fair's 'The Jazz Age of Fashions'," a Concepts for Men double breasted, dark, chalk-stripe suit accented with a light colored shirt, bright tie, and pocket square stirred up memories of the Harlem Renaissance, another time when black men conspicuously and brazenly flaunted the black male body in glamorous and chic fashions. Another model sported a polka dot, double breasted, matching suit ensemble accessorized with a stylish fedora that exuded individuality and personal flair.<sup>123</sup>

The upwardly-mobile black male also found chic suit styles in *Vibe*. The magazine realized the importance of the suit to men's fashions after 1995. Their assessment of the fall 1996 collections stated that the suit represents a "retro-cum-modern, mix-and-match-frenzy. Designers are pairing sweaters with suits, denim with suits, leather with suits, ski pants with suits, fake fur with suits, jerseys with suits, and glow-in-the dark fabric with suits."<sup>124</sup> Suits were on trend and back in the spotlight. The fashion spread "Soul Brother" presented black male entertainers in a host of suiting

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<sup>122</sup> *Ebony*, "What Brothers Are Really Wearing," 92-94.

<sup>123</sup> *Jet*, "Chicagoans Thrilled by Ebony Fashion Fair's 'The Jazz Age of Fashions'," *Jet* 93 (December 1, 1997): 33.

<sup>124</sup> *Vibe*, "Runway Report Fall '96 Menswear," *Vibe* 4 (August 1996): 118.

attire that reflected the glamorous and sophisticated styles of the 1920s and 1930s.

Entertainers, not presidents or businessmen, were fashion plates in the 1990s. America became a celebrity obsessed culture with more and more individuals trying to seek fame, fortune, and their fifteen minutes in the spotlight. Athletes, musicians, and actors emerged as sources of style inspiration and emulation. These professions were not immersed in the traditional worlds of business and politics, showing upscale men that they were no longer beholden to time honored methods of securing not only masculine pride, but financial solvency. In addition, men that lived during the last couple of decades in America remembered those times of political instability, economic duress, societal unrest, and international decline. The old ways simply did not hold any value or merit as they could not keep up with modern times nor could they engender security, stability, and confidence.

*Vibe* also promoted gangster-inspired attire in response to its increased popularity within the rap and hip-hop communities. Rappers started dressing more and more in double breasted suiting ensembles over wearing Adidas track suits, oversized sweatshirts, and utilitarian workwear that were commonplace in the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>125</sup> Black men that donned traditional American clothing styles like sportswear patterned after rappers did so in an effort to express their frustrations with American institutions of power, challenge notions of conspicuous consumption, and contest accepted norms about living in America. Some black individuals even adopted wearing prison-like attire or dark, baggy denim to further emphasize their dissatisfaction and disappointment with American power structures while also exhibiting their link to

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<sup>125</sup> Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, 40-41.



gangsta rap. Clothing operated as a form of visual protest against the white, hegemonic structures of society. However, by the mid to late 1990s, many artists and musicians in hip-hop had actually attained a great deal of financial and professional success and now wanted to dress in clothing and styles that reflected their new status and standing. The confidence, boldness, and potency rappers once derived from their earlier garb radiated instead from suits and accessories that exuded late 1990s gangster chic.<sup>126</sup> Both modes of dress communicated a strong and commanding black presence, just through different means. *Vibe* understood, recognized, and advertised this cultural and stylistic development occurring within their readership.

*Vibe's* "Soul Brother" spread boldly displayed the glamorous gangster trend permeating through menswear collections at this time. Singer Babyface sported a Moschino Cheap and Chic black pinstripe suit that featured a quirky round collar on a white dress shirt by Romeo Gigli. A daisy was placed on the suit's lapel for a bit of whimsy. Actor Jamie Foxx modeled a light colored, almost white, suit by Giorgio Armani paired with a vintage-inspired tie and shirt. Although singer Brian McKnight did not have a suit jacket on his body, his suit style was equally as expressive as the other pictorials featured. A dark, pinstripe, straight-jacket inspired Jean-Paul Gaultier vest wrapped up McKnight's upper torso. A white Gigli dress shirt parading a small collar and dark Armani trousers completed the overall look.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 40-41; Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear*, 59 and 150; and Sowmya Krishnamurthy, "Hip-Hop Style," *AskMen.com*; available from [http://www.askmen.com/fashion/trends\\_700/711\\_hip-hop-style.html](http://www.askmen.com/fashion/trends_700/711_hip-hop-style.html); Internet, accessed 27 March 2014.

<sup>127</sup> *Vibe*, "Soul Brother," *Vibe* 3 (March 1995): 68-71.

Other examples of more refined and smart suit dressing proliferated throughout the monthly issues of this magazine. *Vibe* encouraged its male readership to embrace the suit and integrate it and its components into their daily lives. The magazine contended, “Forget about Dad’s dark suit—fashion designers have taken the classic model and given it an overhaul.”<sup>128</sup> *Vibe* provided visual guides on how to properly break up a suit including showing one model donning a black, fitted, Ralph Lauren suit vest with dark trousers that could be livened up with the inclusion of a lemongrass or “chartreuse” Tommy Hilfiger dress shirt. To give off a more casual air, the model rolled up his long sleeves and did not tuck his shirt into his pants. Men with a flair for the dramatic might gravitate towards Paul Smith’s mini-checked plaid suit in red and green worn with a greenish-yellow dotted vest and a green knit polo by Calvin Klein. A toned down plaid version manifested in Boss by Hugo Boss’s grayish-green hued two-piece suit accented with a lace dress shirt by Hilfiger.<sup>129</sup> These looks were not for the fashion shy or overweight due to their vibrant colors and body-conscious constructions.

Adventurous upscale men with a penchant for unconventional and cult designer fashions had many options at their disposal according to *Vibe*. One noteworthy example came from Japanese designer Yohji Yammamoto. A model donned a pink angora turtleneck sweater to wear under a black, white, and sky blue shaded two-piece suit.<sup>130</sup> The velvet material of this ensemble radiated glamour and materialism. For the male consumer with a desire to show off his physique in a slimmer suit style, *Vibe* exhibited

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<sup>128</sup> *Vibe*, “The New Suit,” *Vibe* 5 (April 1997): 110.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-113.

<sup>130</sup> *Vibe*, “Future Shock,” *Vibe* 5 (September 1997): 190.

versions by cutting-edge designers like Jean-Paul Gaultier. Gaultier's three-piece "speckled" brown suit hugged and skimmed the well-built model's frame while harkening back to earlier eras of sophistication and style.<sup>131</sup> *Vibe* rejoiced in this type of dressing as it announced in its March 1995 issue, "This spring, fashion designers came back glam—thank God!"<sup>132</sup>

Upwardly-mobile black males seeking more classic, yet updated, suit styles still had an array of options and designers to select from to properly clothe their fit and trim bodies. *Ebony Man* provided the conservative black male with numerous sartorial possibilities. A Saint Laurent Rive Gauche double breasted, dark hued, pinstripe suit connected to classic 1920s and 1930s glamorous suiting attire but reflected a modern sensibility with a metallic tie set against a crisp, white dress shirt.<sup>133</sup> Kenneth Cole's navy pinstripe suit flaunted the 1990s penchant for a trim and streamlined male form. Accented with a gray, navy, and yellow stripe tie by Gant and a Mondo di Marco white shirt, this suit demonstrated that it was "a cut above the rest."<sup>134</sup> If traditional chalk and pinstripes appeared too bland and non-descript, the fashionable male clothed his frame in Joseph Abboud's gray, double breasted, blue pinstripe three-piece suit. Even more visual interest was garnered by the inclusion of a gray patterned shirt and gray tie highlighted with dots. Masculine good taste could also be verified in Boss by Hugo

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>132</sup> *Vibe*, "Runway Spring '95," *Vibe* 3 (March 1995): 94.

<sup>133</sup> *Ebony Man*, "Classic: Our Pick of the Must-Haves for the Coming Season Fall 1997," *Ebony Man* 12 (July 1997): 27.

<sup>134</sup> *Ebony Man*, "Suitability: Discover Suits That Are a Cut Above the Rest," *Ebony Man* 12 (September 1997): 34.

Boss's three-piece black suit. This classic suit style was modernized by the injection of color in the shirt and tie combination. A deep purple dress shirt placed underneath the black vest was offset by a striped tie that contained reds, purples, and metallics.<sup>135</sup> A JCPenny ad found in *Ebony Man* encapsulated these suiting examples. In the advertisement, a black male professional sporting thin, shoulder length dreadlocks and a goatee stands tall on the steps of a classical, City Beautiful looking building in an unmentioned urban enclave. Wearing a dark blue dress shirt, blue metallic tie, and tassel loafers to compliment his dark gray double breasted suit, the model stares directly and confidently into the camera while the text reads, "Always in style."<sup>136</sup>

If glamorous and gangster-inspired suiting was "in style" for straight, black and white, upscale males, was it also in vogue for upwardly-mobile gay men as well? Interestingly enough, the suit and its subsequent transformation or transition from casual to refined and polished was not given an enormous amount of press in *The Advocate* during the 1990s. Many upwardly-mobile gay men acquired regular advice and information on fashion and trends from periodicals like *GQ* and *Esquire*.<sup>137</sup> Additionally, since more heterosexual men became interested in fashion during the 1980s, the lines between gay and straight fashions had become obscured and harder to differentiate.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 38-41.

<sup>136</sup> *Ebony Man*, "JCPenny Advertisement," *Ebony Man* 12 (September 1997): 1.

<sup>137</sup> Daniel Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 73. The concept of gay men reading *Esquire* and *GQ* was discussed in the previous chapters of this dissertation.

<sup>138</sup> Shaun Cole, *'Don We Now Our Gay Apparel': Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 186.

Part of the explanation for this shift resonated with that fact that many gay men perceived that their days of struggles for equality in American society had finally reached a pinnacle. While instances of discrimination, homophobia, and intolerance still existed, many upscale gay men shied away from activism and politics since their personal and cultural fortunes had risen substantially since the days of Stonewall.<sup>139</sup> Although *The Advocate* continued to report on matters such as gay rights, anti-hate legislation, anti-gay bill boycotts, and instances of gay bashing, articles within the magazine seemed to pick up on this mentality.<sup>140</sup>

The assimilation of the gay male became visible. Scholar John D’Emilio wrote in *The Advocate*, “In the 1970s we fought police harassment, sodomy laws, and the classification of homosexuality as a disease. We wanted government out of our bars and bedroom and the shrinks out of our psyche. Now the battleground has shifted to gays in the military, same-sex marriage, workplace organizing, the right to parent, and fairness in the schools.” For D’Emilio this amounted to the gay community shifting from the notion of “separatism” to “integration.”<sup>141</sup> Gay men had finally reached a level of wealth, professional success, personal achievement, and social acceptance decades after the riots began at Stonewall. *The Advocate* appeared to partially embrace this shift as evidenced in articles, advertisements, and the general tone of the magazine.

Within the magazine itself, a myriad of advertisements from major, mainstream, American companies for commodities like cigarettes and alcohol populated issues.

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<sup>139</sup> Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*, 74.

<sup>140</sup> Dave Waller, “Taking Exception,” *The Advocate* 543 (January 30, 1990): 26.

<sup>141</sup> John D’Emilio, “Out of the Ghetto,” *The Advocate* 746 (November 11, 1997): 9.

During the 1970s and 1980s companies catering specifically to a gay clientele for items like insurance, travel, recreation, hygiene, and clothing proliferated. But by the 1990s, mainstream America arrived, inserting itself within the very periodical devoted to informing and educating a gay audience. For example, Johnnie Walker placed an advert that presented three men smiling, laughing, and drinking at a party. The text declared, “For the last time it’s not a lifestyle. It’s a life.”<sup>142</sup> Implied within this statement was that there was no such thing as a separate gay sensibility or lifestyle any longer. Differences did not exist between these three men pictured even though two were white and presumably, one would have been thought of as gay since its placement was in a gay periodical. Straight or gay, white or black, all men wanted the same thing—to enjoy life and good company over a bottle of Johnnie Walker.

Articles about gay life also reflected the integration ethos. Information on dating, monogamy, gay partnerships, gay marriage, and how to undergo the process of starting a family regularly appeared within *The Advocate*. Moreover, the magazine focused more space on matters involving the concerns, issues, and glories of its lesbian readers, thereby broadening its readership and corporate America’s potential purchasing base. Even the structure of *The Advocate* changed to meet the needs of mainstream and corporate America.<sup>143</sup> While *The Advocate* did not remove all traces of sex from the periodical, it did alter the location of these items off the front pages and main text. The magazine had always been known for its risqué personal ads, pictures, photographs, and overall classifieds section which existed due to the central position sex and sexual

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<sup>142</sup> *The Advocate*, “Advertisement for Johnnie Walker,” *The Advocate* 726 (April 4, 1997): 2-3.

<sup>143</sup> Harris, *The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture*, 80.

culture had maintained in the gay male community. By the early 1990s though, the classified section along with any similarly bold sexual information was simply transferred into a separate fold out section (akin to the size of a book) available within *The Advocate*. This process had already begun in the 1980s which coincided with the outbreak of AIDS and HIV. Now, assessing the placement of the classifieds took on a whole new significance. The nude pictures, queries for phone sex, erotica, and pornographic text within this insert did not become less salacious or provocative. Rather, it remained tucked away for interested parties to review in secret, a consequence of both the AIDS epidemic and greater assimilation into the structures of mainstream America.

AIDS continued to affect the gay community. Just as it had in the 1980s, *The Advocate* promoted the virtues of safe sex publicizing events like National Condom Week and corresponding products that would halt the spread of the disease. For instance, press was given to devices as the condom key ring, condom mini purse, and the “Condom Critter.” The “Condom Critter” was a backpack shaped as a stuffed animal devised for the on the go gay male who could store his condoms in a unique and eccentric manner on his body or in his car. Companies that promoted this trend appeared within editions such as the 1991 article discussing the opening of Condomania in New York City’s Greenwich Village. The owners hoped their enterprise would make sex “acceptable and even fun” in the face of HIV, AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *The Advocate*, “No More Ring Around the Wallet: Carrying Condoms with Style,” *The Advocate* 518 (February 14, 1989): 36; and Jim Provenzano, “Casa de Condoms,” *The Advocate* 584 (August 22, 1991): 71.

Fashion spreads and articles projected a safe sex theme. Clothing selected for the “Tight Fit” pictorial from August 1991, supported the notion that “sex, safer than ever is back.”<sup>145</sup> One model posed in dark, knee-high, Dr. Martens work boots, a dark lycra body suit, black leather studded gloves, and white knee pads. Other models paraded around in ensembles labeled as “stretchwear” which consisted of white, tight, tank tops tucked snugly into form-fitting lycra biker shorts with colorful racing stripes accessorized with Dr. Martens work boots. *The Advocate* told its readers to don these items in order to “Expose yourself!” The gay male frame could also be visibly and brazenly displayed in an array of “pastel ribbed” wetsuits from AquaGear at Macy’s.<sup>146</sup> These fashions incorporated elements of S/M, athletic gear, and working-class masculinity with the inclusion of the work boots. Moreover, these outfits all boldly projected a confident, physically assertive, and imposing gay male form in the wake of the AIDS epidemic.

Hard masculinity clearly remained the ideal construction for the gay male community. The upscale gay male needed to be toned and developed to outfit his frame in the beach and swim wear featured in “No Day at the Beach” from May 1993. According to the editors, “ ’93 swimwear blows everything out of the water. And some of it can’t even get wet.”<sup>147</sup> Swimwear gave the upwardly-mobile gay man a unique opportunity to flaunt his hard-earned body crafted after many hours spent laboring in the gym or health club. Gay men carved out space for themselves as early as the 1930s in

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<sup>145</sup> *The Advocate*, “Tight Fit,” *The Advocate* 583 (August 13, 1991): 28-29.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31.

<sup>147</sup> *The Advocate*, “No Day at the Beach,” *The Advocate* 629 (May 18, 1993): 46-47.



city beaches and resort areas, finding safe zones to project their own version of masculinity and attract potential partners.<sup>148</sup> 1990s swimwear options consisted of a tight-fitting, black, scoop tank, one piece suit constructed in a material akin to latex or rubber. This suit featured “girdle straps” around the buttocks and upper thigh regions. The well-built model posing in this gear sported liquid eyeliner, tattoos, and a nose ring that only served to further draw attention towards his strapping and brawny exterior.<sup>149</sup>

A mix of feminine and masculine manifested in this visual representing the greater struggle all men encountered during the 1990s between hard and soft masculinities. Gender tension infused with the a hint of S/M also materialized on another model wearing latex-like nylons, Vivienne Westwood six-inch platforms, black leather gloves, and a “rubber jock” by Tank Therapy that also resembled a girdle or a cod piece depending upon your ocular preference.<sup>150</sup> This model’s strong arms, abdominals, chest, and thighs were all blatantly on view. Along with these options, the magazine included a “fringe suede bikini” by International Male paired with latex-looking leather gloves and Dr. Martens.<sup>151</sup> The bikini was not a real bikini as it constituted a short leather skirt akin to what a gladiator or Roman soldier once wore. These men were incredibly developed, imposing, and physical. Their musculature negated any connotations of the feminine, but their chosen garb flirted with transgressing gender boundaries and lines.

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<sup>148</sup> Cole, ‘*Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*’, 131-133.

<sup>149</sup> *The Advocate*, “No Day at the Beach,” 46-47.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

Gay men were aware of the socially constructed nature of masculinity well before their heterosexual peers who only recently became afflicted with the same doubts, insecurities, and issues that plagued gay men for decades. The tension existing within the gay male community between the feminine and overtly masculine, or effeminacy vs. macho, surfaced within the heterosexual male community as a battle between soft and hard masculinities. The upscale gay male's fashion choices represented this greater gender tension and insecurity in society just as suits did for the straight male.

These styles also connected to the AIDS crisis. The gay male had not abandoned sex or sexual culture completely. Instead, he wrapped up his body in a more suggestive, subtle, and tantalizing manner than his predecessor the clone who would allow his genitalia to hang out from opened buttons. The latex sheen to these leather goods referenced the philosophy of safe sex. The phallic and sexual overtones to these outfits signified that AIDS may have altered some elements within the gay male community, but some things did not completely change.

AIDS may have left its mark on the gay male community, but by the mid to late 1990s, a new attitude and atmosphere infiltrated aspects of *The Advocate* that linked to greater gender and cultural trends found within the other selected men's magazines. While suits may not have received a tremendous amount of attention in the periodical especially during the first half of the decade, the overall mentality and mindset of glamour and gangster-inspired suiting emerged. As evidenced by the existence of sexually-laden leather swimwear and tight-fitting lycra sporting attire, the hard gay male body did not want to go unnoticed even in the face of the AIDS crisis and sexually-transmitted diseases. Many gay men were simply tired of the dark cloud of despair and

death that followed their community and wanted to move onward and hopefully towards better times.

Fashion designers were aware of the “cult of masculinity” pervading gay male culture and as such, designed with this concept in mind.<sup>152</sup> Designer Raymond Dragon, a gay man with a considerable gay following, stated that his “skin tight fashions” allowed gay men “the maximum opportunity to show off their God-given, gym-enhanced physical assets.” Interviewer Greg Weiner perceived that Dragon’s “hypermasculine aesthetic” only served to emphasize “the more narcissistic aspects of gay life—working out, posing, cruising...”<sup>153</sup> Fashion duo Richard Bengtsson and Edward Pavlick’s firm Richard Edwards produced clothing for “men who work out.”<sup>154</sup> While the twosome acknowledged that gay and straight men dressed alike these days, the pair did note that their attire focused on a specific area of historic interest to gay men—“the ass.”<sup>155</sup>

Both Raymond Dragon and the Richard Edwards team created garments, that just like the swimwear and athletic gear found within *The Advocate*, filled a cultural need. These sexualized fashions announced that the days of dancing, partying, and pleasure were not over for the gay male. The 1990s witnessed the rise of the circuit party reminiscent of the disco era. Rather than gravitate to a specific club or bar for an

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<sup>152</sup> Michelangelo Signorile, *Life Outside The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles, and the Passage of Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 9-31.

<sup>153</sup> Greg Weiner, “Gay Narcissus: Entrepreneur Raymond Dragon makes his mark as gay fashion’s hottest commodity,” *The Advocate* 676 (March 7, 1995): 51-52.

<sup>154</sup> Brendan Lemon, “Dressed for Success,” *The Advocate* 726 (April 4, 1997): 58.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

evening of mingling, gazing, drugs, dancing, and sexual encounters, gay men now went to places like Miami or Palm Springs for a weekend of mingling, drugs, dancing, and sexual encounters. Many of the circuit parties were initially produced to raise funds for items like AIDS research. Over time, these projects became increasingly commercialized with hired DJs and bands to fill up hours of entertainment and major corporations such as American Express, Westin Hotels, and Absolute Vodka bequeathing sponsorship and goods.<sup>156</sup> While critics argued that these parties promoted bad behavior and irresponsibility especially as AIDS continued to strike, other observers noted that this aura of frivolity and festive activities seemed to be serving as an “antidote to AIDS.”<sup>157</sup>

Outfits that exuded a “sexier silhouette” fit in with this new gay mindset.<sup>158</sup> *The Advocate* spotlighted designers producing slim, vibrant, and sexier formal attire as the suit for those hours not spent at a circuit party. John Bartlett received notice within the magazine just as he did in *GQ* and *Esquire* due to his slim suiting styles that enhanced a healthy and toned male form. Bartlett’s 1995 collection paraded “floor-length pants, shrunken suits, and pastel-green argyle sweaters” likened to a “ripoff of Forest Gump” down the runway.<sup>159</sup> This mix of retro and modern fashion sensibilities linked to the return to glamour and sophisticated suiting ensembles propagated within the other selected periodicals. Bartlett liked to plunder from the past, going to the Salvation Army

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<sup>156</sup> Signorile, *Life Outside*, 83-127.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, xx and 105-127.

<sup>158</sup> Lemon, “Dressed for Success,” 57.

<sup>159</sup> *The Advocate*, “Unisexually Speaking: In four short seasons designer John Bartlett has become the enfant terrible of menswear,” *The Advocate* 676 (March 7, 1995): 56.

since, “‘All of the clothes there had a real sense of history to them, and for me—someone who was really interested in sociology—this was like an open book...I began to see clothing as a pulse point for what society is like at a particular time.’”<sup>160</sup>

Bartlett’s attire reflected the desire for men to return to more stylish, sophisticated, and refined dressing as was the case with another famous gay designer, Tom Ford.

Like Bartlett, Ford catered to both heterosexual and homosexual consumers. Ford was also known for his daring womenswear of the period. In his collections for women and men, Ford played with “gender fluidity” as he despised attire specifically labeled as either gay or straight. He perceived a need for boundaries to be blurred and crossed which was part and parcel of the struggles upwardly-mobile American men encountered with their own masculinity at this time. Ford’s provocative, lush, and slimmer suiting attire symbolized what he called “fashion’s renewed sense of hedonism.”<sup>161</sup>

Clothes now had a vibrancy, energy, and vigor. Designers picked up on the new cultural mood amongst the gay community and channeled it into their seasonal offerings. The upscale gay male asserted his new masculine persona each and every day through these modes of cultural expression that also accentuated his physical assets. All of these designs harkened back to previous eras of glamour and chic fashions. They evoked a sense of glitz, taste, and sophistication. This was not clone dressing. By the 1990s, young gay men who had never been touched by the era of AIDS or clone imagery desired to make their own cultural impact and niche while some older upscale gay men

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>161</sup> Brendan Lemmon, “Gay Guru,” *The Advocate* 735 (June 10, 1997): 28.

wanted to move past the cloud of “morbidity and mortality” of the 1980s.<sup>162</sup> There was agency here amidst disease and community turmoil.

So why was there a return to sophisticated, polished, and fashionable suit styles? Why did elegant and glamorous suiting attire exist right alongside casual and relaxed modes? The fortunes of the suit rose with those of the American economy. The individual presiding over much of this rise in fortunes was former Arkansas governor, and 1992 president-elect, Bill Clinton. Clinton won the 1992 presidential election over Bush largely due to one issue—the economy. Clinton set about restoring the nation’s faith in its economy.<sup>163</sup>

Historian Robert Collins postulated that by the mid-point of 1997, “the stock market stood at an all-time record high; unemployment at 4.8 percent, the lowest level since November 1973; and inflation at around 3 percent, its steady level the past four years. (Each of these numerical indicators of economic well-being would improve further in the next two years.)”<sup>164</sup> Optimism filled the air<sup>165</sup> as the economy improved and policies combating poverty appeared to be working. The falling poverty rate was seen most “dramatically” in the African-American population in addition to the median income rising for all groups of color.<sup>166</sup> America was thriving once again.

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<sup>162</sup> Randy Shilts, “The Queering of America,” *The Advocate* 567 (January 1991): 32.

<sup>163</sup> For more on Clinton’s economic record, mindset, and policies see Robert M. Collins, *More: The Politics of Economic Growth in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University, 2000); Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*; and Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century*.

<sup>164</sup> Collins, *More*, 222. Collins also discusses on p. 223 how economic growth went up as well. See also Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 371-373.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>166</sup> Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 371-373 and 428.

With all of this prosperity came the resurgence of the suit. Men exuded confidence and composure in suits that spoke to their economic standing, successes, and achievements. Wearing a stylish Tom Ford for Gucci suit set a man apart from a sea of khakis and polo shirts in the office. This was a man that took pride in his appearance. He knew that image mattered; that looking good mattered in 1990s America. The suit, the quintessential symbol of masculine pride and esteem, could be worn again with ease as its associations with finance, strength, and power were back in America's purview.

Although suiting attire became more refined, polished, and commanding during the mid-to-late 1990s, casual suiting attire was not discarded or supplanted. Clinton's brand of masculinity mimicked these struggles both the suit, and accordingly, American men encountered in 1990s America. In February 1993, *Esquire* writer Woody Huchswender remarked about Clinton, "He is not afraid to be casual, even sloppy at times, appearing publicly in droopy exercise clothes." Huchswender believed that Clinton's early presidential style embodied the times and his own inner nature since he stated, "An overformal, stiff, or precise elegance in dress would be incongruous with Clinton's relaxed, easygoing personality."<sup>167</sup> Clinton was photographed during his first term in ill-fitting workout shorts, sweaty t-shirts, collegiate sweatshirts, baseball caps, and New Balance sneakers. And, he often stopped to talk to reporters while jogging "sweaty and winded."<sup>168</sup> On the campaign trail and during official presidential business,

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<sup>167</sup> Woody Huchswender, "Notes on Presidential Style," *Esquire* 119 (February 1993): 128-129.

<sup>168</sup> The Huffington Post, "Bill Clinton Style Evolution: From College Sweatshirts to Tuxedos," *TheHuffingtonPost.com* (May 8, 2012); available from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/19/bill-clinton-pictures\\_n\\_1806360.html#slide=1393304](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/19/bill-clinton-pictures_n_1806360.html#slide=1393304), Internet, accessed 7 May 2013. Todd S. Purdum, "Yankee Doodle Dandy?," *The New York Times* (January 19, 1997); available from <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/politics/0119inaugural-fashion.html>, Internet, accessed 7 May 2013.

Clinton gravitated when possible towards “light” hued suits and “busy,” novelty ties for business and bomber jackets, khaki pants, golf shirts, denim, and plaid flannel shirts for off-duty hours.<sup>169</sup>

Despite these sartorial choices, Clinton radiated the authority, control, and confidence that the traditional, professional, masculine suit represents at times. Clinton acted decisively in dealing with the economic issues facing the country while in office. This air of command and effective leadership also manifested itself with Clinton’s skillful handling of both the Good Friday and Oslo Accords. Additionally, Clinton demonstrated his composure and poise in times of great tragedy as was the case with the Oklahoma City bombing of 1994.<sup>170</sup>

Yet, for all of these triumphs, Clinton simply was not able to maintain a masculine persona steeped within the traditional masculine ideal.<sup>171</sup> Clinton could not convey those attributes of authority, strength, control, and power on a sustained basis. In the one arena where commentators argued that a president demonstrated these qualities with ease, foreign affairs, Clinton had a mixed record. Clinton acted with force and decisiveness on some international matters in Iraq and North Korea, but visibly wavered and retreated on others. The 1993 ill-fated mission in Somalia to sequester “warlord” Mohammed Farah Aidid ended in disaster as eighteen elite American soldiers were killed with images of one being maimed and dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Americans saw a world around them engulfed in fear and terror with acts

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> See Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 340-397.

<sup>171</sup> Brenton J. Malin, *American Masculinity under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties “Crisis of Masculinity,”* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2005), 57.



like genocide occurring in Rwanda and ethnic cleansing sweeping through Bosnia.

However, Americans realized that they too were not safe on their own soil when the World Trade Center was bombed in 1993 under Clinton's watch with subsequent bombings on U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya occurring later in the decade. Even the U.S. military was not safe from harm as evidenced by the suicide bombing attack of the USS Cole in Yemen during 2000.<sup>172</sup> The veneer of American military supremacy seemed a bit cracked during the Clinton years.

Missteps like these in foreign affairs only seemed to supply further evidence for detractors that Clinton, like Bush, suffered from the "wimp factor." However, it was Clinton's relationship with his wife Hillary that truly propagated these accusations that he was less than a real man.<sup>173</sup> Many first ladies were simply given "pet projects" to keep them busy while their husbands wielded presidential power. Barbara Bush endeavored to combat illiteracy while Nancy Reagan preached to America's youth in the 1980s to "say no to drugs." Hillary Rodham Clinton was a different breed of first lady.<sup>174</sup>

A highly educated and respected lawyer, Hilary was not content to simply stand in the background and be seen, but not heard. On the campaign trail, the fact that she stood by her husband amidst allegations of cheating and infidelity won her much sympathy and admiration. Many Americans liked the fact that the Clinton marriage seemed to be between equals and devoid of female subservience and subordination.

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<sup>172</sup> Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 336-337.

<sup>173</sup> Ducat, *The Wimp Factor*, 132.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

Hillary was initially viewed as an asset to Clinton. However, once Clinton became president, all of Hillary's prized qualities would be used against her in the press. Hillary would be attacked for not properly taking her husband's last name, keeping separate finances, and taking vacations on her own to places like San Francisco among other charges. Rather than view these actions as positive and an affirmation of the gains feminism made for women, many Americans instead defamed Hillary, her character, and her husband for allowing this type of behavior to exist in the White House. The press "demonized" Hillary. Clinton, in turn, was "variously represented as infantilized, dominated, and as castrated by her."<sup>175</sup> This was not traditional masculinity on display.

Additionally, it did not help matters that the cornerstone of Clinton's presidential platform, health care, was never passed. Clinton placed Hillary in charge of this effort and did so, much in the tradition of President Jimmy Carter, without seeking advice or counsel from Congress or other Washington insiders. When it came time to go to Congress with his health care package, Clinton sealed its doom when he announced he wanted it all passed as one entity—essentially a case of all or nothing. This error in judgment occurred very closely to another public policy blunder. With the implementation of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in the armed forces, Clinton very publicly failed to keep his promise to the gay community to lift the ban on homosexuals serving in the military. Mistakes like these caused the president to appear ineffectual and ineffective. Even Clinton's pragmatism and willingness to compromise with Congress and the Republican Party in order to achieve reforms and legislation was attacked and

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 135-139 and 153.

labeled as less than manly.<sup>176</sup> Clinton's masculinity was battered, bruised, and under attack in the 1990s.

However, there was another side to Clinton. Just like the fragmented nature of the suit in the 1990s, Clinton too displayed a fragmented male identity. Scholar Brenton J. Malin conveyed, "Clinton's masculinity was thoroughly conflicted—embracing a kind of new, sensitive, non traditional masculinity at the same time that it sought to demonstrate a powerful, thoroughly established sense of 'real American manhood,' the sort conventionally depicted in advertisements for pick up trucks by Ford, Dodge, and Chevy." During his campaign for re-election to the presidency, Clinton and his advisors went about the process of "remasculinizing his image."<sup>177</sup> The man who once labeled himself as "the prototypical fat boy in Big Boy jeans" discarded his earlier presidential suiting look in favor of dark colored suits accessorized with "presidential cufflinks," "stiff white shirts," and bright red French foulard print ties." Clinton started wearing made-to-measure designer suits by Donna Karan that "camouflaged his then midsection."<sup>178</sup> The president embraced a new suiting aesthetic and public masculine persona to erase memories of the Commander-in-chief looking pudgy, disheveled, and unkempt. The supportive husband, the caring father of earlier years was now additionally photographed in "masculine" endeavors like hunting for ducks in Arkansas.

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<sup>176</sup> Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*. 328-336; and Chafe, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century*, 269-278.

<sup>177</sup> Malin, *American Masculinity under Clinton*, 7; and Ducat, *The Wimp Factor*, 158.

<sup>178</sup> Purdum, "Yankee Doodle Dandy?," <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/politics/0119inaugural-fashion.html>. Karin Tanabe and Amie Parnes, "Obama Suits Himself with Sleeker Jacket Style," [www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com) (March 28, 2011); available from [http://www.politico.com/click/stories/1103/obama\\_suits\\_himself.html](http://www.politico.com/click/stories/1103/obama_suits_himself.html), Internet, accessed 7 May 2013.

The president also threatened to fight a journalist who printed defamatory language about his wife Hillary.<sup>179</sup> Clinton's image now projected the look of a provider, defender, fighter, and competitor. Clinton did not dismiss or negate his more compassionate and sensitive side, he simply infused his masculine persona with a dose of old school masculine medicine.

More importantly, Clinton was able to defuse the label of "wimp" due to numerous sexual scandals that surrounded his presidency. Whether it was his confirmation of extramarital activities with Gennifer Flowers and Monica Lewinsky, or the harassment suit brought against him by Paula Jones, Clinton's sexual appetite was constantly in the press. Furthermore, even though the Lewinsky affair almost ended with his impeachment from office, Clinton never truly suffered for these actions in the polls.<sup>180</sup> These sexual activities actually boosted Clinton's masculine persona.<sup>181</sup> Men could still exhibit those prized masculine attributes of control, mastery, success, and achievement in this domain. If a man failed to be a proper provider or breadwinner, and lacked military service among other time-honored male activities and roles, then at least he could fall back on exerting dominance and power in the sexual arena.

What better way to showcase one's commitment to exuding all of these masculine beliefs and qualities than through the suit? Not just any suit but one that harkened back to those days of gangsters and mob molls. Gangsters radiated conspicuous consumption, extravagance, ill-defined morals, and wealth through their

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<sup>179</sup> Ducat, *The Wimp Factor*, 158-161.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>181</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 94.

fashion forward suiting attire. Men emulated this masculine model visualized in the pages of men's magazines at this time. The gangster archetype exuded power, strength, command, and authority, alongside sexual appeal, domination, and allure. For those American males conflicted about their masculine personas, the gangster offered an attractive male image that could be reproduced and replicated at will through the use of the suit. Scholar Elizabeth Wilson explained, "Fashion acts as a vehicle for fantasy."<sup>182</sup> The gangster fantasy could become a reality through the stylish male suit.

### **Conclusion**

Rumors of the suit's demise at the dawn of the new millennium had been grossly exaggerated. The decade witnessed a battle between two suiting styles in particular—the casual aesthetic and the glamorous gangster. The suit was immersed in this identity crisis, yet, the suit still stood as emblematic of American masculinity. American men oscillated between elements of traditional masculinity and a more modern masculine sensibility. This masculine tug-of-war materialized in the suiting styles of the decade. Regardless of whether American men chose the laid-back approach to suit attire or a more formal and chic mode of suit dress, the result was basically the same. Men projected control, strength, power, achievement, and status through the suit. The suit still imparted to men a sense of masculine pride and self-esteem. The 90s man continued to utilize the suit for security and comfort. As fashion historian Cally Blackman theorized, "The suit may well survive for another 350 years: it has never been

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<sup>182</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1985), 246.

surpassed as the all-purpose; universally accepted garment and essence of masculine style. Fashion is temporary but style, like the suit, is enduring.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Blackman, *100 Years of Menswear*, 286.

## CONCLUSION

“As long and I’ve got my suit and tie”<sup>1</sup>

“I don’t pop molly, I rock Tom Ford”<sup>2</sup>

The above lyrics were taken from two separate songs by two distinct and seemingly incongruous musicians. The first set of lyrics is from pop star Justin Timberlake’s song “Suit & Tie” and the second offering comes from “Tom Ford” by Jay-Z. Coincidentally, these artists united in the summer of 2013 to perform for the “Legends of Summer” tour. The black and white promotional videos and photographs for this endeavor stylized this pairing between the one time Mouseketeer and street-smart rapper as a throw back to Rat Pack glamour with each in presumably Tom Ford custom made tuxedos.<sup>3</sup> This imagery continued first into Timberlake’s video for his aforementioned single which incidentally featured a cameo and voice over from Jay-Z. The two were surrounded by all the hallmarks of fine living including masseuses, cigars, and premium liquor, while dressed in finely crafted designer suits set amongst black and white cinematography.<sup>4</sup> This aura of the good life carried on as Jay-Z raps in “Tom

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Timberlake, “Suit & Tie,” from *20/20 Experience* (North Hollywood, California: RCA, 2013); Rap Genius Lyrics “Suit and Tie by Justin Timberlake,” <http://rock.rapgenius.com/Justin-timberlake-suit-and-tie-lyrics> (accessed 6 October 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Jay-Z, “Tom Ford,” from *Magna Carta Holy Grail* (New York City, New York: Roc-A-Fella, Roc Nation, and Universal, 2013); Rap Genius Lyrics “Tom Ford by Jay-Z,” <http://rapgenius.com/Jay-z-tom-ford-lyrics> (accessed 3 October 2013).

<sup>3</sup> See [www.justintimberlake.com](http://www.justintimberlake.com).

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsUsVbTj2AY> for the video to Justin Timberlake’s “Suit & Tie.”

Ford” about how he can “piss Bordeaux and Burgundies, flush out a Riesling” even as he admits that he “spent all my euros on tuxes and weird clothes/ I party with weirdoes.”

Jay-Z lives this high-powered existence making deals, building his empire, and crossing continents adorned in stylish suits by his favorite designer, Tom Ford.<sup>5</sup> Power, money, status, and success are their own drugs for this former hustler now music magnate. He has no need for “popping molly” these days.<sup>6</sup> Both the former street kid and boy band ingénue have grown up and grown out of their past masculine images. They are men now clothed in the quintessential symbol of masculine power and pride—the suit.

The suit remains relevant to both fashion and the American male even in the opening decades of the twenty-first century. Although not every man can afford to buy Tom Ford, the suit retains cultural currency and importance. American men continue to purchase this attire as evidenced by industry statistics which reveal that “more fifteen-hundred-dollar-and-up suits were sold in the last five years of the twentieth century than during the previous thirty.”<sup>7</sup> In recent times, suit ensembles have gained a bit more cache since jeans and casual garb have become such an ingrained way of life. Just take a look at the slovenly manner in which men and women board airplanes for travel, dress themselves for dinner out at a fancy restaurant, and run to their local Starbucks in pajamas and tattered clothing. Dressing down is the sartorial norm for many Americans.

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<sup>5</sup> Jay-Z, “Tom Ford,” from *Magna Carta Holy Grail* (New York City, New York: Roc-A-Fella, Roc Nation, and Universal, 2013); Rap Genius Lyrics “Tom Ford by Jay-Z,” <http://rapgenius.com/Jay-z-tom-ford-lyrics> (accessed 3 October 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Molly is the slang word for ecstasy or more accurately it is the “purest form of MDMA” as it is a component in ecstasy. See <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/2013/09/02/molly-drug-glamorized-by-stars-spreading-fast-among-young-people/> for an article on the growing popularity of this drug.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Flusser, *Dressing the Man: Mastering the Art of Permanent Fashion* (New York: itbooks, 2002), 80.



In response to these casual fashion conditions, many men make the conscious decision to dress a bit more properly, elegantly, and with a renewed sense of sophistication. Suits exude panache and transmit a bit of subversive appeal since they are no longer the singular form of masculine daily dress. As such, suits have a unique allure for celebrities, musicians, artists, actors, and others individuals who want to be a bit more chic, fashion forward, and distinctive.<sup>8</sup> These are men who desire to stand apart from the mainstream masses and flaunt their own unparalleled manner of expression and style. Along with up and coming designers like Thom Browne and Billy Reid, established designers and firms such as Paul Smith, Tommy Hilfiger, Brooks Brothers, Giorgio Armani, and Ralph Lauren continue to feature suits in all of their seasonal collections. High-end fashion houses including Balenciaga, Gucci, and Alexander McQueen also present suits and their corresponding accessories each season as well. For the man without excess cash in his checking account, retailers such as H&M, Topman, and Zara can fulfill his need for stylish suiting attire at a fraction of the price. Suits still maintain a place within the fashion landscape of America.

Despite all the cultural pitfalls, revolutions, and sweeping societal changes swirling about in the country since the 1960s, the suit has upheld a “meaningful place in most men’s wardrobes.”<sup>9</sup> No other item of menswear is so indelibly linked to power, success, tradition, and masculinity.<sup>10</sup> That is precisely why the suit was chosen as the fashion style through which to analyze masculinity in this dissertation. From 1970

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<sup>8</sup> Robert E. Bryan, *American Fashion Menswear* (New York: Assouline, 2009), 119.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2000), 141.

through the 1990s, the suit and its corresponding imagery were integral to the process of masculine identity formation for the affluent American male. A review of selected men's magazines illustrated how a new form of masculinity was constructed by white and black, heterosexual and homosexual, upwardly-mobile American men through masculine dress. Suits served as a barometer of masculinity, visually charting the American man's struggle to locate an appropriate and comfortable masculinity that could be reproduced and replicated on a daily basis. Just as the suit oscillated between hard and soft imagery, so too did the American male depending upon societal conditions and individual needs.

While there is no one type of masculinity, all of the groups of men featured within this dissertation built their masculinity around the imagery of the suit either to conform or oppose elements of traditional masculinity. Clothing emerged as the upscale man's visual signifier of masculine expression. Masculinity is a process. Getting dressed is also a process as it is a daily ritual infused with multiple layers of meaning. The more an individual wears a certain style or type of attire, the easier it becomes to continue perpetuating this fashion. Sometimes people try on clothing far removed from their actual personalities and internal comfort zones just to engage in a bit of experimentation and simply be different for awhile. Garments allow men and women to try on new identities and personas which can be easily discarded or repeated at will. Yet, all of this boundary blurring can become a bit dislocating so many individuals veer back towards garb more indicative of their values, beliefs, and lifestyles. Clothing imparts security and comfort against the changing conditions of society.

Garments are cultural communicators. In this study, upscale men's clothing like the suit served to validate, articulate, and express masculinity. Part of the rationale for this project was to shine more of the historical spotlight on men as consumers within American history after 1970. Men's engagement with fashion from the 1970s through 1990s showcased their full immersion into the world of conspicuous consumption, a societal development accelerated after World War II. Post-war America transformed the world of the affluent American male. American culture, in large part, was based upon the benefits and advantages created by consumerism. Happiness, fulfillment, and pleasure were increasingly defined by interactions with commodities that shaped one's identity. American men adapted to this environment by constructing their masculinity through consumptive articles. Retailers and the fashion industry encouraged consumption, especially male consumption, so men simply acknowledged this cultural shift when they purchased goods like suits. Traditional masculinity proved less attainable or accessible so consumer culture repackaged elements of traditional masculinity into consumer items. Clothing was one type of commodity that now embodied traditional masculine qualities of daring, strength, power, authority, and confidence.

Scholar Tim Edwards noted that after 1960, "Masculinity is no longer simply an essence or an issue of what you do, it's how you look."<sup>11</sup> The clothes upwardly-mobile men wore denoted who they were, where they were going, and what they thought of themselves. Men became conspicuous consumers in an effort to develop a masculinity

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<sup>11</sup> Tim Edwards, *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (London: Cassell, 1997), 55.

that was comfortable and acceptable in their lives. This gave men stability and agency.<sup>12</sup>

Male self-worth and value could now be asserted through fashion choices that emphasized items such as one's physique, economic status, racial pride, and sexual allure. While the fashion industry certainly intended a specific use for its products, men also retained the ability to subvert this objective for their own needs. Fashion materialized as a medium through which the men in this dissertation could exert control, dominance, self-assuredness, and mastery, even if the world around them was spinning out of control.

The affluent American male, both white and black, heterosexual and homosexual, used dress to radiate notions of masculine pride, power, and esteem. Analyzing these different groups of upwardly-mobile men challenged the premise of a universal male experience. Rather than investigate men through only one category of analysis or scrutinize only one type of male, this project evaluated the categories of race, gender, and sexuality simultaneously. This method permitted a more complicated and complex view of the issues, anxieties, and desires faced by the upscale American male. The convergence of social, economic, and cultural tensions during the period from the 1970s through the 1990s manifested in the suiting attire and masculine dress both worn and discarded by these groups of men. Clothing was a necessary component in establishing a positive, strong, and commanding masculinity for all men in this study irrespective of racial or sexual differences.

However, despite the similar motives and rationale behind men donning

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<sup>12</sup> Stuart Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 173.

masculine dress as the suit, slight variations emerged based on racial and sexual needs. For example, during the 1970s, gay men gravitated towards overtly macho garments representative of the cowboy and frontiersmen in order to generate an identity based on the clone persona. Their heterosexual white and black counterparts did not as readily embrace these types of attire early in the decade since doing so would have been counterproductive to their own masculine goals. Gay men subverted the socially accepted notion of themselves as unmanly and effeminate by cloaking their frames in historic masculine garb associated with time-honored masculine archetypes. Wearing the standard suit only reminded gay males of their years hiding in the societal closet trying to blend in as just another average man. Suits denoted respectability and convention, two qualities gay men railed against in the aftermath of liberation movements. They challenged past stereotypes in an effort to build their own masculinity, one that would finally give them access to all the privileges and prerogatives associated with American manhood.

Straight black and white males adopted macho and western styles with greater frequency later in the decade in an effort to cast off the more feminine, colorful, and androgynous masculine imagery proliferated by wearing leisure suits. Leisure suits permitted both groups to thwart time-honored ideals associated with conventional masculinity. The roles and expectations associated with traditional masculinity proved unappealing and cumbersome to heterosexual white men. The weight of normative masculinity drove many men into a period of gender and sexual experimentation. Society and established masculinity was in upheaval. At the same time, black men enveloped their frames in colorful and expressive leisure suiting attire to promote their

sense of racial pride, economic worth, and access to the benefits of American citizenship. They wanted the black male body to be celebrated and admired, not feared and derided any longer. In the end, all three groups of men challenged elements of traditional manhood embodied by the suit, opposing gender limitations and restrictions based on race, sexuality, or historical expectations in order to fashion a masculine self that was more comfortable, attainable, and psychically soothing.

The journey of the suit during the 1970s through 1990s showed the growing convergence of dress for white and black, gay and straight, upscale American males. Racial and sexual boundaries to full manhood started to dissipate during the 1980s and 1990s as groups dressed resoundingly similar with each passing year. While variances did remain, there was a remarkable cohesiveness between suiting styles worn by the American men examined within this project. These educated and upwardly-mobile men defined their masculinity through achievement, success, and personal and professional prosperity. And by the 1990s, men's style no longer followed the dictates from the arenas of business and politics. Men increasingly found fashion inspiration from athletes, musicians, celebrities, and fashion plates, among other media stars. Information and advice about fashion and style no longer come solely from traditional leaders, professions, and mediums like the magazine in this day and age of instant communication and the internet. The suit may not visually symbolize just the worlds of business and politics any longer, but its masculine qualities of command, power, and confidence still exude from its fibers and yards of cloth.

Both the suit and traditional masculinity have proved resounding resilient in the face of changing political, economic, and cultural conditions. Suits provide men with a

sense of esteem, power, and pride that otherwise might be lacking in their personal and professional lives. Moreover, fashion allows the American male to daily wage a competitive battle against his environment, society, and other men. Historian Lynne Luciano asserts, “For the American middle-class man, the body is an icon of personal achievement and an unambiguous statement about where he stands in the competitive game of modern life.”<sup>13</sup> Life is a competition so why should masculinity be any different? Clothing gives men the strength and coat of armor needed to take on all combatants and challengers on a daily basis. Those traditional attributes of strength, authority, poise, and command manifest in the suiting attire worn by the American male. Yet, at the same time, since the 1970s, American society has also witnessed the emergence and rising popularity of softer masculinity defined by terms like sensitive, open, tolerant, emotive, and expressive. American men have juggled these two gender poles, borrowing elements from each to craft their own patchwork masculinity that allows them to claim status as a true American man while acknowledging and recognizing racial and sexual differences. Suits enable the American male to visibly and confidently exhibit his own brand of masculinity.

Men’s clear participation in consumer culture through buying suits and masculine dress negates the long held view that women are only consumers within history. Men’s growing interest in and use of fashion has not made them more feminine. Shopping, fashion, and consumption are now truly masculine terrain. Fashion is a valuable tool of historical analysis as it opens windows into the political, economic, and cultural issues of

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<sup>13</sup> Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 35.

an era as this study has shown. Additionally, fashion operates as a unique medium to better understand gender roles, ideals, and expectations. Historians need to undertake more scholarship within this arena in order to better understand not just modern American history, but the modern American male.



Figure 15. The Suit at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century.

Scholar Alison Lurie once said, “We can lie in the language of dress, or try to tell the truth; but unless we are naked and bald it is impossible to be silent.”<sup>14</sup> The suit gave American men the visual language needed to communicate their masculine struggles and successes. From 1970 through the 1990s, masculine dress indeed helped to make the man in a world in flux. The trials, travails, and anxieties of the American man exist

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<sup>14</sup> Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes* (New York: Random House, 1981), 261.



within the cuts, colors, and constructions of the suit. Even though upscale men donned sportswear and western gear during this time period, the suit continued to receive the most press, fashion coverage, and discussion. All of these styles work in conjunction with one another as they reinforce masculine qualities of control, command, strength, and power. These are the very attributes that have made the suit such a staple of a man's wardrobe for hundreds of years. The story of modern American manhood flows through the history, evolution, and wearing of the suit.

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## **VITA**

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