DOES THIS SHIRT MAKE ME LOOK GAY?

Exploring the Invisibility of Hegemonic Masculinity In Heterosexual Men's Dress

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Abstract

During the last fifteen years, men have become increasingly active consumers of fashion with over half of men in western societies buying their own clothes. While, studies have been conducted on the relationship between men and fashion there currently exists a gap in research on the consumption habits of young, style conscious, heterosexual men in the current shifting cultural landscape of men's fashion. Through in-depth interviews, this study unpacks how these men engage with fashion against traditional cultural masculine dress codes. This study proposes that although these men do not actively subscribe to hegemonic masculine values they continue to follow this hegemony on a subconscious level. Through upbringing and cultural influence, heterosexual men are continuously primed to follow a hegemonic masculine ideal, leading to new mutation of hegemonic masculinity that is both invisible and powerful. Ultimately, this study contributes to the overall body of research on male fashion consumption habits as it tests societal assumptions on modern menswear.

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity, men's fashion, heterosexuality

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Chapter 1: Introduction

During the past 15 years, scholars have asserted that men are increasingly becoming active, independent consumers, especially in relation to the consumption of fashion goods and grooming products (Galilee 2002). Men's active fashion consumption has been made abundantly clear in the statistics regarding the menswear industry. The NPD Group, who provides comprehensive market research, reported that in the US men's apparel sales grew 5 percent in 2013 to over 60 Billion dollars, outperforming womenswear (Wang *Global Menswear*). The growth in men's fashion has caused predominantly womenswear brands to make significant investments in their menswear divisions; for example, the *Coach Inc.* menswear department has steadily climbed to reach revenues of 700 million this year and is expected to hit one billion in the coming three to four years (Wang 2014). Men are becoming increasingly visible in retail venues, with over half of men in western societies buying their own clothes (Otnes, McGrath 2001). However while menswear is on the rise, overall there are very few studies on male shopping behavior (Otnes, McGrath 2001; Galilee 2002). Although there has been research into the shopping habits of men, studies on the fashion consumption habits of heterosexual men are currently under developed. Furthermore, while menswear is on the rise, shopping for clothing is still regarded as a feminine activity and consuming fashion is seen as frivolous (Witkowski 1999).

Otnes and McGrath (2001) have stated that many heterosexual men have a fear of being seen as feminine due to femininity's association to homosexual tendencies. "There is a seemingly widespread cultural assumption that gay men possess more expertise than heterosexual men with regard to understanding trends in fashion and grooming" Tuncay,

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Otnes 2008, 492). It has been suggested that this has caused the heterosexuality of a well-dressed man, or a man who enjoys shopping as a leisure activity is seen to be suspect. In fact, activities that are allied with the 'gay man' tend to be style, fashion, grooming and effeminacy, which are further personified through the media (Clarke, Turner 2007).

The link between femininity and fashion is a major deterrent for the heterosexual male to be an active participant in the consumption of fashion items, as they do not want to put their sexual identity into question (Bakewell, Mitchell, Rothwell 2006). These findings have made clear the boundaries that have been created by society in regards to fashion and homosexuality.

While studies have been conducted on the relationship between fashion and men, there currently exists a gap in research on the consumption habits of young heterosexual men in the current shifting landscape of men's fashion. Whereas one study, *The Straight Men Of British Fashion* researched the relationship between fashion and heterosexuality, this study focused on straight males who have aspirations to or currently work in the fashion industry (Simon 2011). Despite the fact that this research is important in developing a better understanding of how straight males interact with fashion, it did not explore the connection between fashion inclined heterosexual males who pursue careers in fields that are unrelated to the fashion industry. Galilee (2002) conducted research that suggests that heterosexual, Caucasian men restrict their engagement with clothing for fear of ridicule or having their identity put under scrutiny. Although this research presents strong findings on the relationship between heterosexual men and fashion, it did not focus on men whom self-identify as having fashion play a role in their lives. Additionally, this

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study was completed in 2002, and as the current climate and cultural view on men's engagement with fashion has shifted, there is a need for updated results.

For example a study conducted by Barry in 2015 offers contradictory evidence to that of Galilee. Participants in Barry's study indicated that they choose particular items of dress that could be used to differentiate themselves from other men. As one participant on their study commented "most guys at bars are in team jerseys and women just brush them off. I wear nice clothes, fitted jeans, and a blazer and women are receptive when I approach them" (Barry 2015, 151). This indicates that instead of anxiety, fashionable dress is being used to instill confidence, as well as promote heterosexuality. Of note, this participant was 42 years old and further research should be undertaken in order to understand the younger demographics relationship with clothing.

According to Alex Bitterman (2016, 4) "the space formerly occupied by 'queer' culture is increasingly homogenizing into hetero-normative culture," Therefore, this study seeks to unpack straight men's feelings and practices in order to uncover their stresses and anxieties when they engage in the feminized and homosexual associated field of fashion. Barry (2015, 154) notes, "younger men are open to questioning masculine norms and to engaging with fashion as the medium to do so." This finding provides evidence that the current landscape of the men's fashion industry is changing. There is a need to analyze how young, style conscious, heterosexual males are currently engaging with fashionable dress. Through exploration, my study makes an important academic contribution by developing new knowledge on the current experiences of straight men's fashion consumption and the current perception of men, fashion and sexual identity.

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Personal Relationship To Research

Gender scholars have asserted that researchers should practice reflexivity where by they are mindful of how their personal histories and social positions inform their research topics and processes (McCorkel, Myers 2003). As an early 20s, heterosexual Caucasian male, I have a personal connection to this topic. The interest in this research stems from my upbringing as I have had an interest in fashion since early childhood. While attending high school my style of dress was inspired by both celebrity and haute couture fashions. While pursuing my undergraduate degree at the Ohio State University in the United States, I began to experience anxiety in regards to my interest in fashion. I noticed that there was a clear disconnect between my personal sexual identity and the sexual identity that was perceived by others. After inquiring into this situation, I came to the understanding that my choices of dress were contributing to the outward scrutiny of my sexual identity. Furthermore, I found it difficult to engage in a relationship with a female companion, as numerous females did not view me as a potential partner due to their assumption of my gay identity. This anxiety in regards to my perceived sexual orientation caused my fashion consumption choices to change, leading to a restriction in my choice of fashionable dress in favor of an athletic aesthetic. Additionally, while purchasing new items of clothing I found myself constantly asking the question if the specific item exhibited signs of a culturally perceived stereotypical homosexual aesthetic.

My undergraduate experience developed my understanding of how although there is no natural connection between fashion and sexual identity; others often use it as an indicator to denote the wearer's orientation. The struggle to balance the consumption of fashionable dress while maintaining a heterosexual identity constantly occupied my

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attention and inspired my graduate research into the factors that influence how other straight men engage in fashionable dress.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to develop a better understanding of how young heterosexual men consume fashion and the relationship between dress and sexual identity, I considered Connells framework of hegemonic masculinity. Using this framework I developed a triangle of connectivity, which illustrates the relationship between masculinity, homosexuality and fashion consumption. This triangle illustrates how dress connects to presenting a sexual identity and reinforces the anxieties that heterosexual men face when they exhibit an interest in fashion.

Theoretical Framework: Hegemonic Masculinity

This study is rooted in Raewyn Connell's framework of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed as a configuration of practice, which legitimates patriarchy, and the subordination of women and homosexuality. (Connell 1987). Furthermore, contemporary hegemonic masculinity is heterosexual, and can only exist in conjunction with non-hegemonic subordinated forms of masculinity such as homosexual men (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005).

Based on Connell's work, and to better understand the connection between fashion and homosexuality, I propose a triangle of connectivity. At the top of the triangle stands masculinity, which has been stated as the rejection of the feminine (Pochmara 2008). Extending to the left corner stands homosexuality, which research illustrates has had strong connections to femininity in the past and continues to be reinforced (Kimmel 1994). Finally, to the right corner stands fashion, which due to its culturally perceived gendered nature has associations to femininity as well (Shannon 2004).

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Based on the research presented thus far, there is an inherent connection between masculinity and homosexuality; while the former rejects femininity the latter has developed strong cultural bonds. On the other side we see a connection between masculinity and fashion for the same reason. Therefore, it can be asserted that society has developed a final connection between fashion and homosexuality, thereby completing the triangle.

While men can engage in fashion, it can only be through strict styles and influences in order to continue to present one's masculinity. Common American male styles include, the Ivy leaguer, the jock, the blue collar worker and the cowboy are all repetitive themes that are both advertised and accepted in order to maintain an authentic masculine aesthetic (Matthews, Hancock, Gu 2013). These traditional forms of masculine dress continue to affirm cultural norms surrounding men's fashion and continue to entrench hegemonic masculine values. This has developed an established understanding that if one is male and interested in non-traditional forms of dress, there will also be a general assumption that he is homosexual.

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Figure 1 Triangle of Connectivity

Masculinity: The Rejection of the Feminine

According to Beynon (2002) Men are not genetically encoded with a masculine identity, instead men fall into a gender category through learned cultural and societal codes. Instead, gender norms have deep roots throughout history and continue to be socially enforced (Barry and Martin 2015). Kimmel (2003) asserts that at the end of the 19th century, the concept of manhood had been slowly replaced with the notion of masculinity. While manhood was used to differentiate men from children, the definition of masculinity was rooted in concepts of men being defined through their opposition of femininity. In the 19th century, the concept of masculinity shed its moral values connected to manliness in favor of a definition, which stood for “aggressiveness, physical force, and male sexuality (Hantover 1978, 17-18). The American cowboy became an exemplar of masculinity; in fact the cowboy was idolized, sexualized, and fantasized over

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by both men and women (Staszal 2014). Additionally, Pochmara (2008, 133) asserts that the myth of the cowboy “is perceived as timeless and ahistorical... thus able to posit a revitalized model of masculinity.” This notion of the cowboy as the epitome of masculinity can be traced back to the 1893 work by Frederick Jackson Turner titled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” one of the most influential works written on American Society (Pochmara 2008). Turner’s powerful vision contributed to the creation of the idealized view of the West and glorified the cowboy as the personification of masculinity. In his writing, Turner describes the American character as follows:

“The coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which are traits of the frontier (85).”

Through Turner’s writings, the idealistic cowboy is depicted as having power, physical strength and vitality (Pochmara 2008). Furthermore, at the end of the 19th century, masculinity stood for “aggressiveness, physical force and male sexuality (Bederman 1995, 17-18). This ideal of hegemonic manhood suggests a number of characteristics that men are encouraged to subscribe to as a basis for masculine behavior (Connell, 1987). Due to the constant phallogentric ideas that are entrenched in Western culture, men are constantly reminded of their fear of being compared to women and feel pressure to prove their manhood (Selleers 2010). In order to demonstrate one’s masculinity, the male must actively refute any attributes, traits, or characteristics that are associated with the

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feminine (Kimmel 2003). This rejection of femininity has developed connections between masculinity and heterosexuality; this is why these two characteristics are so strongly linked in society (Pochmara 2008). Furthermore, this notion constructs not only gender identity but also sexual orientation and these “gender norms are deeply ingrained and continue to be socially enforced (Barry 2015).” Therefore, research suggests “masculinity is primarily the rejection of the feminine and the homosexual, rather than simply affirmation of the masculine (Pochmara 2008).

However, it should be noted that these widely held views on masculinity may be shifting. Recent research presented by Barry and Martin (2015, 12) indicated that their straight participants have much more contemporary views on masculinity. Certain participants expressed their belief that perceived feminine qualities such as creativity and sensitivity are becoming increasingly valued in men. Furthermore, Smiler (2004) argues that multiple forms of gender can co-exist independently in culture. As the strict lines of gender continue to be blurred their participants expressed optimism that the stigmas against men’s interest in fashion will as well. Although this was optimistic, it proved invaluable in practice as men often edited their clothing choices to both offset feminine associations as well as consume items that promoted masculinity (Barry 2015).

Fashion Consumption: A Feminine Pursuit

Due to the inherent visual cues of clothing, fashion is a rich site for studying gender (Paoletti 2015). Dress scholars such as Joanne Entwistle (2002) have noted that fashion can be viewed as a tool to define and redefine gender boundaries. While this statement is accurate, little research has been conducted on the historical influence of fashion on male consumers. This gap in knowledge has led to the theory that the

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masculine nature of dress was solely considered practical and instrumental, while women's clothing has been regarded as emotional as well as expressive (Paoletti 2015). This notion of masculine dress being used simply to serve as utilitarian is contrary to the idea of consumption, which is readily linked to adornment of the body for beautification purposes (Nixon 1996). Not only is the image of fashion still largely gendered but the entire iconography of shopping as well. Fashion's spaces, goods, and the very act of shopping are consistently encoded as feminine (Shannon 2004).

Bourke (1996) suggests that at the end of the 18th century men had begun to reject bright colors and ornamentation. This event has been labeled 'The Great Masculine Reunification' where men abandoned the aesthetic properties of dress in favor of clothing that was utilitarian (1996, 23). Continuing on into the Victorian era, it was generally believed that men had no interest in consuming fashionable dress or ornamentation, although in reality the growing population of urban middle-class males at the time was a fertile market for consuming fashionable goods (Shannon 2004). Much of the research into this period focused solely on the female consumer (Steele 2000) thus proliferating the notion that fashion was a feminine activity and was generally not pursued by heterosexual men at the risk of engaging in a female vice.

Scholars such as Christopher Breward have provided ample evidence to the contrary, through the use of tailoring magazines, advertisements, and catalogues which all establish male patterns of consumption and their link to modern masculine identities (Steele 2000). Breward's research provides valuable insights into the relationship between masculinity and fashion, during a period, which has been identified as the emergence of a commodity culture (Steele 2000). While Breward's arguments have made

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convincing claims that the male consumption habits had a much stronger link to masculine identity than previously thought, the stereotypes that shopping is inherently feminine remains.

Current research has begun to focus on the consumption habits of men but in general most research in fashion studies targets women exclusively (Frith, Gleeson 2004). The overall lack of attention devoted to male attire has become naturalized, leading to an accepted understanding that men give very minimal attention to sartorial matter (Breward 2010). These definitions of normative male dress provided the basis for the anti-fashion, misogynist aesthetic of the early 20th century, and the link between fashion and femininity (2010).

Although scholars have a better understanding of the consumption habits of men during the late 19th century, fashions relationship with femininity continues to persist. Findings from a study conducted by Tuncay and Otnes (2008, 490) indicate, their male informants “recognize that culturally, shopping is still perceived as a “feminine” activity,” their informants discussed the social price of consuming fashion such as ridicule from other males or being labeled homosexual by others. Their findings have provided a better understanding for the cultural view of acceptable heterosexual and otherwise perceived homosexual behavior in the marketplace (Tuncay, Otnes 2008). Current research continues to validate these claims. Barry’s (2015) research indicated that while men consumed fashion, they would often avoid conventionally feminine sartorial forms of dress in favor of styles that presented a traditionally masculine aesthetic. Furthermore, these men would often face criticism from their friends and family if their

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attire deviated from masculine norms, leading to outfits that complied with traditional hegemonic values (2015).

Homosexuality: The Antithesis of Hegemonic Masculinity

Connells framework of hegemonic masculinity is based on the perception of equal oppression of women and gay men (Connell 1987). Kimmel (2003) suggests that homosexuality and femininity have always been strongly interconnected and constantly reinforce each other due to the initial perception that gay men are active gender inverters. This notion is further validated by John Kimmel (2003), who suggests that homosexuality and femininity have always been strongly interconnected and constantly reinforce each other due to the initial perception that gay men are active gender inverters. Meissner (2005) claims that masculinity is not only the repression of femininity but also of homosexual desire, which remains in every male. During the 19th century, sexologists proposed the theory that viewed male homosexuality as a reflection of a female soul trapped in a male body (Cole 2000). This not only became an accepted stereotype of homosexuality in the straight community, but members of the gay community accepted this as well as the only way to actively project their sexuality (2000).

Not all gay men identified with these feminine undertones and advocated for a more masculine, gay aesthetic. This was met with criticism as masculinity and homosexuality were culturally viewed as mutually exclusive, and the term “real men” began to gain popularity (Pochmara 2008). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that the notion of a ‘Real man’ does not only construct hegemonic masculinity in society, but also implies that there are men who are not ‘real’. This notion of subordinate masculinity further strengthened the connections to homosexuality.

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The concept of men who are not “real” has been further explored by Pochmara (2008) who asserted that the phrase ‘real men’ developed “an excluding dynamic characterizing the construction of hegemonic masculinity.” Pochmara’s assertions highlighted a negative cultural view on gender identification and masculinity, whereby homosexuality and masculinity cannot be one and the same and men must refute homosexuality in order to affirm their masculinity. Although the gay community has seen development in terms of differing styles that express sexuality, the culturally viewed connection between femininity and homosexuality has remained. This can be attributed to stereotypical portrayals of gay figures that we see in the media (Clarke, Turner 2007).

Fejes and Petrich (1993) suggested that the portrayal of gay men in popular culture are exhibited negatively, with gay men often portrayed as overtly feminine such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, and *Project Runway* (Cotner, Burkley 1337). While there is no natural relationship between fashion and homosexuality, advertisers and marketers continue to construct these stereotypical associations (Tuncay, Otnes 2008). Overall, there is a large under representation of gay men who reject the effeminate aesthetic and this further reinforces society's views of homosexual men having feminine characteristics. Additionally, based on Connells (1987) hegemonic framework, in order to avoid scrutiny of sexual orientation, men must also avoid activities with connections to either feminine or homosexual interest. One such activity includes fashion consumption.

While men’s refusal to engage in fashion has been steadily changing, the connection between fashion and gender identity have remained. Based on Barry’s (2015) research, gender norms continue to play an important role in the choice of dress in regards to heterosexual men. Participants in this study expressed concern, often

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modifying their outfits in order to avoid potential scrutiny. Additionally, these men would often offset their sartorial elements to uphold hegemonic values and avoid putting their heterosexual identity into question (2015). The men in Barry's study noted that it was common for their sexuality to be questioned, and inferences that they were gay were often received due to their engagement in fashionable dress.

Heterosexuality: Straight Fashion Engagement

In summary, research suggests that men's fashion has an important role in the presentation of men's sexual identities. Both Kimmel (2003) and Connell (1987) assert that masculinity is the repudiation of the feminine and homosexuality, and the rejection of these two aspects continues to reinforce the interconnection between them.

Additionally, the portrayal of gay men in the media is often accompanied by their interest in consuming fashion (Fejes, Petrich 1993). This proves to be problematic, based on the research presented on the 'real' man that associates the non-real man to homosexuality and places the heterosexual male as the dominant group. Hegemonic masculine values dictate that heterosexual men must reject both homosexuality and homosexual pursuits, which the media has shown to be an interest in fashionable dress.

Baker, Gentry and Rittenberg (2005) indicate that male shoppers devote large amounts of time trying to access if certain products violate aspects of their sexual identity. This claim is further substantiated by Barry (2015) research; "participants asserted that gender norms combined with menswear trends made dressing difficult for men." The male informants from the Tuncay and Otnes (2008) study, discussed notions of identity vulnerability further substantiating the research of Baker, Gentry and Rittenberg. The male participants would routinely not discuss their interest in culturally

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regarded activities such as shopping or body maintenance for fear of appearing homosexual (Tuncay, Otnes 2008).

While men can engage in traditional forms of masculine dress such as the cowboy or blue-collar workers, non-traditional forms of dress cause both discomfort and dislike for male consumers. Furthermore, their engagement in these traditional forms of dress continue to proliferate the hegemonic masculine aesthetic, as archetypes such as the cowboy present a 'butch' form of masculinity (Cole, 2000). Therefore, based on previous research claims coupled with fashions inherent connection to both femininity and homosexuality, research suggests men do not engage in fashion due to both pressure to prove one's manhood and fear of scrutiny from other men. These factors parallel the ideal of traditional hegemonic masculinity. While the most recent research provides important concepts on heterosexual men and their consumption habits it should be noted that this research is relatively dated. As over the past 9 years we have seen a rise in online retailers, social media and an overall shifting landscape in regards to gender dynamics, the results provided by Tuncay and Otnes, published in 2008 suggests a gap in fashion research that warrants new analysis.

The past studies that have been presented above on the consumption habits of style conscious heterosexual males provides a basis for this research but overall the research is relatively dated. Therefore, this study will use Connell's framework of hegemonic masculinity to extend on previous theories of masculinity, sexual identity and fashion in an effort to analyze the consumption habits of fashion conscious males in the current 2017 cultural climate. More recent findings suggest that hegemonic values may

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be less influential on heterosexual males when they consume fashion, while analysis of these findings present otherwise.

This study proposes that while on the surface men do not actively subscribe to traditional hegemonic masculine values they continue to follow this hegemony on a subconscious level. Through upbringing and cultural influence, heterosexual men have been primed to follow hegemonic masculine ideals, which has led to a new mutation of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) state that hegemonic masculinity is difficult to eliminate as it constantly changes within different cultures. Although we now live in a more accepting culture this form of hegemony, has been learned and is not only invisible but also powerful due to heterosexual male's unknowing compliance. As the fashion consumption of heterosexuality and homosexuality continue to become increasingly difficult to separate, this study will develop a deeper understanding into how young, straight men engage with fashion and its ties to both traditional hegemony and as well as an invisible hegemonic masculine influence

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research explores young heterosexual men who view fashion as actively playing a role in their lives. A qualitative methodological approach was employed in order to uncover how men engage with fashionable dress and their thoughts regarding hegemonic masculinity and gender presentation. Therefore, this study seeks to uncover personal responses about sexuality and dress alongside men's motivations for consuming fashion. With this research objective in mind, a qualitative method best met the research objectives; the aim was to generate knowledge from people's subjective perspectives (Creswell 2007).

In depth, individual wardrobe interviews were used as the method due to their ability to yield rich insights into participant's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Wardrobe interviews elicited participant's personal accounts through engagement with their garments and this yielded more in-depth responses (Woodward 2016). Furthermore Woodward (2016) further asserts that materials encode memories and can be used to enrich descriptions by exploring the other senses such as touch. Lastly, given the societal tensions between fashion and heterosexuality, the individual nature of interviews generated a space where the participants felt less self-conscious about sharing their feelings on sensitive topics that may challenge traditional gender norms. Furthermore, they were not influenced by a group or other individuals (Barbour 120). Overall, the intimate nature of the interview coupled with the personal description of various garments, yielded rich insights into the factors that influence these men when they engage with fashion. Table 1 illustrates the participants various demographics; age, occupation and their self-identified race/ethnicity.

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Table 1 - Participant Demographic

Participant	Age	Occupation	Race/ Ethnicity
Participant 1	18	Retail Associate	African-Canadian
Participant 2	21	Retail Associate	East Asian
Participant 3	21	Freelance Photographer	Caucasian
Participant 4	21	Freelance Technician	Caucasian
Participant 5	21	Assistant Buyer	Caucasian
Participant 6	22	Server	East Asian
Participant 7	23	Retail Associate	East Asian
Participant 8	23	Self Employed	East Asian
Participant 9	24	Freelance Photographer	Caucasian
Participant 10	25	Intern	African-Canadian
Participant 11	22	Research Assistant	Caucasian
Participant 12	22	Student	South Asian

Data Collection

The sample was comprised of twelve men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who represented a diverse range of body sizes and ethnicities. In order to be eligible for this study, participants needed to identify as heterosexual as well as view fashion as an influencing factor in their lives. A recruitment poster was created that highlighted these eligibility requirements as well as gave a brief statement on the purpose of this study (see Appendix A). Additionally, by being a male researcher conducting all interviews, as well as sharing the same sexual identity as the participants, the intention

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was to create a rapport between the interviewer and interviewees in order facilitate greater disclosure on sensitive topics.

Participants were recruited using a self-selected snowball method; initial participants were contacted through my personal network. The participants were sent the recruitment poster, along with a consent form, via email. Upon completion of the interviews, the initial participants were asked for referrals from their various networks in order to acquire remaining participants. Once these participants expressed an interest in this study they were sent the recruitment poster and consent form via email. This process continued until 12 participants were interviewed. The broad range of ethnicities along with the variety of occupations allowed the greatest variety of responses in order to develop a robust understanding of young heterosexual men's attitudes towards consuming fashion.

The interview consisted of four parts, including initial questioning, viewing of the participants wardrobe, hegemonic masculinity questioning, and finally industry questioning. The participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions. Initial questions were used in order to develop a level of comfort for the participant, the participants were asked how they became interested in fashion, why they were interested in fashion, what motivated and inspired their style etc. Then we toured the participant's current wardrobe where they were asked to pick out various pieces based on personal feelings, meanings or histories attached to these garments. This developed an understanding of how particular garments materially evoked the sensory experiences and explored social relations (Woodward 2016).

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Photographs were taken of the participant's various clothing items and accessories that were discussed during the interview. The participants were then asked questions relating to hegemonic masculinity and sexual presentation. Finally, participants were asked various industry questions such as how they viewed the contemporary menswear industry and what direction men's fashion was heading. These questions enabled not only an understanding of the participant's personal relationship with fashion, but how they viewed the industry as well. As participants answered the various questions, they were probed to elaborate on the relationship between their dressing practices, and their sexual identities in relation to their clothing choices. Upon the conclusion of the interview the participants completed demographic questionnaires. Finally, the choice of my own apparel might have influenced the discussion based on a perceived level of fashion intelligence from the participants. In order to avoid any potential issues regarding the influential nature of clothing, a simple pair of straight leg denim, with either a navy sweatshirt or a white shirt was chosen. Wearing the same outfit for each interview allowed the control of another variable as well as presenting a neutral aesthetic.

Data Analysis

All in-depth interviews were audio-recorded during the interview session. Once the interviews were completed the audio recording were compiled and transcribed by using the online transcribing service, Rev.com. Once the transcriptions were completed the data was analyzed following an iterative process of data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles, Huberman 1994).

Five initial codes were identified based on the participants discussion; masculinity, shopping, homosexuality, restriction of dress, and aspects that caused

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frustration. These five codes were refined into three final codes which were then renamed; masculine presentation, shopping and femininity, and homosexual anxiety. Both restriction of dress and causes of frustration were either absorbed into these three codes or redacted. The twelve interviews lead to the emergence of clear patterns indicating theoretical saturation was reached (Guest, Bunce, Johnson 2006). As the basis of this study was to re-evaluate and update past research, the interviews were coded and three main categories were identified: Masculine presentation through dress, shopping for clothing as a feminine pursuit, and homosexual anxiety while consuming fashion. These categories were defined using results from past research in order to develop comprehensive themes and sub-themes. Finally, all the names of the participants were changed in order to protect the participant's anonymity.

Chapter 4: Findings & Analysis

Previous studies on the fashion consumption habits of young, style conscious heterosexual men present three main themes including masculine presentation, shopping as a feminine activity, and a cultural connection between fashionable dress and homosexuality. This research provides important evidence towards how these men engage with fashion, however this research is relatively dated. Initial findings of these themes suggest that men no longer actively subscribe to hegemonic masculine values but analysis of the findings suggest otherwise. Overall, there is a clear disconnect between how these participants view fashion and their consumption habits. This suggests that while men are not actively contributing to hegemonic masculine values, they continue to subscribe to hegemonic masculinity on a subconscious level. This new form of hegemonic masculinity has been culturally learned and is both invisible and powerful. Overall, these findings explore how straight men currently consume fashionable dress in the cultural landscape of 2017.

Findings - Masculinity & Presentation

As stated above, previous research on heterosexual men and fashion indicate that men wear items that present a traditional masculine aesthetic that encompasses hegemonic masculine values (Matthews, Hancock, Gu 2013). Examples of these masculine appearances include the cowboy and the lumberjack, both of which have often been associated with the traditional form of the robust male (Matthews, Hancock, Gu 2013). Furthermore, past research has shown that heterosexual men actively reject femininity and will avoid non-traditional items that may be associated to womenswear or express feminine undertones Pochmara (2008). Findings of this research suggest that

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presenting a hegemonic masculine aesthetic is much less prevalent influence when the men in this study engage in fashionable dress. When asked how masculinity played a role in their fashion consumption, a large number of participants stated that they did not ever consider masculinity when they shopped or put outfits together. This also corroborates the research of Barry (2015) who found that men are now more inclined to try non-traditional forms of dress.

While some men indicated that masculinity does play a factor in their dress, these men were referring to presenting their athletic figure and sought out clothes that complimented their bodies. Kyle expressed this while discussing what influences his dress, “I stopped wearing baggier clothes, because I wanted tighter fitting clothes, I guess to accentuate my build before? And that definitely plays a role.” When participants were probed further in regards to choosing masculine clothing or styles that denoted a heterosexual identity, all participants stated that this did not influence their fashion consumption habits. Furthermore, while discussing the current menswear industry, many participants cited the lack of menswear options as a site of frustration. These participants viewed the current selection as not only boring but also, noted that most menswear stores carry the same items, which results in a restriction of engaging in alternative forms of male fashion items.

When the participants were asked about wearing non-traditional masculine forms of dress the various participants stated that while they want new styles they would not be inclined to consume items such as a dress or a skirt. However, while these participants stated that they would not wear a dress, it was not due to fear of putting their masculinity into question but simply an item of clothing that they felt did not represent themselves

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personally. Francis asserted, “I’ve worn more feminine things before, it’s not because they are feminine; it’s just because I like them. Masculinity doesn’t affect me at all.”

These results indicate that the participants in this study did not actively dress in fashions that emulated a masculine archetype. Past research may have indicated that heterosexual men seek fashionable items that parallel hegemonic masculine ideals, Galilee (2002), this study contradicts these past results and illustrates that masculinity did not actively contribute to these men when they engaged with fashionable dress.

Analysis - Masculine Presentation

While an initial reading of these findings suggests that hegemonic masculinity does not play a role in fashion consumption, further analysis suggests the contrary. During the analysis of these findings, three themes arose. The three themes were the cultural stigma surrounding fashion and masculinity, dressing as a hegemonic archetype, participant’s views on non-traditional forms of dress, and the lack of new avenues of menswear. These themes provide evidence that while the participants do not actively present hegemonic masculine values, they continue to subscribe to these values on a subconscious level.

Fashion and masculinity. First, while the participants in this study stated that masculinity did not play an active role in their personal fashion consumption, many participants indicated that masculine values are culturally regarded as an opposition to that of fashion consumption. This correlated with Witkowski’s (1999) claim that fashion engagement is still culturally regarded as a feminine activity. This notion proved to be evident during the interview with Francis. While he was discussing his time in Japan he

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noted the differences in how the Japanese culture viewed the relationship between men and fashion,

“That's strange, okay. Fashion is kind of accepted here [Japan], I can see how in America it's not a masculine thing but for me, I purposefully disconnect myself from all that stuff anyway”.

This indicates that, while Francis states that it does not affect him on a personal level he views a negative cultural correlation between fashion and masculinity.

Hegemonic style tropes. The second theme revolved around dressing in a style that resembled a hegemonic masculine archetype. As stated above, common male styles include, the Ivy leaguer, the jock, the blue collar worker and the cowboy, which are all accepted in order to maintain an authentic masculine aesthetic (Matthews, Hancock, Gu 2013). During the interview no participants actively stated that they dressed a certain way that expressed a traditional masculine aesthetic, yet there were examples during the interview that illustrate that on a subconscious level, these participants were choosing styles that were inherently masculine. During the interview, Will discussed his admiration for flannel shirts,

“Then that's just like a new piece I really, really like. Just the flannel shirts are super awesome for the winter; this is warm, stylish. I don't know, something about the full button-up is kind of cool. I feel good in it.”

While Will may not associate flannel shirts to masculinity, these shirts directly relate to a standard masculine archetype, the lumberjack. A symbol of traditional hegemonic masculinity, the outfit consists of flannel shirts, jeans and boots (Cole 2000). Another masculine archetype that was present during the interviews was the military

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figure. Once again a symbol of masculinity, it was interesting to note that Francis stated that masculinity did not affect his choice of dress while discussing his interest in military garb,

“I find military scarves really useful...these are really cool, just camouflage pants.

These are like actual military pants... I believe on here it actually has the name of the guy who wore these in the military (see Appendix B-1, B-2).”

Furthermore, Francis also discussed a hat store he regularly visited, Goorin Brothers. He cited this location as a retail space where he purchases many wide brim hats that bare a striking resemblance to hats worn historically by cowboys. Yet another masculine archetype that Pochmara (2008) asserted as a timeless symbol of masculine ideals. Although these participants refuted that masculinity played a role in their consumption habits, many of their items were inspired from traditional masculine tropes.

Hegemonic archetypes were not the only sign of subconscious hegemonic masculine engagement. This was evident when participants were asked to describe their style as well. When asked how they would identify their style currently, the overwhelming response related to simplicity as well as a monochromatic color palette. Will responded, “so it’ll be like jeans, white tee shirt, or black tee shirt, really simple tones.” His response was similar to that of many participants. Francis stated,

“A lot of what I do is just simple black shirts, a lot of the stuff I have is black...

I’m simplifying it to just black pants, black shirt, brown belt.”

Jordan and James, shared a similar style respectively,

“Like casual with a regular black... It’s usually like black, blue and white,”

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“I have very limited options, that's the nice thing about my closet is I can just throw it on, it's all navy, black and grey. I don't really think about too much.”

While issues surrounding color were not asked, the monochromatic shades were a common thread that was discussed during the interviews. This aversion to color is not surprising as men have been culturally conditioned to avoid color in an effort to maintain a masculine aesthetic. The first edition of the book Dress for Success by John T. Molly (1964, 64) illustrates this point “Never wear pink or pale lavender shirts, which have negative masculine associations.” Furthermore, Pullen and Simpson (2009) note that when men wear pink, they combat conforming to masculine stereotypes, but wearing pink would put their masculinity into question. This demonstrates that the participants in this study have been culturally conditioned to avoid colors in order to affirm their masculinity. Additionally, many participants also cited blue as a color that they often gravitated towards, which again relates to this subconscious form of masculinity. Karniol (2011) asserts that from birth color is gendered, with young girls clothing primarily variations of pink and young boys clothing in mainly variations of blue.

Non-traditional forms of menswear. The third major finding during the analysis of this theme centered around the participants views on non-traditional forms of dress. During the interview, many participants referred to the skirt as an item that they would not actively wear, and while they may not actively cite hegemonic masculine ideals as the reason for their distaste, it can be surmised that these participants have been culturally taught to avoid items of dress that have connotations to femininity Kimmel (2003). This notion of subconscious distaste through cultural upbringing can be illustrated by the

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participant Jordan. During the interview, Jordan expressed his admiration for how his co-workers dress,

“The people I work with, they have sick style. Sometimes they go into extremes, like actual women’s clothing. I try to go more on the men’s side, that's the only thing.”

This indicates that while Jordan approves of how his co-workers dress, he would not engage in the feminine sartorial items that his co-workers wear. Additionally, during the wardrobe analysis of the interview, Jordan expressed his interest in long tee shirts.

“What else do we have here, long tee, super long tee. Almost goes to my knees, see you wear it under that sweater for example and it gives you that street style... I have other long tees but they are either in my hamper or Hamilton where I live but yeah I have like 3 more (see Appendix B-3).”

This proves to be an interesting point of contention, as the ‘long tee’ has been traditionally a womenswear garment. While Jordan would not engage in actively wearing women’s items, it would be interesting if Jordan would wear this item if it was called a t-shirt dress as it is aptly named in women’s apparel. Another example of this was found during the interview with Will who also actively rejected wearing women’s items of clothing yet, while discussing stores that he visits on a regular basis, he discussed wearing leggings.

“Sport Chek, I could definitely buy anything there... I know I can rock leggings, compression shorts, whatever. It's pretty uniform on that sense.”

Once again, this is an example of a women’s item, leggings, that Will chooses to engage with due to its associations to sport, a masculine trope. This enables him to wear the item,

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while still presenting a masculine aesthetic. Lastly, the third example of the subconscious nature of masculine values in dress comes from Francis, a participant who actively recognizes that he wear women's items of clothing. “

“I wear women's jackets just because they catch my eye, and who cares right? For me personally I don't think it affects me as much whether I come across as one way or another, but I do get a lot of people questioning me.”

While Francis states that masculine presentation does not play a role, the two women's jackets that he showed to me during the interview were a tweed blazer and a denim jacket. While they may have been women's items, Francis still chose pieces of clothing that have their origins in menswear, indicating that a masculine aesthetic is still subconsciously being pursued.

The notion of men wearing womenswear that is inherently masculine can also be observed at an industry level. As brands have begun to produce clothing lines that are labeled as ‘gender neutral,’ many of these collections are inherently masculine, and thus subscribing to hegemonic masculine values. One such example is Zara, who released a “16-piece collection of unisex items including jeans, shorts, sweatshirts, shirts and jumpers - all in neutral colors (black, white, grey). (“Zara Joins The Gender Fluid Movement,” 2016). Zara has produced a collection with the intention of blurring the rigid lines of men's and women's dress, yet every piece in the collection has ties to traditional menswear items. Not one piece in the sixteen-item collection has its roots in womenswear, and their choice of a neutral color palette, which as stated above, also has its connections to masculine ideals, further exemplifies this subscription to hegemony.

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These examples indicate that while participants may not consciously confirm the influence of masculinity, it clearly plays an underlying role in their stylistic choice, on a subconscious level. The participants in this study state that they do not feel that feminine items represent them yet, if these items are presented with masculine characteristics these same participants have developed an inherent understanding that it then becomes a valid item that they choose to wear. As previously noted, Beynon (2002) states that men are acculturated into the masculine gender category, these examples illustrate this point as it could be argued their non-willingness to engage in non-traditional forms of dress can be attributed to a cultural learning throughout their lives.

Another area that warrants further discussion revolved around the notion that the participants were not only bored with the traditional forms of dress but also wanted to explore new avenues of clothing. Many participants expressed frustration as they felt that men's fashion was restricted to either simply traditional items, and items that they felt were too fashion forward for them. What proved to be interesting about this point is that when participants were asked what inspired them to try new, non-traditional items, participants needed validation from other men prior to engaging in new items. This was illustrated during the interview with Will,

“There almost needs to be some sort of a general acceptance from guys that you're saying you want the new styles, I don't know how, but just somehow validated as the new style came out, then maybe you'd be more inclined to try them.”

Once again, this relates to hegemonic masculine values. According to Rawaeyn Connell (1987), masculinity is validated through repudiation of the feminine and can only be validated by other men. This framework corroborates the results from in this study as

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well. When participants were asked if their girlfriends influenced their sartorial choices, many participants stated that their girlfriends did not affect their dress. Marcus said that while a girlfriend did not affect his consumption habits, other males would influence his choice of dress, “I never wear polo’s but I’ve considered it because it looks nice on certain guys.” This notion was also evident with Kyle who also alleged that while a female counterpart would not affect his choice to engage in new forms of dress other men proved to be a strong influencing factor.

“I guess that's how I bought this long coat. I saw someone else wearing a long coat and I was like, "Wow, I should buy a long coat," and I bought that long coat (see Appendix B-4).”

Finally, this idea of male validation was a factor that caused a level of frustration with certain participants. Will for example was frustrated with the lack of choice but felt that other males needed to adopt a trend before he could consider wearing new items of clothing.

“I just know that A, there's a lack of diversity in the menswear section where we only have limited things to pick from, but then as soon as you break that mold then there's suddenly stereotypes around it. There almost needs to be some sort of a general acceptance from guys that you're saying you want the new styles... just somehow validated as the new style came out, then maybe you'd be more inclined to try them.”

These examples illustrate that male validation proves to be a major influential factor in the adoption of new forms of dress, and this notion of males validating masculinity through dress directly relates to Connell’s hegemonic masculine framework.

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In summary, although the initial results illustrate that perhaps the power of hegemony on heterosexual men's fashion may be weakening, further analysis indicates that while the participants may not be affected by masculine presentation, on a conscious level, they have been culturally taught to subscribe to these values and subconsciously continue to uphold hegemonic norms. First, while participants stated that masculinity did not affect their dress on a personal level, they recognized its influence on fashion from a cultural perspective. This is in line with the research of Barry and Martin (2015) who assert the genders norms have deep roots and are continually culturally enforced. The participants are aware that on some level, masculinity does play a factor in the menswear industry and by consuming contemporary fashion they are subjecting themselves to hegemonic values.

Second, while participants may have stated that they do not actively seek inspiration from traditional masculine style tropes such as the lumberjack or the cowboy, various participants continue to reflect these aesthetics in their dress. Third, although participants cited a simple distaste for non-traditional menswear items such as womenswear, further analysis revealed that they did in fact wear certain styles that are established in women's fashion. Interestingly they only wore these items when they were marketed with a masculine theme attached to the particular item. Additionally, when participants did indicate that they were wearing women's items of clothing, these items had their roots in traditional menswear, which continues to validate the notion of a subconscious, learned hegemony Beynon (2002).

Finally, the participants in this study were interested in finding new avenues to develop their style, yet this exploration was limited as male validation was influential in

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consuming new items of clothing. This level of influence proved to be powerful as certain participants stated that while they were interested in engaging with a new item of clothing, they would wait until other men had adopted and validated the new style. This notion of male validation correlates with Connell's framework as other males can only validate one's masculinity. Overall, while initial findings suggest that masculinity plays a far lesser factor in the fashion consumption habits of heterosexual males, analysis suggests that this masculine influence is still culturally engrained in these participants and they continue to subconsciously subscribe to masculine hegemony.

Findings – Shopping & Femininity

The second major theme that was investigated revolves around fashion consumption as an inherently feminine activity. As stated above, previous studies indicate that men felt that they were engaging in a feminine vice when they consumed fashion (Tuncay, Otnes 2008). Results from the interviews indicate that past results prove not to corroborate with the responses of the men in this research study. The majority of the participants did not feel that shopping for fashionable dress was a feminine activity, nor was it a cause for anxiety or fear of putting their masculinity into question.

When Will was asked if he felt that he was engaging in a feminine activity while shopping for clothing he responded: "I'm not worried to pick things up and go shopping. I don't feel out of place anymore. I'm more confident in what I'm looking for." However, several participants indicated during their adolescence they did not have the level of comfort in the shopping arena that they currently possess. When Will was asked if he felt that shopping for dress was a female activity he responded,

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“I did for a while, I hated shopping for a really long time. I enjoy it now. I think when I used to feel that it was more of a female arena, I wasn’t as secure about the way I looked or dressed...Now I feel like, yeah, I can go out and dress well, I’m not worried to pick things up and actually go shopping. I don’t feel out of place anymore necessarily...I’m more confident in what I’m looking for.

Jonathan shared this sentiment as well, who also felt that in his younger years, shopping for clothing had associations to femininity.

“I think people perceive it as that but I don’t give a shit to be honest, I just don’t look at it that way. I’ve gone through that whole “you’re so feminine by being into fashion.” I went through that in grade 12, it’s not that I was bullied but I felt it. I’ve gotten to the point now where I’m comfortable enough saying that I really don’t care.”

While certain participants shared the views of Jonathan and Will, who have developed a level of comfort, other participants still felt anxious when they shopped for fashionable dress. However, this was not due to any feminine associations with the act of shopping but instead due to confusion on how to shop and put outfits together. Many participants felt that they lacked a level of what I define as ‘retailer knowledge.’ Participants felt confusion in the retail space in regards to creating outfits, and this often caused frustration. Participants indicated that they brought their female friends when they shopped, in order to help them buy clothing as they felt as though this knowledge was inherent in their female friends. Many participants indicated that they felt uncomfortable in fashion retailers because they did not feel as though they knew how to shop properly. Although Will indicated that he feels confident shopping for clothing currently, he

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discussed how he shops with female friends in order to alleviate the anxiety that he faced when he initially began to engage with fashion.

“I used to go shopping with a lot of my girlfriends, not girlfriends but friends who are females, because yeah, I guess they had more of a fashion sense and so on... you kind of trust this goes with this... that’s what they’ll pick out.”

Additionally, several participants stated they were eager to make up for lost time and develop this ‘retailer knowledge’ but they felt as though this information was difficult to find in regards to men’s fashion. Many participants felt that fashion was marketed primarily towards females and while there were media outlets that marketed fashion to men, it chiefly consisted of traditional menswear such as suits and business wear. Once again, this point was highlighted by James, who discussed his frustration with menswear information outlets,

“I just get frustrated, no one has ever taught me how to shop. I can look through magazines but a lot of those tend to detail into higher, business wear or suits...In magazines it seems more like a footnote and it’s frustrating.”

Overall, these findings illustrate that while femininity may not cause anxiety for these participants when shopping for clothing, this lack of ‘retailer knowledge’ proves to cause confusion and be a restricting factor on their engagement with dress. While some participants felt that shopping no longer caused any discomfort these participants still understood the frustrating sensation caused by this confusion. Additionally, those who have sought out this information to better educate themselves on men’s fashion have found it difficult citing two major obstacles. The first was a perceived lack of menswear

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informational outlets, and the second was the fact that the outlets primarily discussed business wear in favor of day-to-day style management.

Analysis - Shopping & Femininity

The participants in the study were adamant that shopping was not a feminine activity nor did it contributed to stress based on a perceived connection to femininity. Once again, while the participant's responses indicate that perhaps the influence hegemonic values may be lessening, further analysis demonstrated that subconscious hegemony is still very prominent. Initial findings suggest that overall the majority of participants in this study do not view shopping for clothing as a female activity. This suggests that these men are not influenced by hegemonic masculine values and do not feel that they are putting their masculinity into question by shopping for fashionable dress. However, further analysis would argue that these men are continuing to follow hegemonic masculine attributes through their subconscious actions and thoughts on fashions connection to femininity.

Analysis of these findings provided three major themes; a cultural connection to femininity and shopping, a lack of 'retailer knowledge', and a difficulty in developing knowledge on menswear. These three themes provide evidence that on a subconscious level the participants still connect consuming fashionable dress with femininity and this connection has been established through cultural learning as well as marketing.

Shopping as a feminine pursuit. The first major theme that was presented through the analysis of the findings revolves around the perceived connection femininity has with shopping in today's culture. When asked what their thoughts were in regards to the relationship between shopping and femininity, participants in this study indicated that

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on a personal level shopping for clothing did not have feminine connotations nor did it cause anxiety, while they purchased fashionable dress. However, numerous participants also indicated that although they feel comfortable currently, at a younger age they did not share the same level of comfort in the retail space. Participants such as Will, stated that he felt “out of place,” when he began to engage in fashionable dress. This feeling of lack of belonging could be explained for two reasons. First the discomfort that the participants experienced could be attributed to the lack of fashion consumption throughout their lives. Fashion is not marketed to young boys and is culturally viewed as a female pursuit (Galilee 2002) which explains the anxiety they felt when they did begin to enter retail spaces. Secondly, research presented by Shannon (2004) illustrates that the act of consuming fashion and the very arena in which one buys clothing has traditionally been occupied by women.

The overall lack of attention devoted to male attire has become naturalized; leading to this culturally perceived view, that fashion is a female arena (Beward 2010). This has contributed to the discomfort that is felt by men when they begin to develop an interest in fashionable dress (Tuncay, Otnes 2008). Jonathan highlighted this point when he stated that he understood the cultural held view that shopping was connected to femininity, “I’ve gone through that whole “you’re so feminine by being into fashion.” Therefore, while these participants may not actively view shopping for fashion as feminine, they recognize that they did not always share this view, and this connection has been reinforced throughout their lives.

Lack of ‘retailer knowledge.’ The second major theme that was present during the analysis was the notion of what I define as ‘retailer knowledge’ or lack there of, in

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regards to several participants in this study. Many participants stated that one aspect of the shopping experience that elicited frustration was this notion that they did not feel comfortable in the retail space due to a lack of understanding of fashion in general. James highlighted this lack of ‘retailer knowledge’ during his interview, as he did not feel he had a strong understanding of what style of shoes would go with his new outfit.

“I thought the rest of me is getting professional but I’m still wearing these bright blue sneakers everywhere I go. So I would walk through the mall and look at men who had similar or not to contrasting styles and what shoes they were wearing. I would look at what other people were wearing.”

This lack of fashion understanding was also observed by fashion retail employee Jordan, who noticed that male shoppers ask a significant amount of questions.

“When I started at H&M I worked at the three ladies sections and then the men’s and out of all of them the men ask the most questions. I feel like it’s hard for men to find clothes.”

This perceived lack of ‘retailer knowledge’ once again highlights the hegemonic masculine values that were ingrained in these participants during their socialization. It indicates that they did not engage with fashion at a young age and now have to develop this knowledge. The non-engagement in fashion could be attributed to the notion that fashion is coded as feminine (Shannon 2004). Additionally, participants felt confused choosing styles or clothing and would look to their female friends for aid, as the women seemingly had this ingrained knowledge when engaging with fashion. James expressed this confusion while discussing his shopping habits, and cited his female friends as cotes of expertise,

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“It’s not that it’s feminine it’s that I feel confused on what I’m doing and I don’t like it sometimes... Yeah I fully admit, I bring my female friends with me because they do it so much more often. I don’t think it’s a feminine activity or feel like it’s a feminine activity but I’m like I don’t know what I’m doing, help me.”

The participants view that their female friends have a better understanding further supports the notion of learned cultural hegemony, that their female friends have this ‘retailer knowledge’ that the participants don’t feel that they possess. While the men in this study did not view shopping as a feminine activity, they continue to foster these hegemonic masculine views.

Developing knowledge on menswear. Finally, throughout the interview process, the men in this research study indicated that while they may not have the fashion knowledge that they see in their female counterparts, they are eager to make up for lost time. However, the participants have expressed frustration in the lack of outlets to garner this information. Several participants in this study indicated that they felt as though fashion was primarily marketed towards women, and this deterred their overall engagement in retail venues. This lack of marketing in menswear once again continues to foster the notion that fashion is primarily for the female consumer (Steele 2000). The general lack of marketing towards menswear also continues to facilitate hegemonic masculine ideals as men continue to feel unimportant (Frith, Gleeson 2004). This equates to a lack of visibility in fashion retailers, which further cements the notion that shopping for fashionable dress is culturally seen as a feminine. Francis illustrated this point through his observations in Japan,

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“You know how in America, North America, you have a three floor store, two floors are women’s, and one is men’s. In Japan, it’s the opposite.”

This quote illustrates how the marketing of fashion can be used to combat the hegemonic masculine ideals and helps to establish a male presence in retail spaces. Additionally, other participants have sought out this information in online spaces. Both Carl, and Jonathan discussed the online website *www.grailed.com* as a site that they frequent. This site primarily operates as a strictly menswear consignment website where men can purchase used clothing from other men across the globe. The site also produces a wide variety of educational content that details the history of brands, current trends and celebrity attire etc. Darren, also discussed online groups that he is a member of where men can share and exchange knowledge on menswear products,

“Social media is huge, especially on dedicated forums, so stuff like Style Forum, KanyeToThe, those guys are comfortable with spending a lot more money than I am comfortable spending... I’m part of a bunch of buy, sell or trade groups and you can see guys like, “Oh I can that Balmain jeans fake.” It’s like, how? “Oh the tag is wrong.” But it’s like the blurriest photo and then they’ll be right.”

These sites are a location where men freely engage in fashion discussion with other like-minded male consumers; this ‘safe space.’ Barry and Martin (2015, 15) assert, “males are more likely to experiment with sartorial statements that defy hegemonic masculinity when in ‘safe’ spaces that encourage creative dress.” The online sphere allows for a space where men can discuss fashion with other sartorial inclined men without fear of judgment or persecution, but at the same time, engaging in the online sphere leads to a lack of visibility of men in the brick and mortar retail space. These

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groups provide knowledge to male consumers but the online presence continues to create the illusion that fashion retailers are a female majority occupied space and thus a female activity.

Overall, past research indicates that men view shopping as a female activity, while the findings in this study suggest the contrary. The majority of men in this study indicated that they did not view fashion consumption as feminine and were comfortable shopping for fashionable dress. Although femininity was not a cause for concern, the participants in this study expressed a level of frustration with a lack of fashion understanding in regards to putting together certain looks or styles. This lack of 'retailer knowledge' caused several participants to bring their female friends when they shopped for clothing as the participants felt that their female friends had a high level of fashion expertise. Finally, the participants stated that they wanted to further develop their fashion knowledge but felt hindered by the lack of easily accessible information on menswear.

These findings suggest that hegemonic values do not prove to be influential on the shopping patterns of the participants in this study but further analysis suggest that they continue to subscribe to hegemonic masculine values while they engage in fashion consumption. The participants expressed a level of comfort that was not always apparent during their initial entrance into the fashion retail environment. They described that this initial uncomfortable feeling was due to the cultural associations that shopping for clothing was feminine in nature, and that they did feel that they belonged in the fashion retailers.

This notion of men's non-engagement in fashion until their later years was further supported by their views on their female friends. The participants suggested that females

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have a better sense of fashion and style, indicating a connection between shopping for fashionable dress and the feminine. These points demonstrate a cultural view that females have developed this sense of style throughout their upbringing while men do not share this 'retailer knowledge' due to their non-engagement until later in life.

Next, the participants discussed the lack of accessibility in developing a better understanding of fashion and style as a deterrent in their consumption of fashion. James, described feeling like a "footnote" as a male consumer, and would often leave a store due to the confusion he felt. This is supported by Breward's (2010) research that illustrates that the lack of attention devoted to menswear has provided the current definitions of normative male dress and consumption practices. Certain participants stated that they found information on menswear through online forums, where they could openly discuss particular fashions and trends with other men who shared their interests, thus facilitating an exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, they felt that the general view of the contemporary fashion industry was that fashion was primarily marketed to females and menswear was unimportant. This led certain participants to avoid popular retail locations. While these sites provide a 'safe space' for men to engage in fashion discussion it also continues to drive hegemonic masculinity as it creates a lack of visible men in retail locations. This continues to establish that fashion retail spaces are primarily occupied by women and thus continues to subscribe to hegemonic masculine values.

Findings - Homosexuality & Fashion

The third theme I wanted to explore was fashion's relationship to homosexuality. As research has indicated, there seems to be a culturally held view that fashion and homosexuality are interconnected (Tuncay, Otnes 2008). While this may have been the

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case in the past, this study produced results to the contrary. When participants were asked what their thoughts were regarding fashion and homosexuality. The majority of the responses indicated that homosexuality was never a cause for concern while men consumed fashionable dress. The participants did not feel anxiety in regards to their sexual identity or felt that it was a deterrent in consuming fashion. When Jordan was asked what his views were on fashion's relationship to homosexuality he responded,

“Funny story is that I bought these jeans online, and it didn't fit my size. They were really tight on my legs and my girlfriend was like, “ you look kind of gay because it looks like tights.” It didn't really matter to me because I wore it the next day.”

This quote illustrates that presenting a homosexual appearance does not prove to be an influencing factor on Jordan's choice of dress. Several participants stated that they understood that this was a culturally held view but this did not affect their involvement in fashionable dress. Tuncay, and Otnes (2008) research validate this notion, although there is no natural relationship between fashion and homosexuality, advertisers and marketers continue to construct these stereotypical associations. Will demonstrated this view during his interview while we were discussing the fashion's relationship to homosexuality.

“I've gotten to the point now where I don't care what people think, but yeah, there was an instance back before where I wouldn't buy something... I think there is a fear of wow, you dress really well, or you think people might assume that you're gay.”

Will stated that on a personal level, homosexuality does not affect his choice of dress but he understands the cultural connection between homosexual men and fashion as a

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deterrent for other heterosexual men to engage with fashion consumption. Additionally, many participants questioned this view entirely as an area of thinking that shouldn't associate these connections. While discussing fashion and homosexuality James stated, "I can't make sense of it in my head with the type of people who would associate the clothing you are wearing that you are gay." This was common with other participants as well. During Jonathan's interview, he shared his views on fashion's cultural connection as an ignorant tool for indicating one's sexuality identity.

"I don't think dressing well has anything to do with your sexuality. That's my thing, if someone is going to talk shit to someone else because they dress well, it has nothing to do with sexuality, and the other person is just stupid. That makes no sense at all; there is no connection to sexuality."

The participants were also asked if they restricted their dress in an effort to present heterosexual. When participants were asked if they ever wanted an item of clothing but restricted their dress in an effort to maintain a heterosexual presentation, the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that presenting straight did not play a role in the fashion consumption. Jonathan stated,

"If I see something I'm not like "this is too gay", I'm more like "I can't see myself wearing it." Is that because it makes me look homosexual? That isn't something I have thought of. I think of if the item makes sense in my wardrobe, can I wear this everyday, am I comfortable wearing this. But does this make me look homosexual isn't something that crosses my mind."

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Jonathan attests that his non-engagement to certain products was due to his distaste for the item and not due to any homosexual connection. Will also shared these sentiments when asked about restriction of dress.

“I don’t like patterns necessarily. I don’t like things, like I say floral patterns because that’s the first thing that comes to mind... or something that’s a bit more in your face. I just don’t personally like that.”

The notion that the participants did not reject items for fear of presenting homosexual was common among the men in this study. Moreover, a common thread among the participants was an expression of admiration for homosexual style. Several participants were adamant that they often took style inspiration from their homosexual friends and were not opposed to dressing in items that were similar to homosexual men. This point was evident during the interviews with both Jordan and Marcus who expressed admiration for the fashion choices of homosexual men and would wear items of a similar aesthetic to achieve a fashionable look.

“Gay guys dress really cool. Sometimes I try to follow them, especially the people I work with, and they have sick style.”

“I rock what I like, right? Some gay guys dress better than I do, depending on what they wear it works for them. I’ll try and copy because it works.”

Overall, past research indicates that there is a cultural connection between homosexuality and fashion in regards to menswear. This connection has proven to be a point of anxiety for heterosexual men when they engage with fashion, as they do not want to put their sexuality into question (Galilee 2002). Additionally, past research indicates that heterosexual men actively restrict their dress and will not wear certain items for fear

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of presenting homosexual. (Barry 2015). These findings suggest that while past research has found that men actively refute and avoid certain styles or articles of clothing due to a perceived connection to homosexuality, the participants in this study expressed admiration for the style of their homosexual friends, and did not view homosexuality as a deterrent while they consumed menswear. Although the men in this study acknowledged the connection, the majority of participants in this study stated that they were unaffected by this perceived relationship between fashion and homosexuality. This leads to the notion that the cultural ties relating to hegemonic values may be loosening as the participants in this study stated that they are not affected by homosexuality when they engage in fashionable dress.

Analysis - Homosexuality & Fashion

Initial findings suggest that contrary to past research, the majority of participants in this study don't feel that engaging with fashion would put their heterosexual identity into question. However, analyses of these findings have uncovered three major themes that illustrate that the participants continue to subscribe to hegemonic masculine tropes. These three themes are as follows; several participants still culturally view a connection between fashion and homosexuality; there is an association between certain styles or patterns and homosexuality; and finally the gay man as an exemplar of style. Although the participants in this study did not actively subscribe to hegemonic masculine principles while they engaged in fashion, further analysis suggests that they have learned to obey hegemonic norms while they consume men's fashion.

Cultural connection between fashion and homosexuality. When asked about fashion and homosexuality, the majority of participants stated that they were unaffected

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by this perceived connection while they engaged with fashion. On a conscious level, they did not view a relationship between fashion and homosexuality. However, analysis of the interviews found many instances where participants contradicted their conscious claims. Although, participants stated that they did not view fashion as an indicator of homosexuality throughout the interview they continued to foster this stigma on a subconscious level. Francis exhibited this notion when he discussed how he is often asked about his sexual identity.

“A lot of people will be like, “you’re straight?” “Yes I am.” Just because I like big hats, and jackets, and boots doesn’t mean anything. It doesn’t phase me like it used to I guess, if that’s a good way of summing it up.”

This quote illustrates that while Francis did not view fashion as an indicator of sexuality, in this instance he associated the inquiring of his sexual identity to his personal fashion choices. While other aspects may put his identity into question, he viewed fashion as the primary source of the scrutiny. Although Francis may not actively contribute to the stigma, his subconscious actions continue to establish the connection between fashion and homosexuality. Jonathan also demonstrated this inherent connection between style and gay identity when he discussed an experience of going back to his hometown. Jonathan stated that while his sexual identity is often questioned, it does not cause anxiety.

“It’s not really a problem. When I’m hanging out with people from back home who don’t really get it... I’m completely comfortable with myself so I think people back home or strangers can probably tell.”

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In much the same way as Francis, Jonathan associated the questioning of his heterosexuality to his choice of fashionable dress. Therefore, while he actively refutes the idea of fashion being connected to homosexuality, in this instance, on a subconscious level he still does associate his fashionable presentation as an indicator of homosexuality. This association may be due to the portrayal of gay men in the media; Fejes, Petrich (1993) suggest that the portrayal of gay men in popular culture are exhibited negatively often associating the gay man with both fashion and feminine characteristics.

Items of dress as indicators of sexual identity. During the interview process, participants were asked if they ever restricted aspects of their dress in order to present a heterosexual identity. The initial findings demonstrate that the participants did not restrict their dress or avoid certain items due to homosexual connotations but instead chose not to wear certain items due to distaste in the style or aesthetic. However, it could be argued that hegemony continues to influence these decisions as certain items are culturally regarded as connected to homosexuality, and therefore must be rejected as a heterosexual male. Throughout the interview with Will, he discussed his distaste for floral patterns but when probed as to why he did not like the floral aesthetic he simply did not feel it was representative of his style.

“I don’t want to say it’s necessarily that oh, I’m scared of looking gay. It’s more like; I don’t want to wear flowers because it’s kind of girly or whatever. I don’t know. I guess that’s the best way I can answer it.”

While Will does not actively refute floral patterns for fear of putting his identity into question it can be surmised that he has been culturally primed to avoid this pattern in order to maintain a hegemonic masculine aesthetic. (Connell 1987). These connections

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with certain items of clothing and homosexuality were evident throughout the interviews. While discussing homosexuality and dress, Jordan discussed how although he does not fear presenting a culturally perceived homosexual aesthetic, items such as tights and leather pants he chooses to avoid.

“Yeah that's the only thing, leather pants, guys don't usually wear leather pants so I guess it would be the one thing that kind of makes me feel like I look gay so I don't think I would buy it.”

Once again, while Jordan does not actively seek out styles that present a heterosexual aesthetic, this quote illustrates how he has developed connections to certain items of clothing and homosexuality, specifically leather pants. In this instance, Jordan establishes that men don't wear leather pants; moreover leather pants are associated to a gay identity. This demonstrates that on a subconscious level there is a disconnect between 'men' and 'homosexuality.' Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that the notion of a 'Real man' constructs hegemonic masculinity in society as well as strengthens the connections between subordinate masculinity and homosexuality, validate this claim.

The gay man as a style exemplar. Throughout the interview process, many participants cited homosexual men as having great style. Furthermore, these men said that often they would look to their homosexual friends for fashion inspiration and would emulate aspects of their dress in order to present a fashionable aesthetic. Furthermore, the participants viewed homosexual men, as having a much stronger grasp on current styles and trends, and the participants would often look to these men for style advice or help in retail settings. While discussing Will's shopping habits he discussed how shopping has

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become a social activity, and cited homosexual men as the epitome of company while shopping for clothing due to their sense of style.

“I’ll go shopping with someone just because it becomes this social activity.

Generally that’ll be a girl because most of my guy friends are like, “I’m not going shopping with a guy,” unless it’s one of my gay friends who it’s like, great, that’s even better because their style sense is even better than my girlfriends.’ I love shopping with people who also enjoy shopping.”

Although Will stated in his interview that he is not affected by homosexuality when he shops for menswear, this quote highlights that he continues to subscribe to hegemonic masculine values relating to gay men and fashion at a subconscious level.

Tuncay and Otnes (2008) argue that there is a seemingly widespread cultural assumption that gay men possess more expertise in fashion. Will appears to share this sentiment. Initially he states that two men shopping together would put their sexual identity into question, indicating that shopping for clothing is a homosexual activity. Then he illustrates that he views gay men as the exemplars of fashion through his appreciation with shopping with homosexual men as they have a good sense of style. Finally, by stating that he enjoys shopping with people who also enjoy shopping he implies that homosexual men enjoy shopping, which further establishes a connection between fashion, shopping and homosexuality.

These points can be further illustrated through comments found during the interview with Jordan. Throughout the interview Jordan expressed admiration for the styles of his homosexual friends expressing they were often sites of inspiration for his sartorial choices.

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“I work with a lot of gay guys at my work, to me it doesn’t look gay, it looks cool.

Depends right? If they are dressing like a girl but they are not, they are dressing nice. To some people dressing nice can look gay but to me it looks cool.”

Once again, this statement continues to foster the connections between fashion and homosexuality. By using gay men as style conduits, Jordan as well as other participants, continue to reinforce that stereotypically gay men possess a good style. The participants were asked what they thought about homosexuality and fashion, without probing, the participants would often cite gay men as having a good fashion sense, which reinforces a subscription to hegemonic masculinity (Tuncay, Otnes 2008).

In summary, the findings provide evidence that contradicts past research on the views of fashion and homosexuality. Previous studies indicated that men were often fearful of engaging with fashion due to fear of scrutiny of their sexual identity (Kimmell 2003). The findings of this study suggest otherwise, as the majority of participants stated that homosexuality was rarely a cause for concern when they engaged in fashionable dress. On the surface, this indicates that these participants are no longer following the ideals that support hegemonic masculinity, and do not understand the cultural connection between fashion and the gay man. For example, Jonathan stated at the conclusion of the interview, “There’s just no connection in my opinion in presenting yourself properly and being homosexual.” Other participants shared this viewpoint citing fashionable dress as an ignorant indicator of one’s sexual identity. These findings provide a positive outlook that traditional hegemonic masculine values may be on the decline but further analysis suggests that while the participants actively refute the perceived cultural connection

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between fashion and gay men they continue to subscribe to these stereotypes on a subconscious level.

Initially, several participants stated that they did not feel as though dress was an indicator of homosexuality yet when others questioned their identity, they often stated that their choice of dress was the cause. Although other aspects could contribute to presenting homosexual, the participants viewed dress as the source, which continues to establish the connection between fashion and homosexuality. This correlates with the results found in Barry's (2015) study where participants would often offset their sartorial elements to uphold hegemonic values and avoid putting their heterosexual identity into question. Furthermore, while participants stated that homosexuality did not affect their choice of dress, nor did they restrict their dress in favor of a heterosexual presentation, these men continued to choose clothing that followed traditional hegemonic principles and often avoided items that they felt had associations to the gay community. The participants demonstrated through their responses that these items have connections to both femininity and homosexuality and as such warranted rejection. This proves to be a destructive force; as stated previously, both Kimmel (1994) and Connell (1987) assert that masculinity is the repudiation of the feminine and homosexuality, and the rejection of these two attributes continues to reinforce the interconnection between them.

Finally, several participants were adamant that they often looked to gay men for style influence or advice. Once again, this initial finding suggests that the participants were not fearful of putting their sexual identity into question. But by establishing the gay man as an exemplar of style, the participants are continuing to foster the notion that gay men have an affiliation with fashion. In conclusion, initial findings suggest that while

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previous men actively reinforced traditional hegemonic ideals in regards to fashion and homosexuality, the participants in this study actively refute these very ideal. Yet, further analysis proposes that this active reinforcement has been replaced by a subconscious subscription to traditional masculine hegemony. These participants continue to foster the stereotypes between gay men and fashion through culturally ingrained hegemonic principles, which continue to influence their thoughts and actions surrounding fashions association to homosexuality.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The central aim of this study was to analyze the relationship between young heterosexual men, and fashionable dress and to explore how these men engage with traditional hegemonic masculine values while they consume menswear. In order to do so, a triangle of connectivity was developed in order to better understand how factors such as masculinity, femininity and homosexuality contributed to the consumption of fashion. Initial findings of this study contradicted the findings of past research throughout three main themes, including the presentation of a masculine aesthetic, the notion that shopping is a female activity, and finally sexual identity vulnerability due to fashion's cultural connection to homosexuality. These contradictions highlight that perhaps the power of hegemonic masculinity may be weakening in regards to heterosexual male fashion engagement. Further examination of these findings however suggested otherwise. Based on the analysis it can be surmised that although the participants in this study are not actively following traditional hegemonic masculine values, they have been culturally learned and continue to exist on a subconscious level. While the participants actively refute the findings from past research they continue to uphold hegemonic masculinity through their engagement with fashion. This new form of hegemony is not only invisible but also powerful as it continues to influence the consumption habits of heterosexual men and operate on contemporary menswear as a whole. Overall, this study makes an important contribution to the literature on men's fashion as it highlights this new mutation of hegemonic masculinity that must be recognized before its power can begin to be disseminated.

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The first major contradiction revolved around subscribing to a masculine aesthetic. While previous research indicated that straight men, actively seek styles to present their masculinity, the majority of the participants in this study contradicted these claims. When asked about masculinity, participants indicated that they did not ever consider masculinity when they shopped or put outfits together. The second major theme investigated shopping as a feminine activity. While past studies indicated that men felt that they were engaging in a feminine vice when they consumed fashion, the participants in this study did not share these views. While some participants indicated that they brought their female friends when they shopped they were quick to indicate that this was not due to femininity but instead to get their options on the clothing items.

The third major theme involved the connection of fashion to homosexuality. As research has indicated, there seems to be a culturally held view that fashion and homosexuality is interconnected. While this may have been the case in past research, this study produced results to the contrary. When participants were asked what their thoughts were regarding fashion and homosexuality, again the majority of the respondents indicated that this was never a cause for concern. Finally, when discussing the act of presenting a heterosexual identity, results showed that the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that presenting straight did not play a role in their fashion consumption. In fact, the majority of participants expressed admiration for homosexual style and had no problem dressing in clothing items that were similar to their homosexual friends.

Although the findings from this study have provided grounds that perhaps hegemonic masculinity may be losing its influence on the consumption habits of

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heterosexual males, analysis of this research suggests that the hegemony has shifted to an unconscious level. The first major analysis centered around masculinity, although the participants felt that masculinity did not play a role in their consumption of fashion they still recognized a certain cultural stigma surrounding fashion and masculinity. These cultural views, have developed deep-seeded hegemonic masculine values that they continue to proliferate. They often chose styles or items that reflected traditional masculine style tropes such as the lumberjack or the cowboy. Furthermore, when asked about wearing items that deviate from traditional menswear items such as women's wear, the majority of participants stated a non-willingness to try these items. While they cite general distaste for these items as the reason for non-consumption, several participants wore traditional womenswear items simply due to it being marketed as masculine. This indicates that their unwillingness to wear women's items of clothing, until they were promoted as menswear items validate the notion of a subconscious, learned hegemony. Additionally, participants deviated into non-traditional dress only if other male figures validated the item. Often participants would wait until other men adopted these new styles, this correlate with Connell's (1987) framework, which asserts that masculinity can only be validated through other men.

The second major analysis focused on the act of shopping and femininity. Many participants discussed feeling uncomfortable in the retail space when they began to engage with fashion. To alleviate this anxiety the participants often brought their female friends as participants felt that they had a better understanding of fashion. These points demonstrate a cultural view that females have developed this sense of style throughout their upbringing. While men do not share this 'retailer knowledge' due to their non-

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engagement until later in life, which illustrates that they don't code shopping as feminine, they continue to endorse the notion that females are inherently better shoppers. Moreover, several participants indicated that they were eager to develop their knowledge on fashion but found it difficult to find informational outlets. Certain participants used online forums where they could openly discuss particular fashions and trends with other men who shared their interests, thus facilitating an exchange of knowledge. Although this was a 'safe space' where men could engage with fashion it continues to drive hegemonic masculinity as it creates a lack of visible men in retail locations. Furthermore, several participants were adamant that they often looked to gay men for style influence or advice. Once again, by using the gay man as a style exemplar, the participants are providing active reinforcement towards hegemony as they continue to foster the stereotypes between gay men and fashion.

Overall, this study makes an important academic contribution as it expands on previous knowledge regarding the fashion consumption habits of young style conscious heterosexual men. This study has explored how these men are influenced by the deep seated hegemonic masculine values that continue to affect assumptions on modern menswear as well as the wider social attitudes towards young fashionable men. Based on this research, the fashion industry can gain a better understanding of the consumption habits of straight men and the perceived restrictions that these males face. Frith and Gleeson (2004, 41) argue, "the fusion of consumption and identity apparent in market segmentation places a greater emphasis on narcissistic aspect of self previously unavailable to men and evokes a greater emphasis on appearance and display." In an effort to parallel this marketing trend, this knowledge can be used to develop marketing

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strategies that target the heterosexual male in an effort to tap into the increasingly developing segment of the menswear market.

To conclude, not only do participants in this study continue to facilitate the ideal of hegemonic masculinity on a subconscious level, but the hegemonic ideal continues to be a prevailing force in menswear as well. During the end of his interview, Darren discussed how he views a cultural shift that is currently occurring,

“Back in the day, you couldn't be like, "Yo, that guy looks good," you'd be immediately questioned, like, "Are you checking him out? Are you gay?"... Now you can be like, "Hey that guy looks good." And it's like, "Why?" Because, I don't know, he's wearing cool shit.

This finding suggests that men's fashion is leading to a potential cultural shift in regards to the well-dressed man and his sexual orientation. Francis highlighted this notion as well, “I wear women's jackets because they catch my eye, who cares...it's not an issue, I mean who cares if someone is straight or gay, it's 2017, it doesn't matter.” This was the general consensus from the overwhelming majority of the participants in this study. They felt that men's fashion was heading in a positive direction and the rigidity of men's dress is giving away to much more flexible interpretations of what society deems acceptable for heterosexual males. However as this research has demonstrated, there is a clear disconnect between how the participants view fashion and their consumption practices. The power of hegemonic values comes from both society's perceptions, and its actions. Therefore, this disconnection must be recognized in order to begin to overturn the influence of hegemonic masculinity. As Bitterman (2016, 41) states, “we stand, as observers and scholars, at a remarkable and exciting cusp of change...framed by

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optimism and opportunity.” This research provides an important foundational base. Once our subconscious actions are recognized we can begin to dismantle the traditional held cultural views on gender, fashion, and sexual identity. So to answer the initial question, ‘Does This Shirt Make Me Look Gay?’ The answer isn’t whether it looks gay, just whether it looks good.

Future Research

Intersectional influence. The first area that warrants further examination deals with the intersectional aspects of men and fashion. This study provided a wide range of participants. Many participants came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds as well as different cultural circumstances during their upbringing. Due to the limitations of this study, participants were not probed on how aspects such as race, upbringing and men played a role in their dress, this is an opportune area of research. Additionally, participants indicated that location affected their fashion consumption habits as well. James expressed that while it was of lesser importance in his small town, now that he’s moved to Toronto he has developed a vested interest in fashion. These examples indicate evidence that intersectional factors influence men’s fashion. More research into factors such as race, class, upbringing, religion, and culture are necessary in order to fully grasp the extent of this influence.

Vehicles for the changing landscape. During the interview participants were asked how fast fashion retailers have influenced the development of menswear. The resounding response from the participants indicated that more men have taken an interest in fashion due to the exposure of fashionable dress from these retailers. Furthermore, while the opinions were varied on the positive or negative effects, every participant

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discussed H&M during their interview. This indicates that fast fashion retailers such as H&M and Zara have a significant effect on the fashion consumption habits of young heterosexual men. There is evidence that these retailers could be a possible cause for the results from this study that contradict past research findings. More research has to be undertaken in order to better understand the role fast fashion has played in menswear. Based on the interviews, these retailers have been instrumental in providing the budget conscious young heterosexual consumer with fashionable dress with the majority of participants expressing an interest in shopping at H&M, Zara, and Topman. This illustrates that fast fashion retailers have a strong foothold in the young menswear market. While early results from this study indicate that stores such as H&M have helped to develop a larger cultural acceptance of men engaging in fashion, more research must be undertaken in order to develop a better understanding of the influence of fast fashion.

The other noteworthy factor that was evident in multiple interviews was the power of social media. Numerous participants expressed how social media outlets, Instagram in particular have helped to facilitate the development of their style. Not only did participants state that social media played a role on a personal level but on a cultural level as well. Will, felt that Instagram has been a major factor in the development of men embracing fashion. This suggests that it has been influential in the shift in how men are viewed from a cultural perspective when they consume fashion. Perhaps this is due to the fact that viewing other men engaging in fashionable dress affirms that fashion consumption is acceptable or that having one's picture 'liked' validates fashion choices and gives confidence. This is an interesting area of study that requires further investigation.

Appendix A

The poster features a light gray background with a large, dark blue diagonal shape on the right side. The text is arranged in a clean, modern font. The title is at the top, followed by a question, then a paragraph of text, and finally a list of requirements and contact information.

Participants Needed for a Research Study on Men's Fashion

Are you a straight male interested
fashion?

If so, you would be ideal for a
study on the fashion habits
of straight men. You will
talk about your style
and share your
thoughts on
fashion

Requirements

- Male
- Aged 18-24
- Identify as heterosexual
- Fashion plays a role in your life

For more information
Samuel Hardwicke
shardwickebrown@ryerson.ca

Recruitment poster

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Appendix B

B-1 – Military scarf

B-2 – Camouflage pants

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Appendix B

B-3 – Long tee shirt

B-4 – Long coat

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