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# One nation under salary: Business, critics, and the body in the 1950s

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One Nation Under Salary: Business, Critics, and the Body in the 1950s

Thomas Joyce

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the degree of

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all of the average men, who are often forgotten about by history. These men often led quite and unremarkable lives, and are rarely thought of as the actors of history. This is a story about them.

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost I would like to thank my thesis director Dr. Westkaemper for reading countless drafts and being there to answer my endless questions. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Guerrier and Dr. Davidson, for their thought provoking comments and insight. A special thank you is due to Dr. Borg and Dr. Reich. While neither directly read the thesis, the topics of their classes and conversations with them helped shaped my research and ways of thinking about history. Without them this thesis would not have been possible. Finally, I am deeply indebted to the library staff, specifically the inter-library loan department, for helping me track down all of the sources which appear in this study.

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## **Abstract**

The 1950s was a period of dramatic social upheaval. The massive changes brought on by suburbanization, the G.I. Bill, postwar dislocation, the rise of the white-collar worker, the cold war and more significantly impacted ideas about gender. This thesis explores the meaning of corporate work and its impact on masculinity from 1946 to 1963. During this period a group of public intellectuals attacked corporate work as unmanly and white-collar workers as effeminate. These intellectuals believed masculinity was in decline, and that white-collar men were no longer men. While commentators challenged postwar masculinity, business leaders rallied to defend white-collar men's masculinity. Pro-business intellectuals defended white-collar men's positions in 1950s both as masculine and valuable to the company. Ultimately, these discourses impacted ideas about men's bodies. Male beauty culture emerged during this contest over the proper ideal of masculinity. Some elements of male beauty culture embraced commentators' rhetoric, but most sided with white-collar leaders. Thus, in a period where middle-class white men's grip on masculinity was tenuous, male beauty culture and white-collar leaders sought to reaffirm their position atop the social and cultural hierarchy.

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## **Introduction**

The 1950s was a period of social upheaval. Almost all major institutions of American society underwent some form of change between the end of World War II and 1963. These changes profoundly affected white, middle-class men living in new suburban communities. Middle-class men, as a group, included more college graduates than in any other previous era. They obtained new managerial careers, which allowed for more leisure time than ever before. While many of these changes had roots in earlier eras, they intensified in the postwar period. The vast increase in their material success pushed white-collar men to the center of larger cultural discussions on masculinity in the 1950s. Popular culture and public intellectuals presented one idea of masculinity based on the dominant self-made man notion of American masculinity that emerged from the middle of the nineteenth century. The form of producerist ideology espoused by social commentators argued that corporations deprived men of their masculinity by making them work in hierarchical organizations where they had little control over their own lives or careers. According to commentators, the conformity necessary for success in corporations prevented men from fulfilling traditional masculinity. However, the leaders of the new managerial class offered a differing ideal. Business leaders argued that white-collar work was masculine, and that managers needed to be manly in order to succeed in the business sphere. Business leaders did not see the corporation as feminizing, but a new competitive sphere where men could demonstrate traditional masculine, just in new ways.

These two opposing ideas about masculinity both claimed they represented what it meant to be a man, sending contradictory messages to white-collar men.

Commentators questioned the legitimacy of middle-class men's new positions, while



business leaders sought to legitimize their managers' role in society by portraying them as the proper inheritors' American manhood. As social commentators championed the self-made man and corporate and business leadership supported the white-collar man with equal vehemence, the male body took on increasing cultural significance. The male body was not the only part of men's lives that came under scrutiny during the postwar period, but focusing on the body illuminates the depths of these competing discourses and how they affected men on the most intimate of levels. Male beauty culture emerged in the 1950s containing elements of both arguments. However, most of the works on male vanity sided with white-collar leaders. Both white-collar leaders and fitness guides argued that masculinity was not in crisis, and they served to demonstrate the compatibility between masculinity and the contemporary middle-class lifestyles. Commentators challenged white-collar men's positions, and business leaders and male beauty culture solidified white-collar men's tenuous position atop 1950s society.

The emergence of a large scale managerial class dominated the imaginations of business professionals, intellectuals, fitness experts, and popular culture. It seemed as if everyone with a public platform wanted to comment on this new and growing phenomenon: the white-collar worker. Despite the variations on the individual level, some characterizations can be made about the 1950s white-collar man. The stereotypical white-collar man lived in a newly created suburb and commuted to a job in a city.<sup>1</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis considers the perception of white-collar males, as presented by social commentators to the public. Thus this thesis relies on statistics found in popular newspapers and cited by social commentators, not to be taken as completely accurate like statistics from government agencies, but as representative of public discourse. These statistics are an attempt to demonstrate what the 1950s reader was being told about white-collar workers.

normally stayed in one career, or at least did not change jobs frequently.<sup>2</sup> His occupation ranged from junior executive to office clerk. White-collar jobs usually involved some type of management of others, leading social commentators to label white-collar workers as “people pushers” instead of “pencil pushers.”<sup>3</sup> Newspapers and magazines proclaimed that white-collar work offered the highest salaries, which rose steadily throughout the decade.<sup>4</sup> White-collar careers offered the best opportunities for college graduates by 1956.<sup>5</sup> Even the lower-end of white-collar wages remained relatively high.<sup>6</sup> Along with higher wages, white-collar work offered other benefits, such as increased time off. Forty hour work weeks, with free weekends, and multiple weeks of paid vacation characterized most managerial jobs. *Business Week* remarked that “never have so many people had so much time on their hands--with pay--as today in the United States.”<sup>7</sup>

White-collar workers ranged from the upper middle class to middle class. Affordable housing and mass-produced goods limited some of the disparity between blue and white-collar workers, but class distinctions remained. Historian Lizabeth Cohen asserted, “The massive scale of suburban home building also lent itself well to the process of increasing class differentiation, as newly constructed houses easily bore class markings.”<sup>8</sup> The working class experienced much greater economic security and leisure

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<sup>2</sup> Women had white-collar jobs as secretaries, stenographers, etc., but the nature of this work did not challenge traditional ideas of femininity, beyond its removal of women from the home; thus, women workers escaped some of the types of criticism put forward by social commentators. White collar jobs held by women provided support to male workers, reflecting the subordination of women in the 1950s.

<sup>3</sup> “White Collar Work is Found Steadiest,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1947, 29.

<sup>4</sup> C. Wright Mills, “The Middle Class in Middle-Sized Cities: The Stratification and Political Position of Small and White Collar Strata,” in *American Sociological Association* 11, no. 5 (October, 1946): 521.

<sup>5</sup> “Time Clock, Dec. 24, 1956,” in *Time*, December 24, 1956, 1.

<sup>6</sup> “White Collar Pay Has Higher ‘Floor,’” *New York Times*, November 10, 1952, 36.

<sup>7</sup> “The Leisured Masses,” *Business Week*, September 12, 1953, 142.

<sup>8</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 208.

comforts in the 1950s than in other periods, but there still remained a physical distance between the upper echelons of white-collar workers and working-class families, including different schools, neighborhoods, and social clubs.<sup>9</sup> The middle and upper-middle class differentiated themselves in the 1950s through material means, but the real difference between the managerial and production classes was the continual scrutiny of white-collar positions by the leading cultural critics.<sup>10</sup>

Simultaneously, corporations encouraged the new group of college-educated, white men to join the white-collar ranks through the higher salaries and vast opportunities they offered. Not only did white-collar work offer higher salaries than production and manufacturing-based careers, but the amount of white-collar jobs increased while production-based jobs decreased. A 1959 *Time* magazine article noted that, “automation and technological breakthroughs have sharply reduced the ranks of blue-collar (i.e. usually hourly paid) workers...”<sup>11</sup> The emergence of a large-scale electronics industry created newer and more efficient machines that “automatically perform workday chores and take on thousands of complicated new tasks,” rapidly accelerating a long historical process of diminishing the necessity and status of blue-collar occupations.<sup>12</sup> By the late 1950s *The New York Times* reported that white-collar workers composed the

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Lassiter’s *Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) and Elizabeth Cohen’s *A Consumer’s Republic* convincingly demonstrate the class separation and division that remained in seemingly “classless” suburbs.

<sup>10</sup> This thesis mostly focuses on the middle to upper middle class white-collar worker, but many of the criticisms explored are applicable to all because lower levels of white-collar work involved the sedentary and “passive” lifestyle most social commentators despised.

<sup>11</sup> “New Problem for Unions: The Rise of the White-Collar Worker,” *Time*, January 1959, 78. Blue-collar workers engaged in actual production of goods, differentiating them from the service and sales-based white-collar workers. Blue-collar jobs did not usually require college degrees.

<sup>12</sup> The electronic industry emerged in the 1950s as one of the fastest growing industries, becoming the fifth largest industry in the United States by 1957. There were over 4,200 electronics companies with a work force of over 1.5 million, and sales over \$11.5 billion annually. “Electronics: The New Age,” *Time*, April 29, 1957, 86.

largest percentage of the workforce nationwide.<sup>13</sup> While white-collar workers had existed since the late nineteenth century, they became a significant group for the first time in the 1950s.<sup>14</sup>

The dramatic increase in college graduates during the 1950s, specifically business graduates, combined with the good pay and availability of corporate jobs, led to the increase in white-collar workers.<sup>15</sup> Already by 1949 American universities produced “more college students than ever before,” and would continue to produce high levels of college graduates throughout the 1950s.<sup>16</sup> This large group of newly educated college graduates wanted white-collar careers. “Clean hand” occupations held the most respectability and desirability among white males.<sup>17</sup> American anthropologist and one-time employee of the Department of Agriculture and Labor Jules Henry surmised that college educated men no longer entered the blue-collar sphere for careers, nor did they attempt to become entrepreneurs. According to Henry, small business entrepreneurs suffered the same fate as blue-collar workers, and he estimated that in 1963 only one out of eight high school students would strive to go into business for himself or herself.<sup>18</sup> As early as 1952 many believed the appeal of starting a small business began to decline.<sup>19</sup>

Prominent social critic and University of Columbia sociologist C. Wright Mills

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<sup>13</sup> “White Collar-Group Largest Labor Bloc,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1957, 33. John Littlepage Lanaster “Personal Income Estimate for Virginia Counties and Cities: 1960,” Bureau of Population and Economic Research: University of Virginia, 1960, ii-iii. The findings of the government study supported that of the *New York Times* article for Virginia and the upper South.

<sup>14</sup> Vera Shlakman, “Status and Ideology of Office Workers,” in *Science and Society* 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1951/1952): 1. Shlakman asserted that clerical workers only made up 2.9 percent of the workforce in 1870. By 1940 that number increase to seventeen percent, and by the time her study in close of 1951 clerical workers made up about one-quarter of the workforce.

<sup>15</sup> The amount of men available to go to college increased among white males largely because of the G.I. Bill.

<sup>16</sup> “Education Prospects,” *Time*, February 7, 1949, 45.

<sup>17</sup> “The Triumphant White Collar,” *Time*, February 3, 1947, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Jules Henry, *Culture Against Man* (New York: Random House, 1963), 39.

<sup>19</sup> Eileen Ahern, “White Collar World,” *Washington Post*, May 31, 1952, 27.

proclaimed that in the “early nineteenth-century probably four/fifths of the occupied population were self-employed entrepreneurs...,” and in the 1950s “only the modern middle class has steadily grown.”<sup>20</sup> Children from working-class backgrounds wanted white-collar jobs, and white-collar children wanted to remain in white-collar work. There remained an “intense anxiety... to escape the fate of the factory worker...”<sup>21</sup> White-collar workers emerged after World War II as the fastest growing labor group. They represented a new dominant force in society, and their occupations and personal lives subverted older pillars of hegemonic masculinity.

With their new well paying jobs, white-collar workers fled cities in search of domestic tranquility. In extremely large numbers, white-collar workers and their families moved to newly built suburbs outside of cities.<sup>22</sup> Suburbs remained largely racially homogenous. William Levitt, the owner of the company that built the Levittown suburbs, stated “Our policy on that [race] is unchanged. The two other Levittowns are white communities.”<sup>23</sup> The mass exodus of white-collar families came at the expense of cities and smaller farm towns. According to *Time* magazine, little towns in the 1950s slowly withered. The magazine quoted Ernest Edwards, owner of a general store in the small town of Shannon City, Iowa, “none of the kids ever comes back here to live after they’ve gone away to school.”<sup>24</sup> Other small towns such as Mart, Texas, lost significant portions of their younger population after the 1940s. Small towns lost residents largely because of a lack of jobs that appealed to college graduates, and big towns equally lost significant

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<sup>20</sup> C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 63.

<sup>21</sup> Shlakman, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Levittown and Crestwood Heights were the two most well-known and most studied suburbs.

<sup>23</sup> “Third Levittown Gets Under Way,” *New York Times* June 6, 1958, 25.

<sup>24</sup> “The Census: From the Country & the City,” *Time*, July 3, 1950, 12.

portions of their white-collar populations. Most white-collar workers wanted “to live, not in a big city, but near it. All over the nation, people fleeing the city’s crowds and taxes, people feeling the country’s torpor and low wages, have settled in the suburbs.”<sup>25</sup>

Suburbs arose around all the major cities in the country.<sup>26</sup> The suburbs marked a drastic social and geographic upheaval. The combination of new communities, jobs, and new type of students created a vastly different society after World War II.

This thesis explores the cultural meanings of white-collar work, and the corporation’s impact on the discourse of masculinity in the 1950s. An influential group of public intellectuals in the 1950s believed white-collar workers represented the downfall of American masculinity. They clung to this self-made man type as the only acceptable form of hegemonic masculinity. To these social commentators, the nineteenth-century small business owner epitomized masculinity due to his presumed control over his affairs. The self-made man controlled his household and job, and he did not subordinate himself to other men or institutions. He dutifully performed his masculinity, and reaffirmed it through success in the marketplace.<sup>27</sup> Post-World War II commentators believed that white-collar work was incompatible with the self-made man ideal, and thus men in the 1950s were not true men as defined by their standards. They believed that 1950s men were subordinate, passive, and conformist, all of which stemmed from hierarchical occupations that deprived them of the control necessary to be men. The lack of control and individuality at work translated to a retreat into traditional feminine spheres of the home and leisure. Most scholars of the period have utilized their writings

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

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17-30.

to argue a crisis of masculinity existed in the 1950s. Rather, social commentators should be read as one group reacting to social changes of which they disapproved. Corporate and fitness culture offered competing interpretations of white-collar work, which rescued white-collar work from commentators' "crisis" narrative.

Social commentators included a combination of sociologists, psychologists, historians, literary critics, and other forms of academics, along with writers, journalists, magazine editors, and anyone with a platform and capability to shape public ideas and attitudes. These critics remained remarkably visible and influential in 1950s society. They often wrote articles in widely read newspapers such as the *New York Times*, appeared in magazines such as *Time* and *Esquire*, and remained throughout the decade on the nation's fiction and non-fiction best-seller lists. Historian James N. Gregory best explained these commentators' impact in his assertion that:

social science enjoyed a golden age, it was the middle third of the twentieth century, three decades beginning in the 1930s when sociologists, economists, psychologists, and others spoke with more authority and their voices reached farther in any other period before or since... Confidence in the scientific grounding of sociology and related disciplines soared... [as they] developed penetrating theories that seemed capable of answering key questions about the individual, the group, and society.<sup>28</sup>

The social commentators of the 1950s did not merely study the institutions and changing American values, but they also attempted to actively shape and combat many of the changes taking place in men's lives.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 66.

<sup>29</sup> Some examples of prominent social commentators include: authors Arthur Miller, Sloan Wilson, and Tennessee Williams; sociologists David Riesman and C. Wright Mills; magazine editors, such as editor of *Fortune* William Whyte Jr., and magazines themselves such as *Look* and *Esquire* which constantly published etiquette guides and critiques of 1950s masculinity.

However, these commentators reflected only one set of ideas about masculinity. As commentators questioned the legitimacy of white-collar men's masculinity, an equally influential, although less visible, group of pro-business intellectuals pushed back against the commentators' attacks. Pro-business intellectuals and leading business figures argued that white-collar work and masculinity were not mutually exclusive.<sup>30</sup> While it should not be surprising business leaders defended corporate work as masculine and their employees as nonconformists, the language used to defend white-collar work consciously combated commentators' critiques. Business leaders utilized a language of independence, control, and rationality, all of which were traits commentators claimed white-collar men lacked. Using General Electric as a case study, this thesis argues that business leaders believed social commentators misrepresented white-collar work. For business leaders a crisis of masculinity did not exist and white-collar work and masculinity were compatible. White-collar workers appeared as the pinnacle of masculinity, achievement and success in General Electric's publications. These publications included training manuals, presentations at leadership conferences, internal pamphlets and magazines. White-collar work, according to business leaders, allowed for maximum individuality, control, competition, achievement, and power. Corporations required the qualities social commentators claimed they lacked. This defense of white-collar workers maintained these middle-class white men's position atop 1950s social hierarchy, and by confirming their masculinity legitimized their claims to patriarchy.

Company leaders produced documents for audiences within General Electric and for business journals, such as *The Harvard Business Review*. They did not have the

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<sup>30</sup> One example of a prominent figure inside General Electric included General Electric C.E.O. Robert J. Cordiner who continually presented white-collar workers as strong willed, ambitious, leaders.



national audience of the social commentators, who published best-sellers or articles in popular magazines. However, business leaders positioned their messages in managerial conferences and training manuals that would be consumed by white-collar men themselves. The discourse produced by white-collar leaders was prevalent within men's lives even if it did not have national cultural recognition. This discourse rejected every charge produced by social commentators, and no hint of crisis appears in business leaders' rhetoric.

Meanwhile, popular culture, business culture, and social commentators offered contrasting interpretations of the ideal form of masculinity. Some popular culture works supported the white-collar ideal and the suburban lifestyle that white-collar work made possible. A significant portion of the fiction of the 1950s presented family life and the retreat into the home as ideal. These works portrayed non-white-collar men as dangerous, linking them with destruction and loneliness. On the other hand, some films and works of fiction aligned their messages closely with the critique of social commentators. These films argued that men could only achieve happiness outside the corporate world. Men were told inside the corporation that their status commanded respect, while outside social commentators held them responsible for decline of American manhood. White-collar men were bombarded with messages about their masculinity, but none of the messages agreed on what that masculinity should entail.

In its analysis of popular culture films and social commentators, this thesis attempts to demonstrate the depth of the cultural conversation over masculinity. A wide array of films and literature was chosen covering multiple genres. Works were also selected in order to cover differing kinds of taste. Academy award winning and critically

acclaimed works were chosen, as well as popular, low-brow texts. Similarly, with social commentators the most famous intellectuals' works are used, but so are those of lesser known thinkers. In many ways, this thesis is an ideological history, not an intellectual history. It does not attempt to solely explore the discourse of the period's brightest intellectuals like Riesman or Mills. Rather, it relies on many different types of social commentators whose works lacked long term historical significance, but participated in shaping the cultural discourses on work and gender.

Historians credit the 1950s with providing the origins for several movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Historian Beth Bailey attributed the roots of the sexual revolution to the 1950s, and historian John D'Emilio argued that the gay liberation of the 1970s began in the 1950s.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the 1950s witnessed the rise of male beauty culture. Middle-class men dieted, exercised, and emphasized grooming in large numbers. This culture reflected some of the ideas of social commentators, but mostly served to enhance men's middle-class lifestyles, not reject them. Most diets did not call for any exercise or drastic changes to their current lifestyles. When exercise was called for it was meant to fit into men's busy schedules and often amounted to little more than a round of golf. Adherence to this beauty culture produced tangible benefits for men, especially in the business world. Men did not diet because they believed they needed to regain their masculinity, but did so as an affirmation of their white-collar lives. Male beauty culture was not a rejection of the middle-class lifestyle, but a way to enter and maintain middle-class status. Male beauty culture combined concerns about men's health, weight,

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<sup>31</sup> Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) and John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

personal appearance, and grooming, and often pressured men into participating by promising men it would help their careers and personal lives. As pressures mounted on white-collar men from social commentators, beauty culture and business culture converged to protect their hegemonic masculinity.

Despite the seeming polarity between the two ideals of the self-made man and white-collar masculinities, both claimed to express the ideal form of masculinity. Sociologist Michael Kimmel defined masculinity as a historical and changing construct that is “demonstrated for other men’s approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance [of masculinity].”<sup>32</sup> Masculinity requires the constant reaffirmation that one is “man enough,” and men affirmed their manhood through public displays and marketplace success. For Kimmel, homophobia remains a constant theme throughout modern masculinity. Kimmel defines homophobia as “the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, and reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up... the fear of being seen as a sissy dominates the cultural definitions of manhood.”<sup>33</sup> The constant need to prove one’s manhood creates perpetual anxiety, because manhood is never stable or secure.

Ever since the Market Revolution in the early nineteenth century, men derived their masculinity identity from successfully competing in the marketplace.<sup>34</sup> The visibility of success in the marketplace signified to other men one’s manliness. Continually proving one’s masculinity became “one of the defining experiences of men’s

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity,” in *Theorizing Masculinity*, edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman (London: Sage Publishing, 1994), 120-126.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.

lives.”<sup>35</sup> In different historical periods manhood meant different things, but it always needed to be validated by other men.<sup>36</sup> The lack of stability or self-assuredness in one’s masculinity yielded a constant state of crisis. This conception of marketplace masculinity, as defined by Kimmel, required the constant need to prove one’s masculinity in the marketplace, which led to an insecure form of masculinity.<sup>37</sup>

Kimmel’s conception of masculinity is both useful and problematic when applied to the 1950s. Most of the social commentators’ critiques reflected Kimmel’s definition of masculinity as homophobia, and his theoretical conception helps us understand why commentators viewed masculinity to be in crisis. However, Kimmel’s idea of a perpetual crisis of masculinity is more problematic when applied to business leaders and male beauty culture. Business leaders and male beauty culture did not view masculinity to be in crisis. White-collar men “performed” their masculinity, and white-collar leaders approved.<sup>38</sup> Social commentators perceived a crisis, but not all facets of 1950s society agreed. Each side, commentators and business leaders, evaluated men’s gendered performance and came to very different conclusions. The leadership within General Electric did not bemoan that their employees lacked the manhood necessary to fulfill their jobs. Instead, General Electric presented its employees as strong-willed leaders. Films that supported the white-collar lifestyle promoted white-collar life as the epitome of happiness in 1950s society, and social consequences only emerged from failing to fulfill the white-collar norms. The contradictory messages of corporations,

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<sup>35</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-10.

<sup>38</sup> Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 39-42.

commentators, and popular culture illustrated that some believed in a crisis of masculinity, while others found white-collar masculinity as a valid form of manhood.

Kimmel's definition of masculinity appears incomplete if masculinity was not in crisis. Rather than relying solely on the definition of masculinity as homophobia, this thesis defines hegemonic masculinity as power, both over women and other men.<sup>39</sup> In any one period there was not a single form of masculinity, but several masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity reflects the dominant position "in a given pattern of gender relations," and that position is perpetually contested by other forms of masculinity and femininity.<sup>40</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is the idea of masculinity that is "culturally exalted" over other forms of masculinity.<sup>41</sup> This form of masculinity embodies the "currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."<sup>42</sup> Business leaders and social commentators did not, for the most part, disagree about the traits that comprised hegemonic masculinity; rather they disagreed over who comprised hegemonic masculinity. Male beauty culture and business leaders attempted to give white-collar men's exalted positions cultural hegemony and legitimacy. Business leaders and beauty culture legitimized middle-class lifestyles as masculine to insure middle-class white men retained their culture power. White-collar workers were overwhelmingly male and white, by legitimizing their position it attempted to reinforce the racial and gender hierarchy.

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<sup>39</sup> Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," 136.

<sup>40</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 76-77.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

Other scholars offer different explanations of gender norms in the 1950s outside of men's relationship to the means of production, the two most prominent historians being Elaine Tyler May and James Gilbert. Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound* explained the strengthening of gender norms as a result of cold war anxieties. May's work focused primarily on women's roles within the family, but her argument remained applicable to men as well. May asserted that, "in the early years of the cold war, amid a world of uncertainties brought about by World War II and its aftermath, the home seemed to offer a secure, private nest removed from the dangers of the outside world."<sup>43</sup> The family provided "a bastion of safety in an insecure world," and leaders promoted specific types of conduct and policies that emphasized an ideal version of "American home."<sup>44</sup> The home and family became central in the domestic strategy in the containment of communism, and this idea of "home" was deeply entrenched with traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.<sup>45</sup>

May's argument is convincing, but the explanation of the cold war for the strengthening of gender roles ignores many of the prevalent institutions in men's lives. Men spent a majority of their days at work, and social commentators criticized men's relationship to their workplace without addressing the cold war. To be sure, the cold war influenced ideas about gender, and specifically, masculinity. However, many social commentators chided men for retreating into the home. The home, its location in the suburbs, and the occupations men entered to pay for those homes, all remained objects of intense scrutiny. May asserts that men and women attempted to live up to the "domestic

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<sup>43</sup> Elaine Tyler May. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

ideal,” but not all in the 1950s agreed on what the domestic ideal was.<sup>46</sup> The home represented yet another contested domain men negotiated in the 1950s as the production-based, self-made man ideal clashed with new white-collar lifestyles.

The other leading argument about masculinity in the 1950s was that there were multiple masculinities, of which the domestic ideal was one. Historian James Gilbert rejects the idea of a 1950s crisis of masculinity, arguing that no one form of masculinity was dominant, but that multiple masculinities offered various ideals to men. While plenty of leading authors in the 1950s lamented the decline of American men, “it is just as plausible to argue that these public figures were reacting with hostility to the changes that other men in society were quite happy to accept.”<sup>47</sup> This research attempts to build on Gilbert’s multiple masculinities idea, and to demonstrate conflicting masculinities’ impact on men’s bodies. The social commentators that shaped public opinion reacted because they remained opposed to the vast and rapid changes occurring in the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> These influential public figures offered one side of a social conversation about the meaning of masculinity in the 1950s, and just because they perceived a crisis of masculinity does not mean that one existed.<sup>49</sup>

Gilbert offers several competing ideals of masculinity, but all of these alternative forms of masculinity exist separately instead of overlapping. All of the masculinities offered different paths to manhood. However, the white-collar discourse did more than simply offer an alternative. White-collar leaders did not view themselves as offering an

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>47</sup> James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-10.

alternative to producerist masculinity, but as the rightful inheritors of a long tradition of masculinity. They attempted to demonstrate that white-collar work was not incompatible with the traits of hegemonic masculinity, and at times even directly engaged social commentators' critiques. White-collar leaders viewed corporate work as a new type of work requiring many of the same traits championed by commentators. Commentators viewed white-collar workers as a deviation from true manhood, while white-collar leaders viewed themselves as the embodiment of it. The 1950s was not a period of "male panic," but a renegotiation of who embodied hegemonic masculinity. The self-made man and the white-collar man competed for cultural supremacy.

Similar to the work of May, Gilbert, Kimmel and other scholars of popular and consumer culture, this research focuses on the construction of gender identity, specifically the creation of hegemonic masculinity. It attempts to ascertain what role the male body played in the discussion of masculinity, and how competing notions of masculinity impact ideas about fitness, health, and men's lives. It is not a study of how men actually felt, but what pressures were placed upon them. In order to present a more complete picture of the daily expectations and criticism placed upon men, this research explores different institutions' attitudes towards middle-class, white men's relationship to their work. The use of prescriptive literature allows for the understanding of larger social and cultural influences placed on the individual. These sources include popular culture such as films, works of fiction, non-fiction, and magazines. Advertisements and self-help books demonstrate the growth of fitness culture and the expectations it placed upon men. Finally, this thesis looks at the corporate literature and training guides of General Electric to present the way white-collar institutions viewed white-collar workers.



This study's purpose is threefold. First, it attempts to illustrate that commentators were not the only group shaping the discourse on masculinity. The emphasis on business leaders offers a counter to the commentators' rhetoric. To be sure, a history of postwar masculinity cannot be written without a discussion of social commentators' beliefs, but it cannot be written by solely looking at social commentators either. Second, it is to emphasize how the discourse of the body contributed to legitimizing men's new positions in 1950s culture. The 1950s was a period of rapid social and cultural upheaval, and as a result gender norms were vulnerable and open to interpretation. Masculinity was specifically open to renegotiation given the postwar changes, thus explaining the fierce contest over the definition of masculinity. Finally, this study attempts to challenge the idea that masculinity in the 1950s was in crisis. Gilbert argued masculinity was not in crisis because men had alternative forms of masculinity. This study furthers Gilbert's argument by demonstrating white-collar leaders did more than offer an alternative, they directly combated social commentators' assertions of a crisis of masculinity. While there was little doubt that some believed masculinity to be in crisis, that explanation cannot be extrapolated to all elements of 1950s. The crisis narrative explains some facets of postwar gender ideology but not all of it.

The first chapter demonstrates the social commentators' arguments for why they perceived a crisis of masculinity. This chapter also lays out the specific arguments of various influential and lesser works. The social commentators' works focused on the lack of competition in white-collar work, the passivity of white-collar men, meaninglessness of their jobs, and the lack of individuality within the corporation. They

viewed white-collar workers as bringing about the decline of masculinity. They called for a rejection of white-collar lifestyles and a return to the self-made man ideal.

The second chapter presents a different view of the white-collar man both from General Electric's leadership and various works within popular culture. Most histories about white-collar men present the outside culture's criticism of the corporation, but rarely the corporation's defense of itself. The business and popular literature of the 1950s refuted each of the charges levied by social commentators about white-collar work. General Electric presented white-collar work as highly individualized, competitive, requiring leadership, and meaningful. This chapter demonstrates the polarity between General Electric's presentation of their employees and the social commentators' views of white-collar work, and highlights the different versions of masculinity.

The third and final chapter looks at male beauty culture in the 1950s. This included ideas about dieting, exercise, dress, and grooming. This study uses the body to demonstrate how deeply these ideas of masculinity penetrated 1950s culture. Not only did these discourses decide what cultural ideals of masculinity should be, but how men should look and act in order to achieve them. The vanity discourse contained different aspects of both white-collar and the self-made man masculinities. Male beauty culture contained fears of luxury, but it also sought to maximize white-collar life not reject it. These books and products were extremely popular in the 1950s. Not all men were bodybuilders nor did all the diets and products actually cause men to lose weight; many probably had the opposite effect. However, the 1950s promoted a culture that placed men's bodies at the center of the discourses about masculinity. This chapter presents men's bodies in the 1950s as being constructed by two competing ideals, but ultimately

serving to reaffirm white-collar masculinity. Beauty culture did not further commentators' critiques, nor did it call for a rejection of the white-collar lifestyle.

## Chapter 1

### **A Nation of Employees: Change and Reaction in the Long 1950s**

The aftermath of World War II witnessed a new masculine ideal emerge at the forefront of American society. The white-collar male became the dominant symbol of postwar prosperity. White-collar men in the 1950s embodied the cultural angst of a period in rapid transition to a service-based economy. Tensions over the new labor norms dominated cultural and intellectual life. Postwar society bombarded men with contradictory models of masculinity. Social commentators decried the new changes in the 1950s, viewing these changes as responsible for the weakening of American men, and by extension America as a whole. Popular culture picked up on the proclamation from the various cultural jeremiads and made the social commentators' criticism come to life.<sup>1</sup> Both depicted the corporation and everything that white-collar work made possible, such as suburban and leisure lifestyles, as the enemies of individuality and manhood. Published texts, including certain works of fiction, attacked the new institutions of 1950s and the emasculated men they believed these institutions produced.

Influenced by the rapid and dramatic postwar changes in men's work, community, education, and expectations, many social critics believed that the new white-collar man of the 1950s no longer fit the traditional form of the self-made-man. The dominant and most influential social commentators believed that corporations did not lend themselves to the rigors of direct competition, nor did they allow workers the necessary power to fulfill traditional gender norms. According to social commentators, men's subordinate

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter considers films that support the predominant ideas circulated by social commentators. Chapter two will elaborate on films and literature that offer countering points of view.

role in corporations caused the decline of the “rugged individualism that is supposed to be the business of business.”<sup>2</sup>

Social commentators cited corporations’ emphasis on teamwork and personality as evidence that corporations lacked necessary competition. They believed men relied on their personalities as a way of negotiating their way through corporate hierarchies. Industrial psychologist Fred E. Fiedler’s report on effective leadership in corporate settings indicated “our society has come to depend to an increasingly large degree on work which is performed by groups and teams rather than by individuals working alone.” With the centrality of the team in business, personality became increasingly essential to effectively leading a group.<sup>3</sup> Specific personality types became so important that by 1954 sixty percent of corporations used some form of personality test.<sup>4</sup> When filling white-collar jobs, corporations sought men who participated in social clubs. Corporations linked participation in these clubs with a type of personality suitable for sales and white-collar work, qualities that remained unimportant when hiring production workers.<sup>5</sup>

Many outside the white-collar world perceived personality, group work, and conformity as more important than aptitude and individuality for success in white-collar

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Whyte Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 18. *The Organization Man* became a *New York Times* best seller in 1956. Michael T. Kaufmen, “William H. Whyte, ‘Organization Man’ Author and Urbanologist, is Dead at 81,” January 13, 1999. C. Wright Mills called the work pessimistic, but largely agreed with many of Whyte’s conclusions. C. Wright Mills, “Crawling to the Top,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1956, 295. *New York Times* columnist Orville Prescott raved about Whyte’s work calling him a “brilliantly gifted student of the customs of his country and an awesomely industrious investigator.” Orville Prescott, “Books of the Times,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1956, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Fred E. Fiedler. *Leaders Attitudes and Group Effectiveness: Final Report of ONR 170-106, N6-ori-0713*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 173.

<sup>5</sup> “How to Apply for a Job,” *Washington Post*, November 6, 1952, 13.

occupations.<sup>6</sup> The three best-known social commentators: *Fortune* editor William H. Whyte, Jr., and sociologists David Riesman and C. Wright Mills, all emphasized the late nineteenth century as the height of American masculinity. Each of these intellectuals produced a key work outlining the producerist ideology. William H. Whyte, Jr., lamented the loss of the Protestant work ethic mentality, which he believed declined after the nineteenth century. Corporations replaced the Protestant ethic with a new “Social Ethic.” Whyte defined the Social Ethic as a “temporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual.” The Social Ethic emphasized the belief in the group as “a source of creativity,” the belief in “belongingness,” and the use of science to achieve belongingness, such as personality tests.<sup>7</sup>

Whyte attacked the new kind of work that emerged in the 1950s because he believed that men not only worked for the corporation, but “belonged to it as well.”<sup>8</sup> The new white-collar men, according to Whyte, were “more beholden to the organization than their elders, producing a major shift in American ideology.”<sup>9</sup> The shift in American ideology reflected a new “age of Organization” that “imprisoned men in Brotherhood.”<sup>10</sup> The white-collar man of the future lacked individuality and the ability to think for himself. The teamwork and committees which Whyte believed dominated corporate work created a type of man that could only “work through others for others.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Esquire's Etiquette: A Guide to Business, Sports, and Social Conduct* by the editors of *Esquire*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1953), 36.

<sup>7</sup> Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 1-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Group work became the main focus of Whyte's criticism of the corporation. Group work, or group-think, caused "the individual to sacrifice his own beliefs so that he may belong."<sup>12</sup> The group replaced the individual as the source of creativity, and Whyte believed the white-collar worker could not express himself or an opinion that differed from that of his group. Whyte asserted, "people rarely think in groups; they talk together, they exchange information... they make compromises. But they do not think... they do not create..."<sup>13</sup> Strong personalities and leaders became objects of suspicion and ridicule in groups.<sup>14</sup> Fitting in became more important than proving one's self, or standing out. Whyte believed that "such a high premium is placed upon fitting into the group's wishes that the individual who shows some initiative on his own becomes suspect..."<sup>15</sup> The group work and the hierarchy of corporations stifled men's creativity and individuality. Deviation from the beliefs of the group could prove costly to men's careers, but by not deviating it cost them their manhood.

The nature of group work challenges sociologist Michael Kimmel's definition of masculinity as homophobia. In Kimmel's conception of masculinity, men perform for the approval of other men by demonstrating their capability of defeating other men.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Whyte portrayed the group as a man's submission to others. Corporations dominated men, serving to "unmask" them and rendering them passive or "sissies."<sup>17</sup> Within the group men could no longer affirm their manhood in the presence of other men. The group deprived men of the ability to differentiate themselves. Whyte's complaint of

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>16</sup> Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," 124-131.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

a lack of individuality was really an assessment of men's inability to demonstrate their manhood, to impress and separate themselves from other men.

C. Wright Mills echoed Whyte's ideas of passivity and femininity. Mills viewed himself as the antithesis of the white-collar man. He portrayed himself as an "academic outlaw."<sup>18</sup> Not only did Mills believe he was an outsider, but he dressed the part. The sociologist constantly wore a leather jacket and a motorcycle helmet. Even his choice of vehicle rejected suburban domesticity. His motorcycle rejected the family sedan, as his writings rejected the suburbs and white-collar work.<sup>19</sup> Mills not only defined himself in opposition to white-collar men rhetorically, but physically with his outlaw persona.

Of the three major commentators, Mills attacked white-collar life with the greatest vehemence. Mills asserted that "the nineteenth-century farmer and businessman were generally thought to be stalwart individuals-- their own men." For Mills the corporation spawned "a New Little Man" who always "belongs" to someone else. Mills considered the white-collar man a "small creature who is acted upon but does not act."<sup>20</sup> According to Mills, these men were incapable of acting, of performing and proving their masculinity in the public sphere. Mills asserted that white-collar work was similar to "history without events," and that "as a group they do not threaten anyone... as individuals they do not practice an independent way of life."<sup>21</sup> For Mills, white-collar men's passivity prevented them from being historical actors. Corporations created a

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<sup>18</sup> Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in the Cold War: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 31.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Mills, *White Collar*, xii. The *New York Times* praised C. Wright Mills as one of the "eminent social scientists." Despite the work's "hopeless disillusioned" tone, it was a "book that persons on every level of the white-collar pyramid should read and ponder. It will alert them to their condition for their better salvation." H.M. Kallen, "The Hollow Men: A Portrayal to Ponder," *New York Times*, September 16, 1951, BR 3.

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



generation of men unable and unwilling to produce change or impact society. These were men better suited for the domestic sphere. The white-collar man could never be a revolutionary, or the subject of history, according to Mills, because he was incapable of acting on his own or in any significant way.

White-collar men, according to Mills, became the property of other men. Mills contrasted the white-collar workers' inability to act with the nineteenth-century man's independence. While the white-collar man abdicated his power to other men, the self-made man remained fully capable of proving and defending his masculinity.

Entrepreneurs and the old middle class remained the ideal form of men for Mills. Small entrepreneurs owned their own property and answered to "no central authority."<sup>22</sup> The independent farmer and small business owner remained an "unalienated entrepreneur," while the bureaucracy of the new middle-class man bred conformity and emasculation.<sup>23</sup>

Both Mills and Whyte loathed the hierarchical structure of corporate work and denounced the men who submitted to it. They believed that the new middle manager replaced the "captains of industry" as the central figures in American business.<sup>24</sup>

Management functioned as nothing more than a "cog" in the "beltline of the bureaucratic machinery...."<sup>25</sup> Mills' imagery illustrated a man incapable of separating himself from his work, and the new white-collar man's personality became part of the bureaucratic structure. The bureaucratic "planning and math" replaced men's "freedom and rationality."<sup>26</sup> Whereas the unalienated nineteenth-century independent man owned his

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

own land and means of production, the middle-class man “no longer owns the enterprise but is controlled by it.”<sup>27</sup> Where the old professionals remained “free,” for Mills and other social commentators salaried work equaled physical and mental slavery.<sup>28</sup> Men no longer sold goods to each other; instead, they sold their services, and by extension themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Similar to Mills’ criticisms of contemporary work, influential sociologist David Riesman coined the term “other-directed” to describe white-collar men. The other-directed man, as opposed to the inner-directed man of the nineteenth century, relied on his peers for guidance and socialization. The inner-directed man expressed self-assuredness, while the other-directed man traded this self-assurance for acceptance by his peer group.<sup>30</sup> Inner-directed men settled the frontier, while other-directed men manipulated their personalities to become “good packages.”<sup>31</sup>

The new middle class embodied the other-directed personality. Salaried work centered on service instead of the production of goods, and it marked men as other-directed.<sup>32</sup> These other-directed men lacked the “older discipline” of inner-directed men, so instead they depended on a corporate/suburban culture that promoted “behavioral conformity.”<sup>33</sup> Riesman believed that the reliance on a peer group reflected a decrease in

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>30</sup> David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 16-24. According to Riesman, inner-directed men did exist in the 1950s, but they represented a small and declining minority. Contemporary Russell Lynes called David Riesman the most influential intellectual in the 1950s. Russell Lynes, *A Surfeit of Honey* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishing, 1957), 17.

<sup>31</sup> David Riesman, “Individualism Reconsidered,” in *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays* by David Riesman (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1954), 27-35.

<sup>32</sup> Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 21.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

self-assured, confident men. Consumer culture and white-collar work caused a man's individuality to be "drained out of him."<sup>34</sup> Riesman argued that the white-collar man lacked a place to take refuge, to find his authentic self. While the inner-directed man turned inward or to his work, the other-directed man could not "take refuge in his skills." Instead, the other-directed man turned to a commercial culture that manipulated him through advertising.<sup>35</sup>

Other social critics of the period came to highly similar conclusions about men's relationship to their work, often adapting some variation of the terms and ideas that Mills, Whyte, and Riesman supplied. In social commentary, control represented the key element to manhood; critiques, including charges of conformity, centered on a lack of control. The nineteenth-century man owned his own land, decided how to run his business, and answered to nobody. The new middle-class man owned nothing and answered to multiple levels of men above him. The white-collar worker could not afford to be an individual because he did not have any control over his own life. According to social commentators, the hierarchy of the corporate structure left him subject to the whims of superiors. Critics charged that he needed outside acceptance because he could not rely on his own labor to survive. Commentators linked control with power and viewed the white-collar worker as powerless. Critics' conflation of white-collar work with powerlessness symbolically castrated white-collar men.

Whyte, Mills, and Riesman all looked to the nineteenth century as the epitome of manhood. For almost all of the commentators, work built character, required individuality, and provided meaning. Besides conformity, the other most common charge

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-142.

levied by social commentators was that corporate work deprived men of a sense of fulfillment. White-collar work did not build character or give men any sense of accomplishment.<sup>36</sup> Critics believed that previous generations of men enjoyed a sense of power through their work, but the “fundamental structure” of contemporary and corporate hierarchy created feelings of powerlessness.<sup>37</sup> Riesman’s inner-directed man needed “discipline, sobriety and integrity.” Since other-directed men dominated society of the 1950s, many commentators believed these values no longer mattered.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed the 1950s witnessed the emergence of a “fun morality” as fun and play supplanted seriousness and sobriety as the key to happiness and fulfillment, and the “boundaries formerly maintained between play and work” shattered. According to famed psychoanalyst and writer Martha Wolfenstein, “amusements infiltrate into the sphere of work... this development appears to be at marked variance with an older, puritan ethic...”<sup>39</sup> “Mutual penetration” occurred between work and play. Everything was meant to be fun, and if an individual was not having fun in all circumstances then the individual believed something was wrong with him. Work contained the permissive attitudes normally confined to the social sphere, and play became the only measure of achievement that assessed success and happiness. Wolfenstein argued reality no longer became judged in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, but only fun or not fun. The

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<sup>36</sup> David Riesman and Howard Roseborough “Careers and Consumer Behavior,” 1955, in *Abundance For What? And Other Essays*, ed. David Riesman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), 147.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Bensman and Bernard Rosenberg, “The Terror and Therapy of Work: The Meaning of Work in Bureaucratic Society,” in *Identity and Anxiety: Survival of the Person in Mass Society* edited by Maurice Stein, Arthur Vidich, and David Manning White (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1960), 186-191.

<sup>38</sup> Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*, 115.

<sup>39</sup> Martha Wolfenstein, “The Emergence of Fun Morality,” in *Journal of Social Issues* 7 (Fall 1951): 15.

model of the fun morality differed from the nineteenth century's sharp division between play and work.<sup>40</sup>

Several popular culture works emphasized the meaninglessness of 1950s work and asserted men could never achieve true happiness or fulfillment inside the white-collar world. Films such as *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* depicted easy advancement within the business world, but accomplishments in the corporate sphere did not offer a sense of fulfillment. Journalists Barbara Ehrenreich and Peter Biskind note, "In the prosperous late forties and fifties, films just *assumed* that their heroes would succeed. The problem in films like... *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* was whether the heroes really wanted to succeed."<sup>41</sup> Ehrenreich and Biskind illustrated that *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* is not about angst over upward mobility; it is about the corporation's incompatibility with personal fulfillment. Rock Hunter did not earn his promotions through his abilities; rather, he moved up because of his pretend romantic involvement with Hollywood actress Rita Marlow.<sup>42</sup> Such success affirms commentators' fears that personality brought achievement in corporations. Others determined Hunter's success. He only played an ancillary role, if any, in advancing his career.

The film centers on the definition of success, and challenges any notion that those who succeed in business are worthy of their positions. Hunter's friend in the company, Rufus, epitomizes everything social commentators believed was wrong with corporate

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Biskind and Barbara Ehrenreich. "Machismo and Hollywood's Working Class," in *Socialist Review* 10, no 2-3 (1980): 126.

<sup>42</sup> Frank Tashlin, dir, *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, with Tony Randall, Jayne Mansfield, Betty Drake (Los Angeles: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1957), DVD. *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* was nominated for a Golden Globe for best picture and Tony Randall won a Writer's Guild of America award for best actor, [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). *Time* called the film "in merry contempt of all that is sacred," serving as an effective parody of both Madison Avenue and the advertising industry. "The New Pictures," *Time* August 19, 1957, 80.

work. Rufus drinks too much at work, takes several tranquilizers a day, and is hopelessly incompetent. When Hunter and Rufus fear they may lose their jobs, Rufus quips to Hunter “we will get other jobbies. Well, I will. I have no talent.”<sup>43</sup> Eventually the man with “no talent” becomes the president of the company, while Hunter and his former boss opt for manual labor. Hunter briefly serves as president of the advertising firm, but he ultimately rejects the corporate world, instead opting to raise chickens with his true love. Hunter chooses the farm over the boardroom and his average fiancée over the glamorous Rita Marlow. In spite of his potential for professional mobility, Hunter defines success as more than just material prosperity. His rise in the corporation comes at the expense of his relationship with his real fiancée. White-collar work cost Hunter his true love, thus leaving him miserable until he rejects his corporate identity. Hunter leaves the pinnacle of white-collar success to pursue a humble life as a farmer with his love interest. Ultimately, the film asserts satisfaction and personal fulfillment cannot be achieved with the corporation, no matter how many promotions one receives.

*Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* puts forth an image of business as dishonest and corrupting. The film opens with several advertisements that promise one thing while clearly delivering another. These advertisements do not relate directly to the plot, but they introduce the corporate setting of the film by parodying the role of advertisements and business in the 1950s. For example one of the advertisements is for a razor, but it cannot trim the man’s beard. Another commercial features a beer without any head that continuously foams over the edge of the glass.<sup>44</sup> This false advertising set the tone for the film’s attitude towards business. The film pairs this dishonesty and the incompetency

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

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

of men in the corporation against a nobler form of manual labor. Hunter achieves true happiness after leaving luxury to work with his hands on a farm. After almost losing his fiancée, he reclaims her after he trades his gray flannel suit for overalls. The film depicts the triumph of the self-made man over white-collar man. The small business owner or independent farmer, which Hunter becomes, enjoys more freedom and happiness. Hunter, almost corrupted by the white-collar world, finds his authentic self through manual labor.<sup>45</sup>

While *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* uses comedy to satirize the white-collar man, Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* offers a serious adaptation of the same theme. The two works had very different audiences but a very similar message. The film was intended for a mass audience, while the play originally appealed to a high-brow audience. The variety in appeal of these films illustrated the depth of the producerist argument. It penetrated all aspects of popular culture, high and low-brow alike. In Miller's work, nature and manual labor offer a nobler and more fulfilling occupation than salesman. Biff Loman, son of the protagonist and salesman Willy Loman, reflects the tension between the self-made man and the white-collar man. He rejects the white-collar world, characterizing such work as "suffer[ing] for fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two week vacation, when all you really desire is to be out with your shirt off."<sup>46</sup> Happy, Biff's younger brother, feels the same way but is stuck in a dead end retail job

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

<sup>46</sup> Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, (New York: Viking Press, 1949), 22. *New York Times* columnist Brooks Atkinson called "Death of a Salesman," a "tragedy of an ordinary man," and argued Miller captured and understood the modern American family. The play also won a Pulitzer Prize and was voted the top U.S. drama in 1949 by critics. Brooks Atkinson, "Death of a Salesman," *New York Times*, February 20, 1949, X1; Charles Grutnzer, "'Salesman' Is Pulitzer Play; Sherwood, Cozzens Cited," *New York Times*, May 3, 1949, 1; Sam Zolotow, "Miller Play Wins Critics' Plaudits," *New York Times*, April 13, 1949, 40.

where he must wait for the manager to die in order to be promoted. Happy wishes he could join his brother, and he even tells his brother, “I mean I can out box, out run, and out lift anybody in that store, and I have to take orders from those common, petty sons of bitches ‘til I can’t stand it no more.”<sup>47</sup> Where Biff finds his beauty in nature and his physicality rewarded, Happy only finds a stifling career without any prospect for advancing.

Biff believes that he “doesn’t fit in” with the business world, and that he would prefer “mixing cement on some open plain--or being a carpenter.”<sup>48</sup> Despite Biff’s attempts to conform by asking an old boss for a loan, he eventually remains true to his version of manhood.<sup>49</sup> Biff declines Happy’s invitation to stay in the city with him and replies with “I know who I am, kid.”<sup>50</sup> In Biff’s last line he affirms his position that true happiness can only be achieved through manual labor. Even Biff’s final remembrance of his father focused on his father’s happiness through building. Biff remarks “there is more of him [Willy] in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made.”<sup>51</sup> Biff views his father’s career as meaningless, and his true happiness came from building not selling.

Nature and manual labor as the root to happiness and manhood played a central theme in the decade’s most popular dramatic genre, the Western. Westerns accounted for over ten percent of all fictional works in the 1950s, and eighty percent of the top television shows. According to Michael Kimmel, “Westerns provided the recreation of the frontier... where real men, men who were good with a horse and a gun,

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-81. Biff failed to get the loan and ran out of the office. Even though he failed by the end of the story he seems happily reserved to his position as a laborer.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



triumphed...<sup>52</sup> The cowboy represented the self-made man by being “fierce and brave, willing to venture into unknown territory and tame it for its less-than-masculine inhabitants.”<sup>53</sup> After subduing new territory the cowboy must seek new challenges in new territories. Not only is the cowboy in conflict with nature, but he “moves in a world of men, in which daring, bravery, and skill are constantly tested...”<sup>54</sup> The isolation of the cowboy becomes the “masculinization of selfhood, symbolized by the lonesome cowboy...”<sup>55</sup> The independent cowboy appears closer to the hegemonic version of self-made masculinity than the white-collar man that relies on the group.

One of the most acclaimed and popular westerns of the 1950s, *Shane*, captured the cowboy’s tension with domestic life. The opening credits follow Shane as he rides alone through the wilderness. Shane does not have a permanent residence and is not travelling in any particular direction. He lives a nomadic lifestyle without emotional or physical attachment. When asked where he is heading by Joe Starrett, the owner of a small farm, Shane replies “one place or another.”<sup>56</sup> Despite his nomadic tendencies, Shane attempts to stay with a family on the edge of the frontier. Shane tries to give up his gunfighter past, and the family’s domestic tranquility serves as juxtaposition to the

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<sup>52</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 165.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Kimmel, “The Cult of Masculinity: American Social Character and the Legacy of the Cowboy,” in *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change*, edited by Michael Kaufman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 238-239.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>55</sup> Muriel Dimen, “Power, Sexuality and Intimacy,” in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, edited by Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 39.

<sup>56</sup> George Stevens, dir, *Shane*, with Alan Ladd, Jean Arthur and Van Heflin (California: Paramount Pictures, 1953), DVD. The tension between larger rancher and the independent community symbolizes the tensions between the self-made man and the corporation. The corporation (Riker) attempts to destroy individuality (the frontier community). *Shane* grossed over twenty million dollars and won an Oscar for best cinematography and was nominated for best supporting actor and best picture [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). *The New York Times* called *Shane* one of the best ten films of the year, “The Ten Best Motion Pictures of 1953,” *The New York Times*, December 27, 1953, X7.

life Shane left behind. The family is part of a new start up community, but their land is threatened by a larger rancher, named Riker.<sup>57</sup>

For a while, Shane adjusts to domestication. He wears store bought clothes for the first time in a long time; helps Joe, the male figure in the house he is staying with, around the farm; and earns the admiration of the little boy, Joey. Even though Shane and the community are getting along, the threat of Riker causes Shane to revert back to his gunfighter ways. Without a marshal in a one-hundred mile radius, it is up to Shane to protect Joe's family and the rest of the community.<sup>58</sup> Shane defeats both Riker and his hired gunfighter to save the community. Shane's violent regression causes him to realize that he can never fit into domestic life. The fight with Riker serves as a form of self-realization, in which Shane realizes he is only good at one thing and can only live one way: as a lone gunfighter. When Joey asks him to stay, Shane replies by telling him "a man has to be what he is, he can't break the mold... there is no going back for me..."<sup>59</sup> The film ends with Shane riding off again into the wilderness alone, with Joey chasing after him begging him to stay.<sup>60</sup>

Shane fits psychologist Muriel Dimen's conception of the "masculinization of selfhood." Dimen argues hegemonic masculinity, the kind social commentators supported, is incompatible with forming fulfilling relationships. Relationships and dependency on others is feminized, while being alone is masculine. This was partly why commentators denounced suburban life and corporate work, because both the suburbs and white-collar work depended on relationships. Dimen asserts that "when yearnings for the

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

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

Other arise nonetheless, they seem too complicated to acknowledge. As soon as such ambiguity emerges, John Wayne gets on his horse and rides off into the sunset.”<sup>61</sup> The tension between domesticity and affection for Joe’s family and independence is at the center of *Shane*. Once Shane insures that “there are no more guns in the valley,” he cannot stay, because no one is left to test his manhood.<sup>62</sup> Joey’s mother tells Shane, after he teaches Joey to shoot, that guns will not be a part of her child’s life. That even though the frontier is a place of strenuous labor it was no longer a place of the danger and risk that required gunfights. Shane saved the town, but in doing so needed another challenge. He could not remain complacent or happy in domestic life but needed to prove his manhood once again in the wilderness. Shane and other western figures embodied commentators’ ideal of manhood. Cowboys, like Shane, could not function in domesticity or within the confines of teamwork. Shane rejects any offers of help when dealing with Riker and embarks on the challenge alone. Similarly, he finds the Starett’s ranch stifling to his to his need for adventure and danger. Shane is an inner-directed man unable to adjust to his new, symbolic white-collar lifestyle and ultimately rejects it as any true inner-directed man would.

Shane and Hunter had two options by the end of the films, conformity or individuality. Each of the protagonists selects a type of individuality. Rock Hunter rejects the conformity of the corporation, while Shane opts for the individuality of the frontier lifestyle over the domesticity of the ranch. Conformity or individuality reflected

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<sup>61</sup> Dimen, 42. The “Other” implies the feminine. As feelings emerge that deviate from the masculine sense of self the “John Wayne” figure must flee in order to avoid facing feelings that challenge his identity. For example, as Shane develops attachment to the family he must leave or risk losing his masculine identity.

<sup>62</sup> *Shane*.

the paradigm created by social commentators. The perceived threat that white-collar workers posed to individuality contained implications for democracy. Social commentators believed the new emphasis on teamwork and personality eliminated the competition necessary for democracy to flourish.<sup>63</sup> Riesman's inner-directed man derived his idea of politics from the "sphere of production." The inner-directed man viewed "politics as work, and work as good."<sup>64</sup> The meaninglessness of the other-directed man's work caused him to conceive of politics in a different way. Riesman asserted the other-directed man's conception of politics came from "consumership." This man no longer idolized "great politicians," nor did he understand political issues. The luxuries the other-directed man surrounded himself with "dulled" his interest in politics.<sup>65</sup> Instead the other-directed man consumed packaged values based on appearances.<sup>66</sup> The inner-directed man supposedly remained above the tricks and deceptions of advertising, but the corporate man lacked both the fortitude and the independence necessary to preserve democracy.<sup>67</sup>

Despite their focus on the "decline" of democracy, commentators such as Riesman, Mills, Whyte, and their fellow intellectuals rarely discussed the threat of communism.<sup>68</sup> Their conception of politics was tied less to the cold war than to politics as a realm for the performance of masculinity. Historically, masculinity was linked to visibility in the public sphere; thus, for these critics the white-collar workers' retreat into

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<sup>63</sup> Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Reinhart and Company, Inc., 1946), 210.

<sup>64</sup> Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 210.

<sup>65</sup> Lynes, *A Surfeit of Honey*, 1. The *New York Times* included *Surfeit of Honey* in the 1957 top one hundred books. "One Hundred of the Year's Outstanding Books," *New York Times*, June 9, 1957, 247.

<sup>66</sup> Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 211-216.

<sup>67</sup> Mills, *White Collar*, 43.

<sup>68</sup> The notable exception is Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. While Schlesinger did not reference communism in his *Esquire* article, the theme is prevalent in several of his other works

the private sphere was a retreat to femininity. Politics in past generations offered a realm for men to prove their masculinity. However, the public space associated with masculinity began to vanish during the 1950s. Historian Lizabeth Cohen asserted “mass consumption in postwar America created a new landscape, where public space was more commercialized, privatized, and feminized...”<sup>69</sup> Large shopping centers replaced town squares, and private spaces limited men’s ability for public activity.<sup>70</sup> The public forum diminished, and with it so did venues for public and political demonstrations. Private entities controlled what types of messages they allowed and increasingly these private spheres became apolitical spaces. Social commentators’ attitudes towards white-collar men’s interests in politics, similar to their attitude towards white-collar work, are best understood as reactions to the changes in 1950s superstructures. Developers designed these privately constructed new “town squares” with the “female consumer in mind,” diminishing the public opportunities for men to demonstrate their masculinity.<sup>71</sup>

Rather than accept a new form of masculinity based upon a rapidly changing postwar society, social commentators blamed political apathy and most other social ills on white-collar men’s lack of individuality. Social critics believed conformity led to men’s success and promotions in the corporate world.<sup>72</sup> Whyte argued that corporate personnel men “weeded-out” strong-willed men in order to find men able to thrive in a group-think environment.<sup>73</sup> Despite an increase in material wealth, social commentators

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<sup>69</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 286.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>72</sup> David Riesman, “The Saving Remnant: An Examination of Character Structure,” in *Individualism Reconsidered*, 104.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

viewed white-collar men as considerably less independent than their nineteenth-century counterparts.<sup>74</sup>

Corporate men needed to conform to the whims of their bosses. Commentators believed assertiveness, individuality, and white-collar work were incompatible. C.C. Baxter's experiences in the film *The Apartment* reflect the precarious position white-collar workers were believed to occupy. Personality and conformity led to the promotions of C.C. "Bud" Baxter. He works for an insurance company of over thirty thousand employees on the nineteenth floor of an office building. Baxter arrives to work every day at 8:20A.M. and often works late. Baxter is a bachelor and allows his bosses to use his apartment for their extramarital affairs. At the beginning of the film Baxter is a sycophant, allowing his bosses to repeatedly take advantage of him. They eat and drink all of his food without repaying him, and they keep him out of his apartment while he is sick. Baxter cannot stand up to his bosses, and as more of his superiors find out about his arrangement, they also want to use his apartment.<sup>75</sup>

To insure that his bosses can use his apartment, they keep promising him a promotion. If Baxter protests, his bosses threaten him with demerits on his monthly efficiency ratings. Once the top boss Mr. Sheldrake finds out about Baxter's arrangement, he also wants in on the arrangement. Baxter attempts to protest, but

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<sup>74</sup> David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 95.

<sup>75</sup> Billy Wilder, dir, *The Apartment*, With Jack Lemmon, Shirley MacLaine, Fred MacMurray (New York: Mirisch Corporation, 1960), DVD. *The Apartment* won five Oscars including best director, best picture, and was nominated for six others. By 1970 grossed over twenty five million dollars [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). Film reviewer Bosley Crowther stated "you might not think a movie about a fellow who lends his rooms to the married executives of his office as a place for their secret love affairs would make a particularly funny or morally presentable show... the idea is run into a gleeful, tender and even sentimental film." Crowther called Wilder's direction "ingenious" and deemed the film "sparkled by brilliant little touches." Bosley Crowther, "Screen: Busy 'Apartment,'" *New York Times*, June 16, 1960, 37.

Sheldrake tells Baxter he is “executive material.”<sup>76</sup> However, the situation grows increasingly complicated as Mr. Sheldrake is using Baxter’s apartment to have an affair with Fran, the woman Baxter is in love with as well. Despite his feelings, Baxter continues to help Sheldrake have an affair and even nurses Fran back to health after an attempted suicide. For Baxter’s trouble he is promoted from the office floor to his own office. Baxter’s rise is juxtaposed against the elderly man he worked next to in the bullpen. The elderly man’s position within the company is stagnant, whereas Baxter’s unwillingness to speak out against his mistreatment allows him to move up in the company relatively quickly. The film’s assertion is that hard work only leads to dead ends within a corporation but conformity and passivity allow for mobility.<sup>77</sup>

Eventually, Baxter parlays his relationship with Mr. Sheldrake to a top executive position with a key to the executive wash room. Baxter’s new office overlooks New York City, serving as a contrast to his bullpen position on the nineteenth floor which had no window or walls. The top floor represents the pinnacle of executive success and privilege, but to maintain his position he still needs to accommodate Sheldrake’s demands to use his apartment. Finally, Baxter, tired of being used, stands up for himself and turns in his office key. He proclaims as he is leaving the office that he would rather be a “human being” than an executive. On hearing of his stand, Fran decides to leave Sheldrake for Baxter, and the film ends with Fran and Baxter together.<sup>78</sup>

Baxter represents the conforming and weak white-collar worker that social commentators envisioned. Unnoticed by his bosses, unremarkable in ability, and the

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

“kind of guy that can’t say no,” Baxter achieves his promotions through personality.<sup>79</sup> Baxter reaches the top executive levels of his company simply by facilitating his bosses’ affairs, not by merit. However, through the film Baxter transforms from the weak office type to a “human being.” With a demonstration of strength and character, which he was incapable of while a white-collar worker, he is able to win his love interest. The white-collar company left him weak and impotent. Baxter’s subordinate position and dependency on Sheldrake for his job and promotions force him to take care of the woman he loves even though she is sleeping with another man. He must endure the indignity of not only watching Sheldrake and Fran’s relationship but ensuring that Sheldrake’s wife never discovers it. Baxter eventually trades humiliation and emasculation for a form of success, and achieves true happiness with Fran once he leaves the organization. Baxter trades his gray flannel suit for manhood.<sup>80</sup>

Baxter’s personal crisis stems from the tension between individuality and conformity. His position in the hierarchical structure left him with little personal power, which forced him to conform to the wishes of his superiors in order to succeed in his work. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., extrapolated the themes in *The Apartment* and applied them to all white-collar men. Schlesinger believed conformity stemmed from an identity crisis faced by 1950s men. Schlesinger asked in *Esquire* magazine’s fitness guide “What has happened to the American male? For a long time he seemed utterly confident in his manhood, sure of his masculine role in society.” The fear that “men will

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

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



not be man enough” grew from an “uncertainty about his identity in general.”<sup>81</sup>

Schlesinger specifically cited the “new age” of social and geographic mobility as the catalyst for the destruction of the self-made man.<sup>82</sup> In order to reassert their masculinity, men must reclaim:

a sense of individual spontaneity, and to do this a man must visualize himself as an individual apart from the group... Achievement and identity, the conquest of a sense of self-- they will do more to restore American masculinity than all of the hormones in the test tubes of our scientists.<sup>83</sup>

Schlesinger linked the idea of an identity crisis to men seeking material and social safety through conformity. Conformity stemmed from a lack of control. For Schlesinger and the other social critics, if men lacked the ability to control various aspects of their lives then they ceased to be men. Belonging to a group presumably required relinquishing control, usually to other men. White-collar work forces C.C. Baxter to give up his control not only to his work but his home and love life. Schlesinger’s identity crisis was a crisis of power over who was in control of men’s lives: the men or the organization.

The editors of *Look* magazine captured Schlesinger’s and others’ idea of a lack of individuality. According to *Look*, a man “allowed the rape of his privacy and integrity...”<sup>84</sup> Corporations left men without a sense of self or individuality, forcing them to look to the group for identification and affirmation.<sup>85</sup> *Look*’s usage of the term rape emphasized the power dynamic implicit in men’s relationship to their occupation. The

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<sup>81</sup> *Esquire’s The Art of Keeping Fit: On How the Successful Male Can Avoid Going to Seed*, by the editors of *Esquire* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959) 30-33. This Schlesinger article was included in other works produced by *Esquire*, but its inclusion here demonstrates the pervasiveness of the producerist ideology.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-36

<sup>84</sup> Editors of *Look Magazine*, “The Decline of the American Male,” *The Decline of the American Male*, (New York: Random House, 1958), 32.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-36.

organization took men's individuality by force, and made men submit their individuality to the group. Men remained unable to fight back and powerless to stop the organization from violating them emotionally. The organization victimized the white-collar man. He remained penetrated by forces outside of his control.

The rise of corporations caused a renegotiation of older conceptions of individualism and ambition. Social commentators fetishized nineteenth-century small business owners and independent farmers. They clung to the ideal of the self-made man as the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. Critics and popular culture asserted that the career of the independent farmer and the small business owner represented a world of risk, while the corporation reflected a world of security. Social critics argued that the new man of the 1950s displayed a "passive ambition." For example, Whyte argued that men wanted to rise fast through the corporate hierarchy, but not if that ambition placed an unnecessary strain on them. Men only worked hard enough to achieve a specific standard of living.<sup>86</sup> Men, according to Whyte, no longer wanted to prove themselves in the marketplace, and instead opted for the feminine sphere of consumption and family.

Many critics believed the America of the 1950s did not reflect the historical "struggle of winners and losers," but a new America where "everyone has won a fairy-tale, luxury, but lost himself."<sup>87</sup> Work no longer built a strong character in men, and the love of luxury and leisure confirmed men's passivity. Social commentators considered the white-collar worker as the ultimate passive male.<sup>88</sup> William H. Whyte Jr. noted that

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<sup>86</sup> Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 131.

<sup>87</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The Orgamerican Phantasy," in *Identity and Anxiety*, 324.

<sup>88</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, translated by Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 21. Passivity's equation with femininity stemmed from the idea that men act.

business jargon “is marked by the heavy use of passive construction. Nobody ever does anything. Things happen, prices rise but nobody raises them.”<sup>89</sup> Passivity and lack of individuality at work translated to sexual and physical inadequacies. Commentators believed the white-collar sphere contained significant levels of anxiety. Anxiety differed from the idea of stress. Stress came from hard work or overworking, while anxiety came from a lack of confidence about one’s position or identity. Anxiety caused a myriad of social and personal problems, including poor sexual performance. One industrial psychologist stated, “These men have drained off their energy through worry over their job so much [that] they are no longer any good lovers.” Sexual anxiety further distracted men from their work, creating a downward spiral leading to further problems, such as alcoholism.<sup>90</sup>

Sex and sexual performance offered an example of the degree to which social critics believed white-collar work defined masculinity. Not only did it dictate the type of relationships white-collar workers formed, but it prohibited them from satisfying a woman or enjoying true intimacy. David Riesman asserted that “the other-directed man looks to sex not for display but for a test of his... ability to attract.”<sup>91</sup> White-collar work left men so insecure over their positions, so incapable of displaying a dominating personality that they only validated themselves through their relationship to others. Unable to prove themselves in the public sphere, other-directed men used sexual relationships as proof of their masculinity, but this too ultimately confirmed their

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Bourdieu asserted men take action while women are receptors of actions. Passivity equaled femininity. Social commentators use of the word passive equated white-collar men with women.

<sup>89</sup> William H. Whyte Jr., *Is Anybody Listening?: How and Why U.S. Businesses Fumbles When it Talks With Human Beings* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), 48.

<sup>90</sup> Anonymous industrial psychologist quoted in *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>91</sup> Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 156.

passivity rather than asserted their dominance. For Riesman sex “provides a kind of defense against the threat of total apathy... gives the other-directed man reassurance he is alive.”<sup>92</sup> However, any assuredness was fleeting as the white-collar man remained unable to compete on the same level for women as the inner-directed man. The other-directed man lacked “defense against his own envy.”<sup>93</sup> Perpetually insecure, the growing presence of female sexuality caused white-collar men to become overwhelmed by anxiety over their own inability to satisfy women.<sup>94</sup> *Look* magazine declared that the “American male lost much of his sexual initiative and control,” and that men were no longer the aggressor in sex but the “receivers.”<sup>95</sup> Fear of women’s sexuality did not stem from women’s empowerment, but from the impotence of men. Since men were no longer men, according to *Look*, they were incapable of containing women’s sexuality. Unable to control their women, white-collar men could only watch as their women turned masculine. White-collar men attempted to consume sex as a validation of their manhood and as protection from their mundane lives, but their insecurities, inabilities, and increasing pressure to satisfy their wives left them increasingly anxious about their manhood.

Psychiatrist Robert Lindner furthered Riesman’s attack on white-collar men’s sexuality, asserting that homosexuality was a response to the pressures to conform. Lindner categorized the new middle-class man as a “Mass Man.” These Mass Men conformed because “non-conformity has become the major, if not only, sin we know

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-12.

today.”<sup>96</sup> Lindner believed mass culture and corporations placed an intense pressure on the individual to conform causing an “extreme tension... between the individual and his society.”<sup>97</sup> This tension and conformity contained a strong element of sexual repression, and Lindner held bedroom conformity responsible for homosexuality.<sup>98</sup> The homosexual man rebelled against conformity, but it was a “negative” rebellion.<sup>99</sup> For Lindner, homosexuality related “directly to the basic issue of man versus society, of individual versus conformity...”<sup>100</sup> The 1950s culture “unmanned” men.<sup>101</sup> Mass culture left men impotent to rebel against conformity in a meaningful way, according to Lindner. Men responded to increasing conformity and sexual repression by turning to homosexuality. Homosexuality was a misguided attempt at rejecting the Mass Man identity, a rejection of the supposed sexual repression of the 1950s.<sup>102</sup>

Sex offered men both an escape from the dullness of middle-class life and a source of anxiety and confusion. Social commentators argued that the 1950s witnessed a decrease in men’s “sexual potency.”<sup>103</sup> The inner-directed man did not need sex to escape, nor did he worry about performance anxiety. Commentators did not explicitly elaborate on the sexual prowess of the nineteenth-century male, but the self-made man represented the antithesis of the white-collar male. Through this juxtaposition, it can be

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<sup>96</sup> Robert Lindner, *Must You Conform?* (Toronto: Rinehart and Company Inc., 1956), 65.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

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

<sup>102</sup> Lindner does occasionally reference that these pressures impacted both men and women, but it was clear that Lindner’s main focus was men. For Lindner homosexuality meant male homosexuality. One of the main reasons for this was that men dealt directly with the forces that promoted conformity such as the corporation.

<sup>103</sup> “The Decline of the American Male,” The editors of *Look* magazine (New York: Random House, 1958), 22.

inferred that the inner-directed man exemplified self-control, individuality, and sexual prowess. David Riesman made the analogy, in *The Lonely Crowd*, that “the professional man’s uneasy relation to his craft resembles that of a husband to a good- looking and flirtatious wife in a room full of competitive men.”<sup>104</sup> Riesman’s analogy juxtaposed the sexual inadequacies attributed to the effeminate other-directed man, with the central characteristic, competitiveness, of the self-made man. The inner-directed man’s inherent “competitive” and assertive nature sexually threatened the passive professional male. Riesman implied the professional male lacked the sexual ability to satisfy his wife, as well as the ability to control his household. Conversely, the inner-directed man was sexually alluring and capable of satisfying a woman. Riesman’s analogy alluded that the inner-directed man’s wife would never seek other men, while the other-directed man remained cuckolded by a flirtatious wife.

White-collar work’s perceived impact did not stop with men’s sexual capabilities, also extending to men’s roles within their homes and communities. Social commentators believed the wives of white-collar men became part of the corporation, and suburbs extended the corporation’s value of conformity. Wives became an essential part of a white-collar man’s personality.<sup>105</sup> Women’s social capacity in entertaining and mingling at office events could help or hinder their husband’s careers.<sup>106</sup> Whyte believed that businesses intentionally attempted to “cross the threshold” of the home through family programs and family social clubs. Corporations built a “social community able to

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<sup>104</sup> Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 141.

<sup>105</sup> Wives also became important because they reassured employers of men’s heterosexuality.

<sup>106</sup> This focuses on women who were not low level white-collar workers themselves, but wives of white-collar workers only.

provide its members with more and more of their basic social wants.”<sup>107</sup> For example, I.B.M. built a massive country club including a swimming pool, bowling alley, golf course, tennis courts, various picnic areas and play areas for children.<sup>108</sup> Whyte quoted an anonymous executive as lamenting that “We control a man’s environment in business and we lose it entirely when he crosses the threshold of his home.”<sup>109</sup> Whyte viewed the clubs as furthering the organizations control over white-collar men.

The key to shaping men’s environment at home meant placing the wife in a central role. The wife of the white-collar worker remained integral to the “the caste and social system of the modern corporation.”<sup>110</sup> A good wife became one of the most important elements of the white-collar man’s career. One executive characterized the ideal wife as “highly adaptable, gregarious, and realizes her husband belongs to the corporation.”<sup>111</sup> The wife became a manifestation of the corporation, with her behavior and personality just as scrutinized as her husband’s personality.<sup>112</sup> The ideal “good wife” helped her husband by what she did not do, more so than what she did do. Whyte asserted “the good wife is good by not doing things--by not complaining... by not fussing... by not engaging in any controversial activities.”<sup>113</sup> For the wife of the corporate man, gossip, an unwillingness to move, a breach of social etiquette when dealing with the wife of her husband’s superior, disagreeable disposition, or even

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<sup>107</sup> William H. Whyte, Jr., “The Wives of Management,” *Fortune*, October 1951, 86.

<sup>108</sup> William H. Whyte, Jr., “The Corporation and the Wife,” *Fortune*, November 1951, 111.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Anonymous executive quoted in *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>112</sup> Whyte, *Is Anyone Listening?*, 146-154.

<sup>113</sup> Whyte, “The Wives of Management,” 87.

unattractiveness all could potentially sabotage her husband's career.<sup>114</sup> The executive's wife's main role was to be a "social operator," to follow a prescribed set of unwritten social roles in order not to derail her husband's career.<sup>115</sup>

Critics argued corporations controlled white-collar men's wives. His loss of personality and individualism extended to her. Louis Ruthenburg, Board Chairman of the gas refrigerator corporation Servel, never hired a white-collar worker without examining the candidate's wife first. Ruthenburg and other executives called wives at home because, if a man married a wife "who didn't fix her husband a good breakfast," then he "wasn't a good risk." A wife's career posed a risk to the white-collar or potential white-collar worker. A wife with an income caused suspicion because it meant either that a man lived beyond his means or that his wife "wears the pants."<sup>116</sup> Many organizational leaders believed that if the wife had a "sizable" income of her own that it would "mitigate the man's economic drive."<sup>117</sup> The self-made man's wife did not determine his success or status.<sup>118</sup> Social commentators asserted that women's conformity to an ideal type for their husband's success mimicked the same conformity men endured to get ahead.

Whyte depicted women as having a sizable impact on men's ability to succeed in the corporate world. Whyte provided one incident, which he claimed was not "untypical," at an insurance company where "the president is now sidetracking one of his

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<sup>114</sup> Whyte, *Is Anyone Listening?*, 155-156. One example of a breach of etiquette would be inviting her husband's boss' wife out for something, rather than accepting an invitation.

<sup>115</sup> Whyte, "The Wives of Management," 87.

<sup>116</sup> Whyte, *Is Anyone Listening?*, 180-183.

<sup>117</sup> Whyte "The Corporation and the Wife," 109. Here Whyte's criticism seems contradictory. At first he depicted white-collar workers as lacking any sense of ambition, which was a problem inherent in the corporate structure. If a wife's job can hold back a man's desire for competition and to advance, then they must have inherently had that desire to begin with.

<sup>118</sup> *Esquire's All About Women*, edited by Saul Maloff and the editors of *Esquire* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), 34.



top men in favor of a less able one; the former's wife 'has absolutely no sense of public relations.'"<sup>119</sup> Whyte blamed the fourth martini at an office party for derailing many promising executives' careers.<sup>120</sup> Even if a social blunder was not the reason for men being passed over for promotion, women attempted to check men's ambition in other ways. Whyte argued that women believed in the career Plateau, and that women saw a "man's drive as an unnecessarily divisive factor in the home."<sup>121</sup> Women spoke of "bad wives" being the women that pushed their husbands to succeed, rather than the ones that held them back.<sup>122</sup> However, men were not stuck with wives that anchored their careers because divorce did not negatively impact a man's career. The corporation expected rapidly advancing men to "outgrow" their wives, and "the executive's next and, presumably more mobile, wife will be better..."<sup>123</sup>

The assertion that the corporation controlled employees' households served as the ultimate emasculation. Social commentators believed men no longer "controlled" their wives, but allowed other men, their bosses, to do so. The corporation set traditional expectations for women, not their husbands. The self-made man controlled his household, but social critics believed the corporation controlled both the white-collar man and his wife. Women and other men preformed the role of traditional masculinity because white-collar men remained incapable of doing so themselves.

The 1950s film *Woman's World* depicted Whyte's conception of the white-collar marriage. The film follows three potential white-collar workers and their bid for a

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<sup>119</sup> Whyte, "The Corporation and the Wife," 110.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Whyte, "The Wives of Management," 207.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Whyte, "The Corporation and the Wife," 110.

promotion. Wives accompanied the prospective hires as they flew from their various parts of the country to interview with the head of the company, Mr. Gifford, in New York City. The men work for Gifford motors, a company that manufactures luxury automobiles. The Gifford auto company is the largest and most successful in its field. Clifton Gifford, the company's president, is searching to replace Mr. Briggs the former General Manager.<sup>124</sup> Briggs has died; as Mr. Gifford notes "nothing could stop his devotion to his work, not even his doctor." The position offers a salary of one-hundred-twenty-five thousand dollars and an "outrageous expense account."<sup>125</sup> Embodying Whyte's assertion that the wife was essential to the white-collar worker's success, the characters' wives are secretly interviewed and scrutinized in an interview process similar to the one their husbands face. In emphasizing the importance of the executive's wife, Gifford mused about the potential GM candidates, "may the best man win or should I say may the best wife win."<sup>126</sup>

Each of the three couples reflected various aspects of Whyte's conception of the corporate wife. The first couple, Mr. and Mrs. Burns, is in the midst of a separation, which they are attempting to hide from Mr. Gifford. Mrs. Burns wants her husband to seek the career Plateau. Mr. Burns suffers from terrible ulcers brought on by stress, and his constant long hours at work caused resentment from his wife. Work for the Burns couple is at the center of their divorce. The second couple, Phil and Katie, represents the

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<sup>124</sup> Jean Negulesco, dir., *Woman's World*, with George Montgomery, Dorothy Malone, and Frank Faylen (Los Angeles: United Artist, 1954). DVD. Gifford inherited the company from his father. This was an average and forgettable film. The *New York Times* called it an "uncomfortable farce." However, the film demonstrates the depth of the commentators' argument. They not only applied to critically acclaimed films such as *The Apartment* and *Shane*, but lesser, low-brow films as well. Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review," *New York Times*, September 29, 1954, 23.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

small town family. Where Mrs. Burns is sophisticated, Katie often makes inappropriate comments, and she lacks appropriate attire for the various dinners they attend. Katie ultimately does not want her husband to take the promotion because she does not want to move with her three children to New York City. Whyte noted that a wife's unwillingness to move could sink a man's career, and Katie embodies such tension between up-and-coming executive and wife. At the beginning of the film Katie is unaware her husband is even being considered for the position. Katie even goes as far as telling Gifford not to give her husband a job in New York because she does not want to live there. The final couple, Jerry and Carole, personifies Whyte's idea of the "bad wife." Carole is overly ambitious, telling Mr. Gifford "I'm up to here with ambition for my ambition for my husband." Urging her husband to be more forceful, Carole tells him "I belong here [penthouse suite in New York City]..." and that "you've got to want things Jerry."<sup>127</sup> Carole even attempts to seduce Mr. Gifford at the end of the film as a way of getting her husband the job. When confronted she tells Jerry that the reason he had so many clients was because of her, with the implication that she flirted, or more, to bring him to the top.<sup>128</sup>

Not only is Whyte's portrayal of wives applied to *Woman's World*, but his interpretation of the unwritten social order shapes the film. Gifford tells his assistant that it is "better not to make a tycoon out of a man without making sure his wife is qualified as Mrs. Tycoon."<sup>129</sup> The social element of "Mrs. Tycoon" becomes important because her responsibilities require various social obligations. Gifford's mother explained the

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

role of the General Manager's wife as "saying nice things you didn't mean to people who didn't believe you," while their husbands remained constantly away on business.<sup>130</sup>

Gifford informed the wives that they must "never compete with company," and that their husband's work always comes first.<sup>131</sup> Sometimes the wives become liabilities, violating the various social rules. This includes having too many martinis at a social gathering, not bringing the right dress, hiccupping at inappropriate times, and overly flirtatious behavior.<sup>132</sup>

Eventually Jerry receives the job offer, much to the relief of the other two candidates. Phil had determined he would turn down the job because his wife did not want move. Mr. Burns told his wife, "I don't need the Briggs job to make me happy I just need you."<sup>133</sup> Burn starts out as blue-collar worker, but his current position as a white-collar worker is causing him a relationship and health problems. Both men choose their wives, and in Mr. Burns' case his health too, over the promotion, electing to find the "Plateau" of success. Jerry wins the promotion, but only after he informs everyone that he left his wife. Divorce did not hurt men, as Whyte pointed out, and in Jerry's case his wife actually "handicapped" him. Once he decides that her overly ambitious and flirtatious behavior was unacceptable, he becomes the right man in Gifford's eyes.<sup>134</sup>

*Woman's World* offered a fictional version of the criteria Whyte identified in his books and articles for *Fortune* magazine. Both Whyte and the film depicted men as needing their wives' help in order to succeed. In the film men's ability also mattered. Whyte

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* Katie was the main perpetrator of most of these, except for the overly flirtatious behavior that belong solely to Carole.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

often seems to dismiss white-collar men's ability almost entirely, since the hierarchical corporate structure valued conformity over competency. At some point the men's merit and aptitude could not make up for their wives' personality. This influence of women over their husband's careers further emasculated white-collar men in the eyes of social commentators.

Not only did men's relationships with their wives come under scrutiny, but their role in their community did as well. William H. Whyte, Jr. identified the suburbs as reflecting "values of the organization man, communities made in his image... new social institutions, dormitory life into adulthood."<sup>135</sup> The suburbs, made up of similar houses, gave significance to innocuous purchases. Since one's home no longer displayed wealth to the neighbors, "meaningless" purchases conveyed status between white-collar workers.<sup>136</sup> *Business Week* deemed the 1950s as an age of "inconspicuous consumption," where the addition of a swimming pool or new refrigerator separated one home from another.<sup>137</sup> Men and women in the suburbs "struggle with their gardens" because the garden offered a form of visibility to their neighbors. Southern historian William Dobriner summed up social commentators' view of the triviality of suburban living when he stated a "sloppy garden" equaled an inept household.<sup>138</sup>

The suburbs placed an increased emphasis on consumption and luxury, which further alienated the white-collar man from the self-made man ideal. Characterized as an extension of the corporation by social commentators, the suburbs provoked the same fear

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<sup>135</sup> Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 267-280.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 287-314.

<sup>137</sup> "The Leisured Masses," 150.

<sup>138</sup> William M. Dobriner, *Class in Suburbia* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 9. Suburbanite refers to someone who lives in the suburb, also referred to as an exurbanite. Suburbanite is equated with a white-collar family, and in this chapter white-collar male.

of the loss of individuality. Comfort and luxury perpetuated the stereotype of middle-class male effeminacy. The suburbs removed men from the struggle of everyday life. According to art historian and editor of *Harper's Weekly* Russell Lynes, "We have provided ourselves with cushions and anxiety relievers in every corner of the room, so that if we should stumble, we will be sure to land without bruises."<sup>139</sup> Social commentators depicted suburban living as choosing "comfort and not excitement... security and prominence..."<sup>140</sup> Journalist Wilder Hobson proclaimed, "just as the money lust fascinated so many thinkers of Veblen's day, so another lust has laid special hold on contemporary minds. That is the lust for security."<sup>141</sup> The age of security replaced the "brusque age of fortune building, of rampant financial individualism..."<sup>142</sup> The suburbs supposedly removed men from risk and danger. Security meant that men no longer attempted to prove their manhood. Instead of tying their masculinity to the marketplace where it constantly needed the affirmation of other men, they retreated to a secluded world of family and luxury.

Tennessee Williams' short play "Case of the Crushed Petunias" characterized the trivial and feminine nature of suburban living and consumer culture. The play is set in Primanproper, Massachusetts, at Miss Simple's trinket store Simple Notions. Surrounding Simple Notions is a bed of petunias that has been trampled by a "L.I.F.E insurance company" salesman, only identified as a young man. In this fantastical story, he peddles life itself to those trapped in lives of consumerism and conformity. Williams

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<sup>139</sup> Lynes, 1.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>141</sup> Wilder Hobson, "The Business Suit: A Short and Possibly Tactless Essay on the Costuming of American Enterprise," in *Fortune* (July, 1948), 103.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

thus likens the white-collar, suburban lifestyle to stifled development and death. Miss Simple attempts to call the police to have the person who trampled her petunias arrested, as she proclaims “any man who would crush a sweet petunia is equally capable in my opinion of striking a woman or kicking an innocent child.”<sup>143</sup> Miss Simple’s flowers reflect the growing attachment over seemingly innocuous and meaningless objects. Miss Simple equates of trampled flowers with battered women illustrates how much Miss Simple values her flowers, but more importantly William’s uses Miss Simple to emphasize how absurd that attachment seems.

According to literary critic Richard Corber, Williams uses his characters to promote producerist masculinity. As a homosexual, Williams produced self-made man character-types to reject suburban masculinity. By rejecting the organization man ideal that personified suburban heterosexuality, he attempted to demonstrate the compatibility of homosexuality and masculinity. Corber argues this subversive use of homosexuality serves as a form of cultural resistance in Williams’ works. While Corber does not look specifically at “the Case of the Crushed Petunias,” the producerist ideology Corber identifies elsewhere is overt in the play. In this context, even though the main character is a salesman he is not meant to represent a white-collar man. By rejecting the heterosexual suburban sphere as feminized and unmanly, he embodies the ideals of producerist masculinity.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Tennessee Williams, “Case of the Crushed Petunias,” 1948, in *American Blues: Five Short Plays* (New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1968) 23. The age of Miss Simple is never revealed, but she appears to be middle aged, somewhere between late thirties to fifty.

<sup>144</sup> Corber, *Homosexuality in the Cold War*, 103-110. Corber specifically looks at *The Cat on the Hot Tin Roof* and *Hard Candy*, but his framework can be applied to “The Case of the Crushed Petunias.”

The flowers represent the desire for order, stability and security in 1950s suburban life as well. Simple believes that “flowers are like human beings. They can’t be allowed to grow wild.”<sup>145</sup> Human beings are meant to be confined, to find security. The young man’s trampling of Miss Simple’s petunias represents his attempt at freeing her from the confinement of security and pointless consumption. The young man comes to Miss Simple’s shop to sell her “life” by getting her to reject her store and lifestyle. The salesman wants her to leave everything behind and venture out to an unknown address. Presumably the address does not exist, and he is challenging Miss Simple to adventure into the wilderness or unknown. By surrounding herself with “inconsequential” things, Miss Simple is inviting death.<sup>146</sup> A person cannot “live and exist in Primanproper, Massachusetts.”<sup>147</sup> The young man tells Miss Simple that “you little people surround your houses with rows of tiresome, timid little things like petunias,” instead of experiencing life.<sup>148</sup> Eventually, Miss Simple gives up her boring life surrounded by trivialities and leaves Primanproper for an unknown and mysterious destination.<sup>149</sup>

Williams did not attempt to disguise his critique of the mass consumption and security of suburbia. Being surrounded by trivial goods and placing emphasis on unimportant matters were no way to live according to Williams. Miss Simple only invests in life once she leaves Primanproper, implying the confines of suburban living are stifling to the spirit. Miss Simple reflects the larger producerist ideology that the suburbs

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<sup>145</sup> Williams, 26.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-32.



and consumer culture represented a feminized sphere. The woman is enamored and obsessed with the inconsequential. It takes a manly character to convince her to give up both her life and her work. While she spent her time confined to Simple Notions and Primanproper, the young man spent his time facing the dangers of the road, and saving those trapped in a trivial existence. Only once the young man liberates Miss Simple, literally by crushing her flowers and emotionally by destroying what she thought she valued most, can he free and convince her to leave her life behind and seek something new.

The triviality of the suburbs and its impact on men is prevalent in Max Schulman's *Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys*. One of the main characters of the novel is Harry Bannerman, whom the narrator describes as the typical 1950s suburbanite because he is "between thirty and forty, married, father of three, the owner of a house, second mortgage," and had "a gray flannel suit, a bald spot, and a vague feeling of discontent."<sup>150</sup> Despite Harry's love for his wife and children he felt "helpless," and as "a puppet in his wife's hands."<sup>151</sup> Harry blamed his wife's "ambition" for their moving to suburbs, and longs for the excitement of the days when he and his wife, Grace, lived in the city.<sup>152</sup>

The trappings of the suburb brought more than just boredom. They came with a series of continuous obligations and meetings. Harry cannot schedule a vacation with his wife because of never-ending volunteering commitments. This volunteering serves two purposes. First, it is presented as a necessary obligation to fulfill the norms of suburban

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<sup>150</sup> Max Schulman, *Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1957), 23. This work was a *New York Times* best seller in 1957 and remained there for over forty five weeks. The book was adapted into a film by the same name in 1958. "Article 9," *New York Times* September 1, 1957, 154. "Best Seller," *New York Times*, July 13, 1958, BR8. Sam Zolotow, "Shulman Plans Show From Book," *New York Times*, February 28, 1958, 18.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-30.

life. Second and more subversively, the narrator implies that the characters' lives are so empty and meaningless they fill them with these trivial and unimportant commitments.<sup>153</sup> Not only are Harry's vacation plans interrupted by his wife's obligations, but so is his sex life. An endless array of meetings forces Harry to make an appointment to have sex with his wife.<sup>154</sup> Their lives lack spontaneity; every second is mapped out by meetings, dinner parties, or other obligations. The parties contain the same conversations of "Nielsen ratings, sheep manure, penis envy, vermouth, and the like..."<sup>155</sup> This growing frustration causes Henry to begin to fantasize about other women, proclaiming "if she [Grace] wasn't so goddamn busy being a homemaker, clubwoman, and patriot, then he wouldn't be thinking about getting his jollies elsewhere."<sup>156</sup> Harry complains that when he and Grace eventually do have sex that "it's just another item on a schedule..."<sup>157</sup>

The dissatisfaction with a life summarized by "bookshelves and bikes" causes Henry's indiscretion, not his dissatisfaction with his wife.<sup>158</sup> Throughout the novel Harry's love for his wife remains constant: it is suburbia he hates. This is evident as Henry tells his wife:

I don't want anybody but you. And some day-- when we don't have to go to a meeting or a rally or a lecture... when the lawn doesn't need cutting and trash doesn't need burning and the hinges don't need oiling and the stairs don't need fixing... and the children don't need bite plates... I'll get you!<sup>159</sup>

Despite his love for his wife, Henry's dissatisfaction eventually overcomes him. He begins getting off the commuter train drunk because he cannot "face what's waiting for

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

us [Harry and Grace] at home...<sup>160</sup> He has an affair with a neglected housewife from the same suburb, which consumes him with guilt.<sup>161</sup> Angela, the woman he had an affair with, summarizes Harry's life in an attempt to ease his guilt for cheating on his wife: "you're not a louse darling, you're just a poor, trapped, unhappy, man."<sup>162</sup> Suburban life makes Harry a philanderer.

Henry eventually confesses to his wife and is thrown out of their home, which forces him to move back to the city. Five weeks later Grace takes Henry back, because of an unexpected pregnancy, and Henry acts like the model husband. Despite Henry's dissatisfaction with suburban life, he found single life equally as miserable. Longing to be back with his wife Henry happily came home.<sup>163</sup> However, Henry attributes his newly found acceptance of suburban life, not with maturity, but with senility.<sup>164</sup> Similar to the protagonists in *The Apartment* and *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, Shulman's protagonist is only happy when he is with his wife. Unlike C.C. Baxter and Rock Hunter, who reject their corporate lifestyle so they and their love interest can lead fulfilling lives, Henry never escapes the white-collar world. He cannot live without his wife, thus he chooses the best, but not completely satisfying, course for his life. *Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys* offered a satire of suburban life. While the novel ended happily for Harry, the message remained clear: one has to be crazy to be happy in the suburbs. Schulman offers a lighter, yet similar, critique of the suburbs to the other social commentators.

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 270-275.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

The suburbs “sandpapered” the “rambunctious and fascinating” edges of American life, mostly through domesticating American men.<sup>165</sup> The emphasis on the home, according to Lynes, caused men to assume “women’s work...”<sup>166</sup> Lynes argued that “man, once known as ‘the head of the family,’ is now partner in the family firm, part-time man, part-time mother, and part-time maid.”<sup>167</sup> The “servant-father” replaced the “head of household” character.<sup>168</sup> Lynes’ depiction of the democratization of the household reflected the feminizing nature of corporate work and the luxuries of the suburbs. The rugged nineteenth-century man sat atop the family hierarchy, but the white-collar man was simply a servant in his household. One of the consequences of the rise of the organization was its facilitation of “female dominance.”<sup>169</sup>

Suburban isolation furthered the emasculation of men in the view of social commentators. Suburbanites wanted to maintain separation from the city. As suburbanites’ attitudes toward work and leisure intertwined, they viewed the home as a “self-sufficient center.”<sup>170</sup> The emergence of large chain stores, such as supermarkets, allowed for suburbs to become almost entirely independent enclaves. Supermarkets and mass retailers freed suburbanites from dependency on the city, and the isolation of white-collar enclaves.<sup>171</sup> The rise of supermarkets corresponded with the decline of the “mom-and-pop food stores.” *New York Times* contributor and financial expert Sidney Margolius noted:

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<sup>165</sup> Lynes, 5-6.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 58. Lynes dramatically overstates men’s role in the household. While men were expected to be more active fathers, a majority of household responsibilities still fell to women.

<sup>169</sup> “Decline of the American Male.”

<sup>170</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 238-241.

<sup>171</sup> Dobriner, 18.

Thus is the last stronghold of traditional American ‘rugged individualism’ being breached. Time was when an ambitious young man could start a career in retailing with a small store, or even a push cart. Now he is more likely to become a corporation employee, an organization man in what has become one of the biggest of big businesses.<sup>172</sup>

Supermarkets’ triumph over the independent entrepreneur exemplified the negotiation between white-collar masculinity and the self-made man. The supermarket reflected a new world of convenience, leisure and luxury, while social critics perceived it as mass consumption and conformity, both of which the commentators considered feminine.

Suburbs embodied the “modern culture” loathed by social commentators.<sup>173</sup> By the end of the 1950s, the suburbs became the dominant communities for white-collar workers, and they provided a drastically different landscape from the pre-World War II period.<sup>174</sup> Political scientist and member of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Robert Wood summarized critics’ view toward white-collar suburbanites when he asserted that they “exchange individuality, privacy, the certain satisfaction of pride and craftsmanship and work well done, for something obscurely defined as the social ethic...” Wood, utilizing Whyte’s conception of the social ethic, believed the suburbs created a community where people with no natural ties to each other sought an identity through conformity and mass consumption. Only consumption allowed a suburbanite to obtain status in the community. For critics the hard work and reputation that made the nineteenth-century man the pillar of his community no longer existed.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Sidney Margolius, “Super Business of Supermarkets,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1959.

<sup>173</sup> Robert C. Wood, *Suburbia: It’s People and Their Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), 1.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

The 1950s represented a vastly changing world for middle-class men. New occupations and communities offered a higher standard of living, but they came with new types of pressures. The white-collar worker existed since at least the late nineteenth century but never represented a dominant group until after World War II. The corporation increased men's standard of living and ability to enjoy leisure time, but it also became "the relentless enemy of individuality" to the critics of the 1950s.<sup>176</sup> Many influential thinkers proclaimed that corporations diminished the importance of competition and rugged individualism, and replaced struggle with security and prosperity.<sup>177</sup> This led many social commentators to believe they lived during a new period of American history, a type of "fourth epoch," based on new white-collar values.<sup>178</sup> Social critics rejected these values and attempted to keep the self-made man ethos central to masculinity in the 1950s. However, white-collar men "reproduced themselves like fruit flies," until they became the predominant character type of the white, middle-class men.<sup>179</sup>

Social commentators reflected only one argument of what it meant to be a man. Commentators believed that American masculinity was vanishing and that corporations replaced older, individualistic men, with lesser, weaker, group-oriented men. They emphasized an older form of hegemonic masculinity, which new institutions challenged. While commentators proclaimed that a crisis of masculinity existed in the 1950s, other sectors of society did not agree. The new white-collar institutions, such as corporations, used much of the same language about individuality, hard work, and leadership, but they

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<sup>176</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 1.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>178</sup> C. Wright Mills, "On Reason and Freedom," in *Identity and Anxiety*, 112.

<sup>179</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The Orgamerican Fantasy," in *Identity and Anxiety*, 328.

changed the definition of manhood. Corporate and white-collar leaders moved away from the rugged frontiersman fetishized by Whyte, Mills, Riesman, and others toward the rational, planning, white-collar manager as the pinnacle of manhood. White-collar leaders argued a crisis of masculinity did not exist, and that the white-collar world and masculinity were not incompatible. Rather, many white-collar leaders asserted corporate work offered a way for men to demonstrate their masculinity. The social commentators remained prevalent throughout the decade shaping the cultural discourse. However, commentators were not the only group shaping ideas of masculinity, and their crisis narrative does not fully depict the meaning of masculinity in the 1950s. Commentators sought to demonize white-collar work, but other groups, like business leaders, attempted to demonstrate the manliness of the managerial class.

## Chapter 2

### **Manly After All: White-Collar Workers and the Defense of Corporate Masculinity**

Social commentators in the 1950s attacked white-collar men for being passive. Allegedly, men's work in noncompetitive hierarchical corporations left them effeminate, passive and conformist. Criticisms of American masculinity by commentators verged almost on hysteria, as they lamented the decline of the American male. Masculinity, according to these critics, was in dire need of rejuvenation, and only a rejection of the corporate world could make men manly once again. The clever prose and polemic rhetoric disguised the absence of empirical evidence in social commentators' anxious criticisms of change in 1950s society. Commentators developed elaborate theories, coining pseudo-scientific sounding terms such as "other-directed," but ultimately they provided little convincing evidence that white-collar work actually caused men to be unmanly. Many intellectuals decried a crisis of masculinity; subsequently, many historians and sociologists incorporated these theories, still without considering that other key figures, like business leaders, offered a different depiction of postwar masculinity.

Business leaders and various works of popular culture sought to render the men in the middle as masculine. They emphasized white-collar men's work ethic, control, leadership, and rationality to demonstrate the compatibility of masculinity with corporate work.

This chapter focuses on General Electric as a case study to test the assumptions of social commentators and illustrate, that for white-collar leaders, a crisis of masculinity did not exist. General Electric was the quintessential corporation. It was not only profitable, but hierarchical. The company's sales boomed throughout the 1950s



including record setting years in 1956 and 1957.<sup>1</sup> *Time* magazine listed General Electric as a blue chip stock, and the second most widely held stock amongst insurance firms, pension trusts, college endowment funds, and other “institutional investors.”<sup>2</sup> Despite the company’s financial success, its structure reflected everything social commentators loathed. As early as 1915, according to historian David Nye, “General Electric and Westinghouse exemplified the triumph of managerial capitalism over the old forms of family capitalism and partnerships.”<sup>3</sup> The company maintained over two hundred thousand employees in the 1950s and organized them hierarchically with a larger group of middling managers.<sup>4</sup> Even though General Electric in the 1950s attempted decentralization to give managers more power, it was still organized in a hierarchical structure.<sup>5</sup> Meeting all of the criteria in business historian Alfred Chandler’s conception of what made a company a corporation, General Electric utilized a managerial hierarchy to attempt to shape the market through calculation, specialization and coordination.”<sup>6</sup> General Electric reflected the typical corporation in size and structure, thus serving as an excellent case study to test the impact of white-collar work on masculinity. The company was a model of a corporation, both historically and to social commentators, but the leaders of the company did not believe corporate work contained negative connotations.

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<sup>1</sup> General Electric Company, “1959 Annual Report,” in *General Electric Company: The Professional Business Management Course* (Crotonville, New York: General Electric Company, September 1960), 5.; “More Earnings,” *Time*, July 29, 1957, 74.; “High Tide,” *Time*, April 30, 1956, 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Time* “The Favorite Fifteen,” October 18, 1954, 86. The number one held stock was Standard Oil.

<sup>3</sup> David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 170.

<sup>4</sup> General Electric Company, “1959 Annual Report,” 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Cordiner, “Problems of Management in a Large Decentralized Organization,” presented at General Management Conference of the American Management Association (June 19-20, 1952), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1977), 1-8.

They did not look at the hierarchical managerial structure as inherently promoting conformity; rather, General Electric's leaders and other business leaders presented manhood and white-collar work as compatible.

White-collar leaders in the 1950s rejected social commentators' definition of production-based masculinity, characterizing contemporary business as the site for a new kind of man who nevertheless fulfilled an older version of masculinity.<sup>7</sup> Business leaders depicted white-collar men as embarking on a new type of career, but they did not view white-collar work as deviating too far from producerist ideology. They emphasized white-collar workers' control, rationality, etc. White-collar workers embodied all of the same qualities as Riesman's inner-directed man, but they applied those qualities in a new way. Businessmen, according to those within corporation, reflected the kind of man to lead America, specifically American business, into the future. According to white-collar leaders, managerial work represented the highest degree of difficulty. These men were more than cogs in a large bureaucracy. General Electric defined a manager as:

refer[ring] to any member of the company who is responsible for getting results through the work of others; and whose job requirement, therefore, includes substantial responsibility for the leadership of people through planning, organizing, integrating and measuring their efforts.<sup>8</sup>

White-collar men needed superior analytical abilities and leadership. Their work was both challenging and fulfilling, and managers' roles were vital to the success of the company. Criticisms of passivity and conformity appeared unfounded to white-collar

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<sup>7</sup> White-collar leaders were C.E.O.s of larger corporations, high level officials in corporations, or pro-business intellectuals, such as business professors.

<sup>8</sup> General Electric Company, *Managerial Development: Guidebook I Managerial Climate of the Organization Component* (New York: General Electric, 1954), 7. Manager and white-collar are synonymous for the purposes of this thesis. Also this thesis uses the term businessmen because managers were overwhelmingly male.

men. Managers' positions allowed for freedom, control, and competition, everything commentators claimed corporations deprived men from obtaining. White-collar leaders dismissed the argument that white-collar work left men emasculated and American manhood in a serious state of decline. Business leaders' rhetoric offered an alternative view to social commentators' crisis of masculinity. Business leaders presented white-collar work as manly, competitive, fulfilling, and non-conforming.

One of the main charges by social commentators against white-collar workers was that they do not produce goods. Commentators fetishized the production model of masculinity. However, it was not that white-collar workers did not produce, but they just did not produce in a traditional way. White-collar work could not be assessed in the traditional form of output of material goods. By the mid-1950s white-collar workers made up over thirty percent of the total workforce in fields such as electronics, but as *Time* asserted "no one knows how to gauge the productivity of such workers... on the standard measures it often appears that white-collar employees drag productivity down."<sup>9</sup> Commentators became fixated on "standard measures" and an older idea of what work was supposed to be. They did not, and could not, justify or accept the shift from producer-based masculinity. White-collar workers defied standard measurement, and in doing so defied producerist masculinity.<sup>10</sup>

Contrary to commentators' beliefs, "nonproduction" workers found greater satisfaction in their occupations than production based workers. Commentators elevated

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<sup>9</sup> "Measuring the White Collar," *Time*, June 9, 1958, 87.

<sup>10</sup> Commentators like Mills and Riesman criticized white-collar workers because they did not produce. Mills especially thought that since managers only worked through others, or "people-pushers" as he called them, they were a drain on society. True men produced according to commentators, hence the commentators' obsessions with "standard measures," or judging men terms of what they produced.

production-based workers. If commentators were correct about white-collar workers, then men engaged in manual labor should have been more satisfied with their jobs than managerial workers. Blue-collar workers actually produced goods, and thus they should have found their work more satisfying. According to Harvard professor and industrial psychologist Chris Argyris, numerous studies of corporations illustrated that white-collar workers were quite satisfied with their positions, many times more so than blue-collar workers. Writing in 1959, Argyris argued that production based workers were the most dissatisfied, apathetic, and ultimately “passive” workers within corporations. He divided production based laborers into two groups: skilled and unskilled. While unskilled workers were significantly more dissatisfied with their jobs, skilled workers did not view advancement from their current positions as a possibility.<sup>11</sup>

Commentators argued that the corporate structure created worker dissatisfaction. However, Argyris asserted that it was management’s role to create proper working conditions, and that the corporate structure had little to do with workplace satisfaction. Argyris continued that often managers exhibited too much control, which left production-based workers feeling disenfranchised. Argyris asserted, “the leader, therefore, is assigned formal power to hire, discharge, reward, and penalize the individuals in order to mold their behavior in the pattern of the organization’s objectives.”<sup>12</sup> The great power concentrated within the hands of managers made “individuals dependent upon, passive, and subordinate to the leader. As a result, the individuals have little control over their

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<sup>11</sup> Chris Argyris, “The Individual and Organization: An Empirical Test,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (September 1959): 158-160.

<sup>12</sup> Chris Argyris, “The Individual and Organization: Some Problems of Mutual Adjustment,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (June 1957): 13.

working environment.”<sup>13</sup> In Argyris’ study it is not white-collar workers, but assembly line and factory production workers, who are consumed by feelings of “dependence, submissiveness, passivity, and so on.”<sup>14</sup> White-collar workers were far from passive in Argyris’ study. They controlled everything, even to the point where it was detrimental to production based workers.

One way for production workers to escape the apathy of their situation was to “climb the corporate ladder.”<sup>15</sup> Argyris never explicitly commented on managers’ satisfaction in these studies, but his encouragement to climb the corporate ladder allows for insight into the role of management.<sup>16</sup> Climbing the corporate ladder meant promotion, and leaving the production occupations. Escape from production-based jobs allowed for more satisfaction and happiness within the corporate structure. Promotions into managerial work prevented workers from becoming “immature.”<sup>17</sup> Management seemed largely immune, according to Argyris study, from feelings of alienation and subordination, but it carried with it a specific set of anxieties. Argyris asserted, “Managers deep inside are quite uncomfortable with, and may even feel guilty about, the power vested in them.”<sup>18</sup> A manager felt himself to be “all powerful,” which made him aware of the “true psychological distance between the employees and himself; that is that

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

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Most modern day corporations who hire managers mostly hire people without shop floor experience. While management was increasingly selected from college campuses, it was still much easier in the 1950s than today for blue-collar workers to reach the ranks of management.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Argyris, “The Organization: What Makes It Healthy?” *Harvard Business Review* 36 (1958), 107. Argyris did offer other solutions to the problem of the alienation of production labor, such as fostering peer culture amongst production workers by management. Argyris, “The Individual and Organization: An Empirical Test,” 163.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

they are not on an equal level, all working together as co-workers.”<sup>19</sup> The “guilty feelings” identified by Argyris differed from the anxieties social commentators perceived in white-collar workers. Social commentators believed white-collar workers’ anxiety stemmed from internalized feelings of inferiority, whereas Argyris asserted managers were uncomfortable with the amount of power they wielded.

Argyris’ various studies illuminated the important difference between social commentators who fetishized production-based masculinity and those within the business sphere. Sociologist C. Wright Mills reflected commentators’ beliefs when he described the white-collar man as a “small creature who is acted upon but does not act.”<sup>20</sup> However, the reality of the workplace and the rhetoric of popular commentators were starkly different. Mills relied on sweeping generalizations with little concrete evidence. Argyris’ studies, on the other hand, appeared grounded in specific case studies based on actual workplaces. He relied on actual interviews with workers, rather than theoretical ideas about the impact of organizational hierarchy. Mills’ *White Collar* seemed more philosophical and general, while Argyris offered a specific study. Argyris’ works portrayed white-collar workers as far more powerful than a “small creature.” Production workers, not managers, were the ones in danger of becoming passive and submissive. Managers’ positions allowed them to have complete control over the workplace, to the detriment of subordinate workers. The freedom, control, and power exhibited by managers protected them from the more negative effects of corporate work. Commentators lamented that corporations deprived men of the control necessary to fulfill their manly duties, ultimately making them passive. In reality, managers had so much

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>20</sup> Mills, *White Collar*, xvii.

control they deprived others of their manhood. Managers' positions emasculated their subordinates, but not the managers themselves. Argyris' studies demonstrated that managers' roles were far more complex, challenging, and masculine than commentators ever acknowledged.

Managerial work consisted of many different aspects. White-collar work differed depending on the position. Different workers at different levels had different responsibilities, but managerial work contained several similarities, no matter what the position. Corporations, such as General Electric, emphasized management as a distinct and rational profession. Managers' responsibility was to organize and develop subordinates through talent evaluation and decision making. These skills did not necessarily reflect the manhood proposed by social commentators, but General Electric President Ralph Cordiner asserted, commentators' criticism reflected "the national obsession with concepts that are no longer relevant," and relied on a "wholly obsolete assumption as to the nature of economic life in the U.S."<sup>21</sup> Cordiner reflected the sentiments within the white-collar world that managerial work reflected the pinnacle of success, difficulty and by extension, manhood. Their work was both challenging and complex, and it could not be performed by passive men.

Business leaders portrayed managerial work as cutting-edge, rational, scientific, competitive and unpredictable. General Electric's Vice President of management consultation services, Harold Smiddy, argued in an internal pamphlet for company managers that white-collar work contained a "more complex mission and work of the Manager in today's increasingly technological, competitive environment, and in the

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<sup>21</sup> Ralph Cordiner. *New Frontiers for Professional Managers* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1956), 2.

changing business world of tomorrow...<sup>22</sup> Smiddy called white-collar men “explorers,” because they were motivated by “a sense of adventure and exploration.”<sup>23</sup> Participating in the science of managing was akin to a “physical adventure.”<sup>24</sup> Smiddy asserted, “Planning, organizing, integrating, measuring, exercising judgment, decision-making in the face of risk--risk itself--all are part of both the intellectual and physical search of men for something new.”<sup>25</sup> That something new was managerial work, and in searching for something “new” men faced “perils and defeats.”<sup>26</sup> However, men did not cower in the face of this new form of occupation, as commentators asserted. Instead, they adopted a new approach to managing. They faced their work with “self-initiative, self-discipline, self-confidence and self-development.”<sup>27</sup> It was managers’ duty to instill these values not only within themselves, but also within their subordinates.<sup>28</sup> Managing became a science “dedicated to bringing into being the affairs of men the kind of order which nature exhibits all about us.”<sup>29</sup> Since managers were “scientists,” their duties entailed the responsibility of identifying and maintaining rational order in an “erratic world.”<sup>30</sup> Rationality and an “ethical managing philosophy” became the basis for all white-collar work within General Electric.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Harold Smiddy, “‘Measuring’ As an Element of a Manager’s Work of Leadership,” *General Electric: Management Consultation Services* (New York: General Electric, December 1957), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Harold Smiddy, “Present Status of the Work of Managing,” *General Electric: Management Consultation Services* (New York: General Electric, December 1, 1955), 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Smiddy “‘Measuring’ As an Element of a Manager’s Work of Leadership,” 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Smiddy, “Present Status of the Work of Managing,” 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*,” 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> Smiddy, “‘Measuring’ As an Element of a Manager’s Work of Leadership,” 2.



As a science, managerial work was both a distinct and professional type of work. This meant that managing was founded on principles which could be applied in various situations, and that it could be taught and learned by others.<sup>32</sup> Managing relied on three basic principles: the value of liberty over compulsion, belief in reason over force, and finally a leadership style of persuasion and integration instead of dictatorial leadership.<sup>33</sup> General Electric believed that totalitarian rule by command, executive order, or control damaged unity and productivity. The use of persuasive leadership “preserved” self-discipline and “the essential freedom of the individual” in a hierarchical organization.<sup>34</sup> General Electric’s managers became responsible for preserving the long American tradition of personal liberty and resisting tyrannical control.<sup>35</sup> Management combined the “logical approach of the Scientist with the ethical values of the Leader who recognizes that good governing always has to rest on the consent of the governed.”<sup>36</sup> The manager/subordinate relationship represented almost a type of social contract, which required more than commands and threats. Rational persuasion served as the best course of action. Valuing persuasion did not mean the abrogation of authority. Managerial work still required “holding each man to high standards of performance,” it just also encompassed “helping each man accomplish his own personal objectives and release his own best efforts.”<sup>37</sup> General Electric emphasized that managers should be leaders, not dictators. They should be men whose competency and abilities inspired men not only to

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<sup>32</sup> Smiddy, “Present Status of the Work of Managing,” 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Smiddy “‘Measuring’ As an Element of a Manager’s Work of Leadership,” 10 .

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Obviously American history is far more convoluted than the image presented by General Electric. There is a very overt patriotic tone throughout General Electric’s materials. They present managerial work as the fulfillment of the American ideal.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

follow their lead, but also to improve themselves in the process. Managers needed to command respect through proving their abilities, not based upon their hierarchical position.

Managers also needed to draw “strength” from the principles of morality, religion, and “the deep belief that the natural rights of the Individual... [which] can not be subverted or destroyed by the increasing complexity of social relationships...”<sup>38</sup> The corporation and managers needed to maintain the utmost respect for ideals such as individual liberty and personal growth. Smiddy defined white-collar work as based on the “sincere and expressed belief in the fundamental willingness and capability of people to do a job for which they are responsible--and accept themselves to be accountable...”<sup>39</sup> Managers needed to be able to convince men to follow their lead, while allowing for the “satisfaction of intellectual and spiritual hungers, without losing his [the follower’s] individual identity.”<sup>40</sup> Managers’ policies needed to stimulate individual and societal growth.<sup>41</sup> Respecting individuality attempted to reject the dreaded conformity which supposedly plagued corporations.

General Electric’s view of management and managers differed vastly from the social commentators’ assessments. Social commentators rejected the persuasion style of leadership as unmanly. They argued that men sold their personalities, and white-collar workers did not make decisions. The guides General Electric published for managers to better understand their craft disagreed with that view of masculinity. Reversing social commentators’ arguments, Smiddy and General Electric viewed managerial work as the

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<sup>38</sup> Smiddy, “Present Status of the Work of Managing,” 10-11.

<sup>39</sup> Smiddy, “‘Measuring’ As an Element of a Manager’s Work of Leadership,” 19.

<sup>40</sup> Smiddy, “Present Status of the Work of Managing,” 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

embodiment of rationality. Commentators argued that persuasion-based leadership was an extension of white-collar men's lack of control. The business world promoted persuasion-based leadership, as opposed to command leadership that violated personality liberty and stifled self-development and creativity. General Electric viewed its managers as the new scientists, not the old businessmen. The business world believed they could achieve more out of their employees and allow for maximum individuality if they emphasized persuasion and leadership over dictatorship.

The scientific approach to management, emphasizing rationality, leadership, individuality and personal development, pervaded General Electric's management guides and daily work assignments. In one of these company guides, Robert J. Davis studied the daily activities and problems faced by managers of the sales department. This study provides a representative view of General Electric's approaches to management. Managers in different departments would have had some responsibilities that differed from the manager of salesmen, but the manager of salesmen's duties largely reflected the role of managers in the company. The manager of salesmen was responsible for "directing a team of salesmen in a local territory..." and he was "the immediate supervisor of one or more field salesmen."<sup>42</sup> The salesmen manager served as a liaison between the local territory he represented and the home office. Management, as a whole, required a particular set of skills, "namely those of analysis, decision-making and human relations," and the manager of salesmen utilized all three of these skills.<sup>43</sup> The salesman manager had numerous duties, including all or part of the local office's personnel. He

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<sup>42</sup> Robert J Davis. *The Manager of Salesmen: His Work and Job Requirements in the General Electric Company* (New York: General Electric, 1959), 3-9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

prepared sales forecasts, created expense budgets and lobbied the national office for the required funds, and planned account tactics. He had the authority to recommend price and product changes, adjust price offers within an established set of limits, and approve concessions in order to satisfy aggrieved accounts or customers. For certain accounts, presumably accounts either in jeopardy of being lost or high revenue accounts, the manager took over responsibility for selling and handling those accounts directly. The manager was also responsible for adapting national promotional advertising campaigns to fit the local climate. Additional duties included creating special reports about the local market's composition, product acceptance, etc. The salesmen manager was responsible for the hiring process at the local level, which included recruiting and securing new sales talent. This also included making recommendations for promotions and compensation. All of these responsibilities made the salesmen manager the "eyes and ears" of the corporation in the marketplace.<sup>44</sup>

This salesmen manager was more than the derogatory characterization of a people pusher. Commentators dismissed white-collar men as not being particularly important, but from Davis' description white-collar men appeared essential to the daily operations of the company. Not only did the manager combat the logistical difficulties, but the manager served as the biggest determinant of his salesmen's success or failure.<sup>45</sup> The manager of salesmen's work was divided into five major parts. The most important of these duties was the management of his sales team.<sup>46</sup> In addition to all of their official duties, managers also played amateur psychologist. The manager served as a

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 35. The other four included relations with customers and markets, relations with higher management, management of the local office and community responsibilities.

“sympathetic listener,” offering advice and counseling their salesmen.<sup>47</sup> The abilities of the subordinate salesmen determined the role and level of activity of the manager. When the manager’s salesmen performed well, the manager served mostly as an advisor. While the salesmen’s performance dictated some of the manager’s role, it was always the manager’s responsibility to instill a culture of self-discipline. For the manager this meant a balance between fieldwork, such as visiting accounts, and office work.<sup>48</sup>

Success of a local branch in the case of the salesmen manager, or a corporate division for other types of managers, relied on the ability and skill set of the manager. The manager of salesmen was truly “middle management” as he needed to satisfy both demands on the local level and the corporate level.<sup>49</sup> Through the mundane daily activities and the more abstract qualities, such as leadership and ability to motivate, the corporation depended on managers as a vital and invaluable piece of the workforce. Managerial work required fiscal and personal discipline. For example, the manager needed to understand how to balance the use of the expense account. A manager who underspent was as equally ineffective as a manager that overspent.<sup>50</sup> Not only did a manager need astute business acumen, but charisma as well. The manager needed to work well within the group setting.<sup>51</sup> He needed to be able to maintain interdepartmental relationships and the relationships within his own office.<sup>52</sup> The key to success on the local level resided within “the manager’s personal enthusiasm and his ability to offer the

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-26.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

group an exciting challenge.”<sup>53</sup> Not only did the manager need to keep his own sales team motivated, but he also needed to keep the production department and corporate offices satisfied.

The final responsibility of the manager of salesmen required the white-collar worker to be more than just a businessman. At the end of the film *The Apartment*, C.C. Baxter quit his executive job stating he would rather be a “human being.”<sup>54</sup> However, for General Electric the white-collar worker did not have to choose between being a “human being” and a successful businessman. General Electric encouraged social responsibility and community involvement for its white-collar employees. The manager was “a man of varied interests,” who did not “look upon his job as a requirement, a given number of hours of work...,” but realized his personal and political interests were not in “conflict” with his business interests.<sup>55</sup> Not only were relationships inside the corporation or local office important for business, but relationships outside the white-collar sphere were equally important. General Electric believed that memberships in service clubs and industrial associations, as well as active contributions to churches, schools, politics and charitable organizations were important for the growth of the individual and the company.<sup>56</sup> Interaction with the community played an “integral” part of any management position. Community participation not only helped improve the community, but it made good business sense as well. Community events allowed for informal networking with potential accounts, and for the creation of informal business relationships.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>54</sup> *The Apartment*.

<sup>55</sup> Davis, *Manager of Salesmen*, 112.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Certainly the duties of manager of salesmen carried with them challenges unique to that position. Each white-collar job had its own specific responsibilities, but in many ways the duties of the manager of salesmen were typical of most of General Electric's managerial positions.<sup>58</sup> They required interdepartmental communication, management of subordinates, leadership and the ability to motivate, an understanding of finances and logistics, and administrative and communal duties. Many of the overall responsibilities of the manager of salesmen were the responsibilities of all managers in some fashion. Creating a proper atmosphere, planning, organizing, integrating, measuring and leadership were universally emphasized for all managers by General Electric's training program.<sup>59</sup> Also similar to Davis' depiction of the integral nature of the salesmen manager to the success of a local office, General Electric believed competent and skillful managers were the key to a successful corporation.<sup>60</sup> General Electric thought white-collar work did not create passive, emasculated, conformist men, as evident by how much the company valued white-collar work and how vital the company believed white-collar men were to future success.

General Electric placed a great deal of emphasis on men's abilities to develop themselves. While social commentators charged that corporations and white-collar work stifled individuals' desire to grow, General Electric believed their corporation did the exact opposite. Through various publications distributed internally amongst employees or at conferences designated specifically for managers, General Electric continually

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<sup>58</sup> The duties and responsibilities of the manager of salesmen are similar to the general duties of managers laid out in managerial guidebooks cited later in this chapter, specifically *Managerial Development I-IV*.

<sup>59</sup> These aspects are also emphasized in *Managerial Development I-IV*

<sup>60</sup> Ralph Cordiner, *Developing Management Leadership for a Free Society*, part of the *General Management Series* #159 (New York: American Management Association, 1953), 10.

emphasized “the company does not develop men; they develop themselves. The company should offer help, guidance, and opportunity, but these must all be related to the man’s ability and willingness to stretch...”<sup>61</sup> Men developed by putting themselves on a job with “real responsibility” combined with programs to help men develop their abilities.<sup>62</sup> Becoming a better leader was a “self-development process.”<sup>63</sup> The corporation provided the challenges and opportunities, but the individual was responsible for meeting those challenges.<sup>64</sup> To be sure, not all employees took advantage of these challenges, and certainly some sought Whyte’s prosperity plateau.<sup>65</sup> However, the assertion that white-collar work inherently stifled individuality, competitiveness, and hard work contradicted the purpose and philosophy of the management development program. The managerial programs sought not to make men conform, but to train and provide incentives for “highly competent employees” so they may use and further develop their skills.<sup>66</sup> Management expected men to be of “integrity of character and intellectual ability” as well as in “good physical, mental and emotional health,” or to use the language of social commentators, inner-directed men.<sup>67</sup> General Electric entrusted its management teams with “providing innovation and cooperation” to “enable General

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<sup>61</sup> John Belanger, Henry Erben, Roy Johnson, Robert Paxton, and Philip Reed, “Development of Men,” speech delivered at *Responsibilities of Business Leadership: Talks Presented at the Leadership Conference Associations Island* (1954), 9.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> General Electric Company. *Manager Development: Basic Principles and Plan* (N.Y.: General Electric Company, 1954), vi.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> General Electric’s management study guides include a pamphlet acknowledging that some preferred “lower level of sacrifice” and wanted to just be “well off.” John Carson, “Make the Time you Need,” October 1956, in General Electric Company, *General Electric Company: The Professional Business Management Course* (Crotonville, New York: General Electric Company, September 1960).

<sup>66</sup> General Electric Company, *General Electric Company: The Professional Business Management Course* (Crotonville, New York: September 1960), 22.

<sup>67</sup> General Electric Company. *Manager Development: Basic Principles and Plan*, 29-30.



Electric to do its part in helping the nation keep ahead of Communism.”<sup>68</sup> Besides helping maintain the viability of capitalism, management was also devoted to “hurdling those roadblocks to progress in the coming decade.”<sup>69</sup> Management became the key to growth and increasing profits, a seemingly impossible task for the “New Little Man,” but not a white-collar man.

The increasing complexities of business in the 1950s, both in the size and scope of the corporation, intensified the need for a professional class of manager.<sup>70</sup> The management development plan set up by General Electric sought to create a standard set of guidelines for managers to follow. It attempted to “convert the rule of thumb into tested principles and practices...”<sup>71</sup> The development plan contained four major objectives: provide managers with challenges and opportunity for development, increase their skill and competency, create the number and types of managers necessary for current and future operations, and simplify each manager’s role. These objectives provided the individual manager with the tools to identify areas in need of self-improvement, to better understand their responsibilities, and to develop their leadership capabilities.<sup>72</sup> While the managerial plan sought to standardize management practices, the program nevertheless sought to preserve individuality. The programs were tailored to “suit the individual’s own development potential and personality.”<sup>73</sup> General Electric

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Paxton, “Report From the President,” General Electric Company, *General Electric Company: The Professional Business Management Course* (Crotonville, New York: September 1960), 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> General Electric Company, *Manager Development: Basic Principles and Plan*, 13.

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

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

recognized “each man has dual responsibilities--as an individual and as a manager.”<sup>74</sup>

The freedom given for self-development respected men’s individuality.

The older producerist style of management was no longer adequate to combat the problems of modern business. New managers needed to not only supervise labor, but also deal with customer relations, shareowners, the public and much more.<sup>75</sup> The first main role of all managers was to create a sufficient climate in which to work. General Electric placed incredible emphasis on the proper climate, asserting “the managerial climate of an organization is then like the air a man breathes.”<sup>76</sup> Managers’ attitudes, methods, communication and strategies all contributed to creating the proper climate. The climate was a direct reflection of the managers’ “attitudes and skills.”<sup>77</sup> The managerial climate created high standards for the department, allowing for a clear understanding of employees’ role in the group.<sup>78</sup> Smiddy argued that the managerial climate allowed people to “voluntarily perform to the best of their abilities as to quality and volume of output and results.”<sup>79</sup> The proper climate was imperative to maintaining “harmony between the individual and his job, and in his relationships with others...”<sup>80</sup> A manager’s duty was to create an atmosphere that fostered teamwork and encouraged men to express their opinions.<sup>81</sup> The climate created by managers sought to prevent white-collar workers from fulfilling the claims of social commentators. Commentators depicted the corporation as a stifling place to work where an individual could not express his

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-18.

<sup>76</sup> General Electric Company, *Managerial Development: Guidebook I*, 2.

<sup>77</sup> General Electric Company, *Manager Development: Basic Principles and Plan*, 24.

<sup>78</sup> General Electric Company, *Managerial Development: Guidebook I*, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Smiddy, “Measuring as an Element of a Manager’s Work of Leadership,” 2.

<sup>80</sup> General Electric Company, *Managerial Development: Guidebook I*, 12-13.

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

opinions, but the emphasis on managerial climate insured individuality and the free exchange of ideas.<sup>82</sup>

After the manager created the proper climate, he set his attention towards planning. For managers, planning meant more than simply setting objectives, outlining and creating schedules.<sup>83</sup> Administrative planning was a major part of managers' jobs, but equally important was manpower and self-development planning. Manpower planning expected General Electric's managers to focus on future development. Managers needed to anticipate and analyze the work that needed to be done by a department, and insure its completion. Manpower planning integrated "the needs and interests of the individual, the component [department] and the company with respect to managers' resources and their development."<sup>84</sup> Managers also needed to insure adequate leadership "depth" existed in each department.<sup>85</sup> Manpower planning mostly focused on the daily routines necessary to be manager. Successful managing required both practicality and foresight, since managers' duties required addressing staffing and resources concerns in the present and focusing on future growth and planning. However, even in the more mundane aspects of the management position, General Electric still emphasized respect for individuality. The company through each one of its training steps sought to prevent men from turning into organization men, New Little Men, or other-directed men.

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<sup>82</sup> Both Ralph Cordiner and Harold Smiddy repeatedly emphasized the need to preserve individuality. This reflects the distinction between persuasion style leadership and command leadership.

<sup>83</sup> Smiddy, "Present Status of the Work of Managing," 13.

<sup>84</sup> General Electric Company, *Managerial Development: Guidebook III Manager Manpower Planning* (New York: General Electric, 1954) 11.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Self-development planning called for managers to evaluate the talent of their subordinates, and then create a plan to help their employees further develop their abilities. Self-development allowed employees to take responsibility for their career paths and was part of General Electric's commitment to preserving individuality. A proper self-development program set out by the manager translated into promotions for the individual and profits for the company.<sup>86</sup> The ability to accurately appraise talent and create a way to develop talents was an essential element of white-collar work.<sup>87</sup> General Electric expected its managers to evaluate tangible attributes such as profitability, productivity, public responsibility, and competency, as well as intangibles such as leadership, attitudes, initiative, "inherent characteristics," and "personal qualities."<sup>88</sup> General Electric's self-development planning was an attempt to weed out the men Whyte, Riesman, Mills and others railed against. Managers identified the strengths of employees in order to maximize employees' potential and correct any deficiencies in their work. The managerial responsibilities were to continually challenge and motivate employees in a way that allowed for their growth.<sup>89</sup> This required locating men who "stick to the job... did more than required... take calculated risks... and avoided serious mistakes in judgment and timing..."<sup>90</sup> Rather than stifle men of talent or men's individuality, "the self-development planning is focused completely on the individual" and its goal was to maximize talent.<sup>91</sup> In order to maximize talents, managers often acted as teachers,

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<sup>86</sup> General Electric Company, *Managerial Development: Guidebook II Self-Development Planning* (New York: General Electric, 1954), 2-3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

advisors, and counselors; and they encouraged men to participate in opportunities both inside and outside the corporation.<sup>92</sup>

One of the main criteria a manager used to evaluate a subordinate was ability to thrive in a team setting. Because social commentators viewed teamwork as inherently emasculating, this managerial approach sparked commentators' criticism. Commentators believed white-collar work made men reliant on other men and prevented them from being strong enough to think and act on their own.<sup>93</sup> While commentators' criticism of group work may not necessarily be accurate, their identification of teamwork as central to the contemporary workplace was grounded in fact. Industrial psychologist Fred Fielder noted that most work within corporations was performed by teams instead of by individuals. Also, the personality of the group's leader did affect how the group functioned.<sup>94</sup> General Electric echoed Fielder's findings, asserting that "personal characteristics or attributes" became a "basis for predicting success."<sup>95</sup> Managers were expected to be, and expected their subordinates to be, well-liked, satisfied with group work, and capable of teamwork. Managers and subordinates were not supposed to speak of "my work," but instead "our work."<sup>96</sup> However, General Electric's assessment of the impact of teamwork was very different than that of social commentators. Whereas effective teamwork for social commentators stemmed from conforming one's personality, General Electric argued effective teamwork stemmed from individual growth and personal competency. Teamwork functioned within the managerial climate and self-

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> This is largely William H. Whyte Jr.'s position. See Chapter 1.

<sup>94</sup> Fred E. Fielder. *Leaders Attitudes and Group Effectiveness: Final report of ONR 170-106, N6-ori-0713* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1958), 1-2.

<sup>95</sup> General Electric Company, *Managerial Development: Guidebook II*, 50.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-64.

planning development, both of which emphasized personal growth and individuality. Furthermore, General Electric insisted “effectiveness in working with others depends heavily on authority of knowledge...”<sup>97</sup> Being liked made a group function better, but for General Electric that did not necessarily mean that one had to be liked on a personal level. Being liked stemmed from being respected, by proving oneself through personal ability and intelligence. Thus the group was not a source of mediocrity, but a place to demonstrate ability.

Managers’ responsibility through self-development planning, creating climate, and motivating all stemmed from their ability as leaders. Managers’ leadership abilities directly impacted “profitability, market position, productivity, product leadership, personnel development, employee attitudes, public responsibility, and balance between short-range and long-range goals.”<sup>98</sup> General Electric identified five major components to a good leader: character, mental capacity, imagination, initiative, and human understanding.<sup>99</sup> Managers’ abilities as leaders determined the “character” of the company and allowed it to grow.<sup>100</sup> General Electric’s managers needed to be “strong” and “self-reliant” in order to be effective leaders.<sup>101</sup> The president of General Electric, Ralph Cordiner, asserted managers needed to be masculine in order to be leaders:

We are asking you to become, even more than you are, a professionalist. A professional is, above all, an individualist... great discoveries and great decisions are made by individuals, not by committees. The professional is at times a lonely man... an ‘inner-directed’ man.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>98</sup> Smiddy, “‘Measuring’ As an Element Or a Manager’s Work of Leadership,” 15.

<sup>99</sup> General Electric Company, *Managerial Development: Guidebook II*, 49.

<sup>100</sup> Ralph J. Cordiner, “The Development of Companies,” *Responsibilities of Business Leadership*,

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Having the title of a manager did not make a man a professional manager. They needed to fulfill the expectations of a professional by fulfilling traditional masculinity.<sup>103</sup>

Cordiner did not believe that white-collar work made men passive; rather, he argued only a manly man could be a white-collar worker. White-collar workers needed to exhibit the traits of the inner-directed man. They made decisions and worked in groups while maintaining their individuality. The producerist ideal that disparaged white-collar work was, as Lawrence Appley noted, “passé.”<sup>104</sup> The new business world of the 1950s was complex, and the old small business model of manhood and leadership did not fit in a white-collar world. Managers still needed to be risk-takers, driven, calculating, efficient and most of all leaders.<sup>105</sup>

Leadership embodied all of the responsibilities of white-collar workers, offering the best example of white-collar work as a masculine position. General Electric characterized leadership as “the final characteristic of management,” necessary for every professional to possess.<sup>106</sup> A leader needed to prove his abilities by demonstrating he was a competent employee and a fair boss. Only once he commanded respect from his subordinates could he be accepted as a leader.<sup>107</sup> According to General Electric, men’s

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<sup>103</sup> Peter F. Drucker, “The Professional Employee in Industry,” *Responsibilities of Business Leadership*, 33.

<sup>104</sup> Lawrence Appley, “Social Responsibilities of the Businessman,” *Responsibilities of Business Leadership*, 23. Lawrence Appley was president of the American Management Association from 1948 to 1968, and chairman of the association’s board from 1968 to 1974. He also was a member of thirty-five corporations’ boards. Throughout his distinguished career Appley emphasized the importance of effective management to a business’ success. Edwin McDowell, “Lawrence Appley, 92, an Expert on Business Management,” *The New York Times*, April 9, 1997. accessed on <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/09/business/lawrence-appley-92-an-expert-on-management.html> (April 9, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> Harold Smiddy, *General Electric’s Philosophy and Approach for Manager Development* (New York: American Management Association, 1955), 17-20.

<sup>106</sup> General Electric Company, *Supervisors’ Guide to General Electric Job Information* (New York: General Electric Company, 1947), 4.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

willingness to follow a leader depended on the leaders' abilities to demonstrate certain, usually masculine, characteristics. Leaders could not be "afraid," whether that meant afraid to assume their responsibilities or of their own bosses, and must fight until "hell freezes" for what they believe.<sup>108</sup> Leaders needed to know their work was important, and they encouraged others to maximize their own potential in ways "never thought possible" in order to gain the confidence of their subordinates.<sup>109</sup> It was not the job of the manager to befriend all of his employees, and leaders needed to reprimand and correct whenever a problem arose. However, realizing when to correct a problem was different from being unnecessarily stern. Men wanted to follow a leader who was "square as a die, who can't be bribed by anyone, and [can] see through crookedness."<sup>110</sup> General Electric believed effective leadership came from technical competency, power and authority, integrity, and ambition. According to social commentators, none of the qualities identified by General Electric were supposed to be possessed by 1950s businessmen. These attributes were all supposedly unique to the inner-directed men of the nineteenth century. Managers needed to demonstrate their manhood, to fulfill traditional ideals of masculinity, in order to be considered leaders.<sup>111</sup>

In order to meet the demands for leadership, managers needed to exhibit specific traits. Subordinates wanted masculine men to lead them; they wanted strong leaders. General Electric emphasized specific elements necessary to create strong leaders. Social commentators depicted white-collar work as meaningless, but General Electric believed strong leaders "find in their work not only a means of earning but also a reason for

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

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*



living.”<sup>112</sup> White-collar work was meant to inspire feelings that “something important has been accomplished... and that the job is a good one to return to the next following day.”<sup>113</sup> Leaders found meaning in their work and fully immersed themselves in it. Besides finding their work fulfilling, managers needed to be mentally tough, excellent listeners, confident and rational.<sup>114</sup> General Electric did not believe its managers to be passive, but men of ranked “at the top in character and integrity.”<sup>115</sup> Rather than an organization of other-directed men, General Electric picked managers because they were the “best [men] the company could find.”<sup>116</sup> Management, contrary to the depiction of social commentators, made important decisions and represented an integral part of the corporation, thus General Electric placed great emphasis on selecting only the most competent men. The work was challenging, and General Electric wanted men that could respond to that challenge.

General Electric expected leaders to exhibit one trait which made all other aspects of leadership possible, control. Social commentators asserted white-collar work prompted a crisis of masculinity because it deprived men of control over their lives. Not only did white-collar work require all men to make immediate decisions, but General Electric emphasized the necessity of self-control. General Electric’s signs of a good leader stressed men’s ability to control their emotions. General Electric emphasized obvious points, such as managers’ need to enjoy leading, have confidence, etc., but the

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

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

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

company also stressed innocuous forms of control.<sup>117</sup> It was imperative that leaders spoke in “low voices” with “slow thoughtful speech.”<sup>118</sup> Managers were never to appear in a hurry, and walking with an “even gait and moderate pace.”<sup>119</sup> Managers needed to bury their emotions, even in the face of defeat. General Electric wanted managers who enjoyed “a contest of wits and a game of chance,” but not to fear or become angry by the outcome.<sup>120</sup> Being a good loser or being calm in the face of adversity became signs of confident leadership.<sup>121</sup> It was not only anger and fear that men needed to be able to control, but joy as well. General Electric asserted that a man should “laugh only when he means it, and then under control.”<sup>122</sup> This model underscored the need for white-collar men’s authenticity. General Electric, at least as evident through its management guides, was hardly a place for sycophants. Authenticity and integrity were essential to both notions of traditional manhood and management.<sup>123</sup> When white-collar men found something authentically humorous, their response, the same as when they found something generally frustrating or disappointing, was meant to be tempered. Self-control and discipline manifested through men’s ability to control their emotions.

White-collar men were still human, and obviously did not conform to all of these qualities, traits, and signs of leadership all the time. Surely some white-collar men were poor at their jobs, sought security, and even laughed unnecessarily. Most likely, some

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

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

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* The *Supervisor’s Guide* emphasized these men should enjoy a game of chance, stressed white-collar men needed to be risk takers. Social commentators characterized white-collar men as passive and seeking security; General Electric’s placed great weight behind the idea white-collar men were the opposite.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-24.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>123</sup> The idea also appears in other places on the list. General Electric stressed the importance of being fair, of looking people in the eye, etc... General Electric Company, *Supervisors’ Guide*, 12.

men were inner-directed, others other-directed, some dedicated, and others indifferent. While the type of man found within the corporation surely varied, the corporation did not produce a certain type of man. The structural determinism of social commentators failed to acknowledge the complexities, varieties, and realities of white-collar work. The manager presented by General Electric was quite different from the image presented by social commentators. Neither social commentators nor management guides dealt with actual men, with real individuals. Both focused on the characterization of the field, what the work symbolized in the abstract. General Electric realized this, asserting “it would be hard to conceive of any human being meeting all the specifications... in the long run a knowledge of our weak spots should be our first step in strengthening them.”<sup>124</sup> General Electric never claimed all of its managers embodied these ideals, but expected men to personify most of them and work towards constant improvement. The difference between business leaders and social commentators centered on the different attitudes towards what the corporation represented. For commentators that meant an industry of institutional conformity and passivity. For white-collar leadership, management was a challenging occupation which allowed for individual development, control, and satisfaction.

The debate over the role of corporations became a debate over the future of American masculinity. Founder of business history and Harvard professor N.S.B. Gras argued, “in an age of social ferment, such as the present, there is an unconscious search for leaders... leadership is being offered by competing groups and institutions...”<sup>125</sup> Gras referred to the competition between the “religion of Rome, the communism of

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>125</sup> N.S.B. Gras, “Leadership, Past, and Present,” *Harvard Business Review* 27 (July, 1949): 419.

Moscow, and the privately controlled enterprise of Washington,” but his comments reflected the debate over the direction and character of American masculinity.<sup>126</sup> Social commentators believed massive changes needed to be made so men could meet the challenges the future posed. Corporations argued that they prepared men for a vastly changing America. The producerist ideal and the white-collar man stood diametrically opposed, competing for the role of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>127</sup>

Business leaders urged white-collar men to take the lead in American society. White-collar men held a vast responsibility in fulfilling their manhood, and helping others become individuals. Effective management “can stimulate the development of human spirit... can enrich and embellish individuality or it can degrade men and women to dull and common levels of mediocrity.”<sup>128</sup> Management held the key to the future, thus it was imperative corporations were not full of other-directed men. White-collar work called for highly educated and uncommon men. White-collar leaders viewed managers as the highly educated men necessary to combat domestic and international woes. Chairman of General Mills, Harry Bullis, proclaimed “the future... of this country and the world lies with the highly educated man... without him, we cannot save ourselves...”<sup>129</sup> Uncommon and highly educated men entered government, science, and education, but these men also turned to business. Corporations sought out uncommon men. General Electric President, Ralph Cordiner, stated in a lecture at Columbia University:

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>127</sup> Cordiner, *Developing Management Leadership for a Free Society*, 1-10.

<sup>128</sup> Richard F. Ericson, “Looking Around,” *Harvard Business Review* (September-October, 1958): 146.

<sup>129</sup> Harry Bullis, “The Future Belongs to the Highly Educated Man,” delivered as the Commencement Exercises of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, *Vital Speeches of the Day* (August 18, 1955), 1483.

Each of us is an uncommon man. Each has some distinctive and individual contribution that he alone can make. When the professional manager... realizes this, and cherishes it as his most deeply held belief about his fellow men, then he has found the clue to leadership in American society. It is leadership of this kind that will determine whether the way of freedom will be the way of the world.<sup>130</sup>

Vice President of General Electric and General Manager of General Electric's electronic division, Dr. George L. Haller, called the idea of the organization man stereotype a myth. Corporations did not "prize" organization men. Haller stated, "the business world... doesn't need the adaptive, softly-rounded man; we can't afford him..."<sup>131</sup> To "make-it-big" in the white-collar world one could not be an Organization man, instead a man needed to be an ardent "individualist" and "nonconformist."<sup>132</sup> Corporations sought men with "self-reliance, courage, resourcefulness and the independence of judgment that all through history have distinguished superior men from their inferiors."<sup>133</sup> The leaders of the business world believed white-collar men to be the embodiment of masculinity. They argued their managers were not soft or timid as social commentators claimed, nor was management conformist or passive. Businessmen believed they fulfilled traditional ideas of masculinity. The white-collar man and the frontiersman exhibited the same characteristics just in different settings.

General Electric was not the only business institution that rejected the organization man label. Professor Lyman W. Porter published an article in the *Harvard Business Review* asserting that large companies did not produce the kind of men social commentators argued they did. According to Dr. Porter, commentators did not even

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<sup>130</sup> Ralph Cordiner quoted in Dr. George L. Haller "The Obsolescent Common Man: The Need for Superior Men Today," delivered at the Commencement Exercises at Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove Pennsylvania, *Vital Speeches of the Day* (June 3, 1962): 671.

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

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

adequately prove the Organization man's existence. His study surveyed over 1,700 managers, and these managers viewed white-collar work as "challenging, [and] more difficult and more competitive than in small firms."<sup>134</sup> Porter's research dismissed the idea that a return to the entrepreneurial small business would somehow create more manly men. Porter specifically dismissed the findings of William H. Whyte, Jr. Porter argued Whyte's work was "based simply on personal opinion and observation, rather than on any objective, verifiable evidence."<sup>135</sup> Managers of large organizations often described their work using such terms as "good, interesting, difficult, intense, complex, profound, challenging, and competition."<sup>136</sup> Managers of large companies were also more likely to use those words to describe their daily work than managers of small companies. The widest discrepancy between managers of corporations and small firms was through identifying their work as challenging.<sup>137</sup> Porter's evidence not only rejected Whyte's and others' assertions that white-collar work was not challenging, but also the idea that corporations breed men with other-directed personality traits. Managers of large companies emphasized "forceful" and "imaginative" as the two most necessary attributes for their success. Even more damaging to social commentators' claims was Porter's assertion that managers of smaller companies reflected other-directed characteristics. The two most important qualities for a small-business manager were "tactful" and

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<sup>134</sup> Lyman W. Porter, "Where is the Organization Man?," *Harvard Business Review* (November-December, 1963): 53.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

“cautious.”<sup>138</sup> Fear and passivity plagued the entrepreneur or the small-business manager, not the corporate man.

Porter’s study argued white-collar, corporate management was more challenging and difficult than small or independent business. The corporation represented a new kind of challenge in the way starting a business did in the nineteenth century. Corporations challenged men to lead and be administrators of large organizations with a vast number of employees beneath them. Porter asserted, “the jobs of upper and top managers who help to run one of these large organizations are at least as great a challenge as starting one’s own small business.”<sup>139</sup> White-collar work for unambitious men provided “maximum security and minimum personal risk,” but for ambitious men “the large company may also provide the maximum in job challenge.”<sup>140</sup> The concession that some unambitious men worked in corporations did not necessarily validate social commentators’ beliefs, because corporations did not create passive men. Passive men worked in corporations, but they were not a product of the corporate structure. Corporations often used progressive training programs and policies, whereas smaller companies were often more “tradition-bound” or dominated by one central personality which demanded conformity.<sup>141</sup> More importantly, large corporations offered challenging and fulfilling work, more so than their idealized small-business counterparts.

General Electric and business leaders demonstrated that masculinity and the white-collar work were not incompatible. This discourse attempted to reshape the commentators’ arguments and rescue middle-class men’s manhood. For business leaders,

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

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

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

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

a crisis of masculinity did not exist, and a man did not have to choose between being a man and a white-collar man. Corporate work for them reflected the pinnacle of masculinity through its emphasis on rationality, leadership, control, and planning. These men were essential to the company's long and short term success. Elements of 1950s popular culture supported white-collar leaders' ideas about masculinity. In the same way social commentators' ideology diffused into popular culture, the white-collar discourse impacted the films and literature as well. Films and literature emphasized the importance of the men in the middle, the same way General Electric did to its managers. Some films and literature not only showed the middle as a place for happiness and fulfillment, but presented deviations from the middle as undesirable. Sloan Wilson sought to emphasize the importance of the middle, stating "those who have inherited money and those who have none are today equally uneasy."<sup>142</sup> Business leadership and certain films rejected the commentators' assertions that the middle-class lifestyle, whether it was the place middle-class men worked or lived, produced unhappy, conformists, and passive men. Both sought to rescue the middle from the onslaught of criticism rendering it respectable and masculine.

Wealthy men in 1950s mainstream popular culture fell normally within two stereotypes. Wealthy men were either the hyper-inner-directed men, driven to work so hard to amass and keep their fortunes that their personal lives collapsed around them. The other character-type was that of the effeminate millionaire. Pampered by a life of luxury and idleness these characters often provided comic relief. Their inability to function within society, relate to women, and fulfill traditional masculinity made them

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<sup>142</sup> Nona Balakian, "Talk With Mr. Wilson," *New York Times*, August 7, 1955, BR 17.



objects of ridicule in the films. Identification with these men became impossible, as their deficiencies were often so dramatic as to drive viewers or readers either to laughter or pity. However, none of these films or books contained an anti-capitalist message. They were not an attempt to demonstrate the dangers of wealth or the evils of inherited wealth. These wealthy characters were used to contrast their imperfections against either the middle-class male protagonist or another middle-class male.

The embodiment of hyper-inner-directed male stereotype is Ralph Hopkins from Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Hopkins is the president of a large broadcasting corporation. He hires the main protagonist of the story, Thomas Rath, to write speeches for him for a mental health campaign.<sup>143</sup> Hopkins devoted himself to his work at the expense of the relationships around him. He even maintains an apartment in the city next to his office where he stays a majority of the time in order to conduct business at all hours of the night. His family lives in the suburbs, and he mostly sees them around Christmas.<sup>144</sup> Hopkins' schedule and work-ethic was a detriment to his character, not a characteristic to be lauded. Almost every hour of the day was filled with some sort of meeting or another. Hopkins even conducts business while eating breakfast.<sup>145</sup> Working as hard as Hopkins came at a price, both with his health and family. Hopkins has a history of dizziness, high blood pressure and even a bad heart.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Robert Bentley, 1979), 33-41. Wilson's work was a *New York Times* best seller in 1955. The *New York Times* lauded Wilson for his perceptive characteristic of the 1950s white-collar man. His title became a "synonym for a post-war phenomenon: the former G.I. heroically reconverting to respectable civilian life." "Other 11- No Title," *New York Times*, November 27, 1955, 324; John McNulty, "Tom Rath, Commuter: The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," *New York Times*, July 17, 1955, BR18; Nona Balakian, "Talk With Mr. Wilson," *New York Times*, August 7, 1955, BR17.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

Everyone around him urges Hopkins to slow down, including both his doctor and his wife.<sup>147</sup> Helen Hopkins calls his preoccupation with work a disease. Helen laments she never saw her husband, asserting “life isn’t worth living like this...”<sup>148</sup> She implores her husband to slow down and spend time at home, but to no avail.<sup>149</sup> His perpetual absence leaves their marriage strained almost beyond repair, including talk of divorce.<sup>150</sup>

Ultimately, Hopkins’ family deteriorates to the point where his wife has a breakdown. She leaves the country on multi-month cruise, and demands Hopkins sell the house because she could no longer bear the loneliness of an empty house. Hopkins’ overbearing work schedule and perpetual absences drives his wife into a severe depression.<sup>151</sup>

Hopkins’ obsession with work led to disarray in his personal life. Not only had he driven his wife to depression, but his only daughter, and living child, hates him. Helen blames his absence from her life as the reason for her unruly behavior. His daughter refuses to attend college, sleeps all day, parties all night, and dates older men.<sup>152</sup> Helen implores Hopkins to finally “put her down on your calendar. Treat her as though she were something you were a trustee of!”<sup>153</sup> Helen’s implication is that the only thing Hopkins cares about is business. She begs Hopkins to treat his daughter as he treats a business meeting since business is the only thing he understands. Hopkins’ belated attempt at parenting could not control his unruly daughter. Hopkins’ daughter likewise blames her father’s success for ruining his and her mother’s life. She asserts “I’m not

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-172.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-243.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 215-216.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

going to let money ruin my life the way it's ruined yours and Mother's."<sup>154</sup> She continues chastising her father, "It's stupid the way you work all the time! You don't know how to live. If I'd been Mother, I would have divorced you long ago... I don't know why you have to work all the time... You're a masochist!"<sup>155</sup> She rejects her father's lifestyle proclaiming, "I don't want to be like you and Mother. I want to have a good time."<sup>156</sup> She urges her father to leave her alone, as he "always has!"<sup>157</sup> She eventually marries a much older failing playwright, to both Hopkins' and Helen's chagrin.<sup>158</sup>

Hopkins' takes a different path than Mr. Burns from *Woman's World*. Burns seeks the middle-path as the source to happiness, whereas Hopkins picks success in business over happiness in his personal life. Burns rose from the ranks of the working class, and opts not to push a position atop the corporate world. Like Hopkins, Burns has health and relationship problems due to the high stress levels and time commitments of his work. Unlike Hopkins, he values his wife and health more than success. Burns finds happiness and reunites with his wife as he picks a white-collar lifestyle, while Hopkins' life remains in shambles.

Hopkins was not an enviable character, despite his fortune and power. When he offers Thomas Rath, who had been a speech writer for him, a top position he turns it down. Rath was afraid it would make him like Hopkins. In a conversation with his wife, Betsy, he explains his fears, "I don't think you can get to be a top administrator without

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-229.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-243.

working every week end for half your life, and I'd just as soon spend my week ends with you and the kids."<sup>159</sup> Rath wants the increase in pay that came with the promotion, but realizes he only wants more money to enjoy life, something Hopkins was incapable of doing.<sup>160</sup> Rath wants to succeed, but "without sacrificing [his] entire personal life."<sup>161</sup> Ultimately, Rath opts for a less stressful job closer to his house that afforded him free time with his family.<sup>162</sup> Given the option between maintaining his life or becoming Hopkins' protégée, Rath rejects Hopkins' lifestyle. Hopkins' obsession with work left him as an undesirable character to be pitied, not identified with, by the reader.

Rath, as a character, embodies both an elevation of the middle-class lifestyle and the anxieties of the commentators. Rath initially finds it difficult to adjust to white-collar life. He has trouble transitioning from his military service to a corporate career. During World War II, Rath was a paratrooper, and he finds the shift from a "tough bastard who knows how to handle a gun" to a speech writer on mental health a difficult transition.<sup>163</sup> Rath asserts, "I detest the United Broadcasting Corporation... and the only reason I'm willing to spend my life in such a ridiculous enterprise is that I want to buy a better bottle of gin."<sup>164</sup> It is not only work Rath found unsatisfying, but he also views his neighborhood as "just a crossroads where families waited until they could afford something better."<sup>165</sup> Rath's dissatisfaction does not stem entirely from middle-class life

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 250. Rath's view of a top administrator reflected General Electric's view more so than social commentators' view. Rath depicted white-collar work at a high level as time consuming, difficult, and something that demanded complete devotion. His rejection of the promotion should not be read as a validation of social commentators' claims.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

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

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

the way it does for Henry's in *Rally 'Round the Flag Boys*. Instead, Rath disdains the constant need for competition and improvement. Henry hates the dullness of suburbia, whereas Rath hates the fact "contentment was an object of contempt."<sup>166</sup> In many ways Rath seeks Whyte's conception of the security plateau. Rath rejects the world of inner-directed men when he turns down Hopkins' promotion.

*The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* highlights the criticisms identified by social commentators and then turns them against the commentators. Rath longs to enjoy his middle-class lifestyle. He wants a job that will enable him to no longer worry about money and allow him time to spend with his family. Given the opportunity to become inner-directed, Rath chooses to be other-directed. Rath by the end of the novel is happy, and his happiness stems from his choosing a white-collar lifestyle. *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and General Electric celebrated middle managers as men. General Electric emphasized the benefits of management, while *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* illustrated the satisfaction of the home life white-collar work made possible. Unlike social commentators, Rath does not view the traits of the inner-directed man as desirable. Wilson's goal in writing the novel was to "confront--not criticize--his generation."<sup>167</sup> Wilson stated his goal was to illustrate the heroism in everyday white-collar life.<sup>168</sup> Rath embodies Wilson's everyday heroism. Rath chooses the middle because the middle offers him the most fulfilling option; he finds satisfaction in other-directedness.

Wilson presented Rath's career path as more desirable than his boss Hopkins' path. Other works continued this emphasis on the middle by depicting the wealthy as

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>167</sup> Balakian, "Talk with Mr. Wilson," BR 17.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*.

overworked or highly effeminate. In 1950s popular culture, men that inherited wealth were no happier or more successful than men that spent their entire life working towards wealth. Men who inherited wealth not only lacked the drive necessary to accumulate it, but they also surrounded themselves with luxury from an early age. Films continuously portrayed these men as weak and easily manipulated. The parents of these men, usually their mother, controlled them well into their adult years. In the film *Some Like It Hot*, Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis play two men on the run from the mob. They disguise themselves as women and join a band touring Florida. One millionaire in his mid-forties, Oswald Fielding III, becomes smitten with Jack Lemmon's female character, Daphne. Short and perpetually clueless, Oswald continually lusts after Daphne. Oswald has been married over seven times. His mother breaks up his last marriage because the woman smokes, and sends him to Florida where he meets Daphne. Even after Daphne reveals she is a man, Oswald responds "nobody's perfect."<sup>169</sup> *Some Like It Hot* depicted Oswald as dopey, effeminate, and oblivious because of his mother's interference in his life. His life of luxury left him disconnected with reality.

The film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* centers on a father's meddling in his rich son's love life. Gus Desmond, Jr., son of an extremely wealthy businessman, falls in love with gold-digger Lorelei. Lorelei easily manipulates Gus. Every time they kiss he becomes dazed, as a dizzying sound effect plays in the background. Gus is unable to free

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<sup>169</sup> Billy Wilder, dir, *Some Like It Hot*, with Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis, and Jack Lemmon (Coronado, California: MGM, 1959). DVD. The film grossed twenty five million dollars domestically and won an Oscar for best costume. The film was nominated for best actor, best director and best black and white cinematography. www.imdb.com. Critics found the film "outrageously funny," but the ribald premise of the film did upset some of the audience. At least one viewer found the humor in poor taste, and disapproved of the female impersonator characters played by Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon. A.H. Weiler, "Screen: 2-Hour Comedy," *New York Times*, March 30, 1959, 23. Leslie Rabkin, "Off the Beam," *New York Times* May 31, 1959, X5

himself from his father, and Gus Desmond, Sr., hires a private detective to spy on Lorelei on a cruise. Even after the detective presents Gus with evidence of Lorelei's inappropriate behavior, he gives her fifteen thousand dollars because she spent forty-five minutes alone with him. Gus, as an emasculated character, is contrasted with the tough, middle-class private detective. The detective charms and eventually woos Lorelei's best friend. The assertion is that money here does not buy love and simply leaves men blind to the fact they are being used.<sup>170</sup>

Similar to Gus and Oswald, Brad Allen's friend Jonathan, in the film *Pillow Talk*, is equally inept. Through the demonization and ridicule of non-white-collar men, these films elevate middle-class lifestyles. Just as the General Electric manuals emphasized the manliness of their managers, these works highlight the satisfaction driven from white-collar lifestyles. Jonathan inherits wealth, married three times, and blames his failed marriages as a "revolt against his mother." Jonathan remains unsuccessful on his own, unable to increase his inherited fortune. He entered college with eight million dollars and remains with that amount of money. Despite being a millionaire Jonathan's wealth does not bring him respect, or his love interest. Jonathan remains unable to coax Brad, a song writer, to work on his schedule. Brad is clearly the dominant man in the friendship, despite Jonathan's wealth and being Brad's employer. Throughout the film Jonathan appears as Brad's sidekick and admirer. Jonathan even loses his love interest to the middle-class Brad. Jane's choice of Brad over Jonathan again demonstrates that wealth

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<sup>170</sup> Howard Hawks, dir, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, with Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell, and Elliot Reid (Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1953). DVD. The camera did not show what happened during the forty-five minutes, but it alludes to sex. The film grossed twelve million and won a WGA award for best written American musical [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). Like *Woman's World*, this film was viewed as rather unremarkable by critics. A *New York Times* columnist asserted the film lacked class and relied too much on the looks of the female leads. This film was included to illustrate how far this rhetoric penetrated popular culture. Bosley Crowther, "Screen in Review," *New York Times*, July 16, 1953, 17.

failed to bring the same level of manliness or happiness as the middle-class ideal.<sup>171</sup>

Whether it was brought by overwork or inheritance, wealth in these works prohibits happiness. These films heralded the middle-class protagonists as ideal, usually at the expense of their wealthy counterparts. The wealthy in these works lacked the happy ending found by the middle-class protagonists.

Wealth barred men from fulfilling their ideal gender roles. Poverty contributed to the failure of reaching the middle-class ideal as well. Working-class men often yielded to vices and temptations in their daily lives when portrayed in fiction. Marlon Brando played Terry in the film *On the Waterfront*. Unable to count, and a former fighter, Terry works on the docks. The workers considered the waterfront a world of its own, because of the harsh conditions and heavy corruption. The corruption allows those without strong will to take advantage, while others suffer. Terry joins the mob instead of working. As a result of his affiliation everyone in town calls him a “bum.” Terry did not want to join the mob, but on the waterfront “it’s about staying alive...it’s living like an animal.” All Terry really wants is a “steady job, and few extra potatoes.” Reflecting on his life Terry exclaims “I could have had class, could have been somebody, could have been a contender, instead I am a bum.” Terry redeems his life and reputation by being saved by a middle-class woman. A student at an all-woman’s college and aspiring teacher, she convinces Terry to change and inform on the mob to the police. The working-class

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<sup>171</sup> Michael Gordon, dir., *Pillow Talk*, with Rock Hudson, Doris Day, and Tony Randall (New York: Universal International Pictures, 1959), DVD. The film grossed over eighteen million dollars won two technical Oscars and was nominated for best actress and supporting actress. It was also nominated for a Golden Globe for best picture, best actress, and best supporting actor [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). Rock Hudson and Doris Day, the stars of the film, were hailed as the year’s most popular actor by film exhibitors. The film was also considered one of the top comedies of the year along with *Some Like It Hot*. “Rock Hudson Wins Poll,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1959, 14.; Bosley Crowther, “Good For Laughs,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1959, X1.



“bum” gains respectability and happiness through his middle-class love interest and rejects his working-class values.<sup>172</sup>

These elements of popular culture corroborated business leaders’ argument that middle-class work provided a fulfilling alternative to the producerist ideal. Through emphasizing leadership, individuality, and rationality, white-collar men positioned themselves as the true inheritors of American masculinity. Although the corporation may have reached a new level of prominence in the 1950s, it required channeling traditional masculinity and repurposing it in different ways. White-collar workers thought of themselves as inner-directed and rejected the label of the organization man. Social commentators believed corporations made men lose control, white-collar work made men effeminate, and the middle class made men conformists. Commentators hysterically warned that American masculinity was in severe decline. Men could no longer be men in the 1950s, they argued. White-collar leaders and white-collar popular culture illustrated that commentators were projecting their fears of a drastically changing society onto white-collar workers. There was not a crisis of masculinity for all men in the 1950s, but only for certain popular and vocal figures in the 1950s. As author of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* Sloan Wilson noted, “These are, we forget, good times. Yet too many novelists [or social commentators] are still writing as if we were back in the depression

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<sup>172</sup> Elia Kazan, dir, *On The Waterfront*, with Marlon Brando, Karl Malden, and Lee J. Cobb (New Jersey: Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1954). DVD. The film grossed over nine and a half million dollars and won the Oscar for best actor, supporting actress, best director and best picture [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). The film attempted to capture the realistic nature of labor unrest and corruption on the docks exposed by a series of journalist early in the decade. While occasionally over the top, the film was lauded by critics for its realistic portrayal. A.W., “The Screen: Astor offers ‘On the Waterfront,’” *New York Times*, July 29, 1954, 18; Budd Schulberg, “Waterfront: From Docks to Film,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1954, X5.

years.”<sup>173</sup> Business’ view of white-collar masculinity serves to move the crisis of masculinity from an unmitigated fact, to one group’s opinion.

White-collar men self-consciously disagreed and rejected commentators’ interpretations. The two opposing groups represented two very different cultural discourses on what it meant to be a man in the 1950s. These competing discourses trapped men in the middle. The impact of this cultural conversation on masculinity became evident through men’s bodies. Dieting and fitness served as a canvas for both discourses to sculpt. Elements of white-collar and producerist masculinity are evident in the discourse about health, and the male vanity discourse served to validate men’s new white-collar lifestyles.

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<sup>173</sup>Balakian, “Talk with Mr. Wilson,” BR17.

### Chapter 3

#### **Looking Your Best for Success: White-Collar Men, Vanity, and the Necessity of Being Thin**

The 1950s placed a new kind of pressure on men, the pressure to look good. Male vanity took center stage in 1950s, as dieting, grooming, fashion, and to a small extent exercise became increasingly important and expected. Expecting men to engage in physical activity was not unique to the 1950s. Physical activity for men reached the height of its popularity in the period between the late nineteenth century and World War I. Famous figures such as William James and Theodore Roosevelt extolled the virtues of the “strenuous life.” During this era, as philosophy professor Patrick K. Dooley asserts, “numerous writers and public figures endorsed the catalytic and ability of challenge, stress, danger, emergency and high-risk situations to elevate conduct and expand horizons...”<sup>1</sup> The strenuous life asserted that physicality built character, but in the 1950s physical activity had a much different role. Being thin, or at least not overweight, built character. The emphasis shifted from activity to looks, and in many cases exercise was dismissed instead of celebrated. The 1950s reflected a period of male vanity. Looking good and being healthy mattered more to men than living a strenuous life. A majority of the literature on how to lose weight and look good specifically sought to avoid any type of strenuous activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick K. Dooley, “Public Policy and Philosophical Critique: The William James and Theodore Roosevelt Dialogue on Strenuousness,” *Transactions of the Charles Pierce Society* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 162. Other works on nineteenth-century fitness include Clifford Putney’s *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*; E. Anthony Rotundo’s *American Manhood: Transformations in masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*; E. Anthony Rotundo’s “Body and Soul: Changing Ideals of American Middle-Class Manhood, 1770-1920,” *Journal of Social History* 16 (Summer 1983):23-38; Gail Bederman’s *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Harvey Green’s *Fit For America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society*.

Vanity, looking good solely for the purpose of looking appealing to others, emerged in the 1950s as a necessity for men. Dress, grooming, and weight all took on new significance in the 1950s. Success and looks became inextricably tied. The right suit, the ideal weight, and the proper hair meant marriage, respectability, and promotions. Men did not achieve the ideal look through strenuous exercise, extreme dieting, or perpetual attention to their appearance. Rather, men achieved their ideal weights and looks through moderate attention to their appearance and grooming, light to no exercise, a slight alteration in eating habits, or through the purchase of dieting pills or powders (although most fitness guides denounced this method). The methods for reducing weight and achieving the correct appearance were meant to fit into men's busy schedules, and with minimal interruption to their daily activities.

Male beauty culture emerged amidst the debate over what constituted middle-class masculinity. Some of the producerist ideology impacted ideas of male fitness, but the crisis narrative neither comprised a majority of the discourse on male vanity, nor can it offer a full or convincing explanation for why it emerged. The main themes of male vanity centered on elevating the middle-class lifestyle and achieving success in the white-collar world. Both male beauty guides and business leaders sought to demonstrate that manhood and white-collar work were compatible. Neither presented white-collar men as lacking masculinity, and both sought to emphasize white-collar men's masculinity. Male beauty culture used some elements of commentators' rhetoric, but did not share their disdain for white-collar life. Men needed to lose weight but do so in a white-collar way. Wariness of luxury and consumerism are present, but diet and appearance guides did not reject white-collar lifestyles. Instead, these works sought to "improve" men's lives with

minimal sacrifices so they could enjoy their middle-class lifestyle even more. Male beauty culture encompassed both the producerist and white-collar discourses, but it sought to elevate white-collar lifestyle. Fitness culture, like business leaders, offers more of a counter to the idea of a crisis of masculinity. The commentators' ideology did partially shape the discourse on men's bodies but not completely. It was fine to be a white-collar man: one just needed to be a slightly more self-conscious white-collar man.

Historians have developed three separate interpretations of the emergence of male beauty culture, characterizing it as a response to the Cold War, as part of the crisis of masculinity, or as an inconsequential, insufficiently-popular phenomenon. None of these frameworks fully address the complete reasons why the concern over male vanity emerged. The crisis of masculinity argument remained convincing because most historians focused only on the ideas proposed by social commentators. Historian Jesse Berrett argues that dieting narratives repurposed the producerist critique of manhood. He asserts that participation in fitness culture allowed men a way of purchasing their inner-directedness. Dieting not only masculinized consumerism, but it also allowed for the realization of self-made manhood.<sup>2</sup> According to Berrett, "Diet, then, helped to reconcile traditional masculine individualism with the restrained corporate world... The successful dieter then proceeded to master the rest of his world, for his masculinity, renewed by his control of what he took in, made" a new man.<sup>3</sup> Berrett assumes masculinity needed revitalizing because masculinity was supposedly in crisis in 1950s culture.

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<sup>2</sup> Jesse Berrett, "Feeding the Organization Man: Diet and Masculinity in Postwar America," *Journal of Social History* (Summer, 1997): 807-814.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 817.

Berrett uses the social commentators' critiques as the only form of masculinity available, and thus considers the men in the middle effeminate. However, as General Electric's documents and works like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* demonstrated, social commentators were not the only ones defining the managerial class' identity. If the white-collar work was not an inherently feminine sphere, as business leaders argued, but a masculine one, then it did not require revitalizing. Corporations provided a masculine occupation and the suburb a source of fulfillment, not emasculation. Also, many of the dieting narratives used the rhetoric of only slight modifications to the middle-class lifestyle, and their results promised more enjoyment of the white-collar world. Male beauty culture hardly reflected a new version of self-made man masculinity.

The cold war narrative for male fitness is convincing and important, but not complete. K.A Cuordileone argues that fear of communism manifested itself in a language of "hard and soft."<sup>4</sup> Cuordileone's study of political writings by intellectuals during the 1950s argues, "politics... relied on a complex of sexually-charged dualism..." This hard/soft dualism reflected the fears of a rapidly changing society and concerns over national security. Cuordileone places Cold War security rhetoric in terms of a crisis of masculinity. Concerns over mass society, the growing power of women inside and outside of the home, and the Cold War all challenged masculinity and carried national security implications.<sup>5</sup>

The hysteria over masculinity coexisted with doubts over whether American men "were prepared to meet the demands of a hypermilitarized nation. Uncertainties about

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<sup>4</sup> K.A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity 1949-1960," *Journal of American History* (September, 2000), 515.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 522-523.

hardness of the nation's cold warriors hovered over the manhood debate...<sup>6</sup> The emergence of openly gay subcultures exacerbated these growing uncertainties. World War II military service provided increased opportunities for homosocial interaction combined with mass dislocation and upheaval, allowing for the emergence of visible homosexual communities and subcultures. As Cuordileone asserts, World War II served as a "national coming out party." The number of homosexuals did not increase, but many people grew concerned that homosexuality was on the rise in the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> Popular culture depicted homosexuals as a threat to national security, since many public and government intellectuals believed gays were morally bankrupt and politically suspect. Communists and queers became interchangeable, and both were "mentally twisted."<sup>8</sup> Cuordileone argues that "liberals, homosexuals, and Communists had been linked by virtue of their common moral weaknesses."<sup>9</sup> The fear of tying homosexuality to communism stemmed from anxieties over the perceived loosening of traditional sexual mores. However, Cuordileone argues, homosexuality became a more prevalent fear and damaging accusation. Accusing someone of being a communist carried limited weight, as these fears were "projected onto an enemy whose quasi-Victorian culture and rigid material theology made it an altogether unworthy repository of American anxieties and frustrations."<sup>10</sup> The shame of being less than a man resonated more with the American public than the shame of being communist. Therefore, by linking the two, the

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 529.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 532-533.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 533.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 538.

government intensified the public's emotions toward the Cold War. Masculinity defined political rhetoric, and any taint of softness was unacceptable in the Cold War.

The hard/soft dualism works until a point. Undoubtedly being labeled as soft was undesirable and an effective political weapon. The Eisenhower/Stevenson presidential competitions fully demonstrated the impact of the hard/soft dichotomy.<sup>11</sup> Flabbiness, fear of mass-culture, and national defense merged, giving the body, appearance, and sexual identity new significance.<sup>12</sup> Cuordileone links cold war fears with cultural anxieties over masculinity and sexuality. Part of the reason labeling an opponent as soft has such cultural resonance was due to the crisis of masculinity. Cold war fears merged with anxieties over mass-culture and conforming corporate identities. To be sure, the hard/soft dichotomy influenced political rhetoric, but it does not fully explain the emergence of a male beauty culture. First, cold war concerns failed to penetrate the most popular guides, and none of them linked fatness with national security concerns. Second, the rhetoric Cuordileone identifies is concerned with the "hard body," whereas male beauty culture moves beyond just fitness. Men did not need hard bodies in the 1950s, just slightly less soft bodies. Also, Cuordileone ignores the link between the hard body

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 527. Many scholars argue homosexuality became a source of identity after World War II. For the impact of the growing federal government on sexual identity see Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. For the impact of Cold War ideology see K.A. Cuordileone "Politics in an Age of Anxiety." Also see Robert Corber's *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia and Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America*. For political impact see Cuordileone again. Also see David K. Johnson's *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays in the Federal Government* and Andrea Friedman's "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy: The Lavender Scare, Gossip, and Cold War Politics," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (December, 2005): 1105-1129. On the impact of popular culture see Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* and Geoffrey Smith's "National Security and Personal Isolation: Sex, Gender, and Disease in the Cold-War United States," *The International History Review* 14, no. 2 (May, 1992): 307-337. For homosexuals' resistance see Robert Corber's *Homosexuality in the Cold War: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* and John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*.



and emphasis on hair and clothing. The “hard/soft” argument relies too heavily on the crisis narrative, and fails to account for other discourses on masculinity presented during the period, such as the one from business leaders. Cuordileone’s argument seems better at addressing the rhetoric aimed at politicians, rather than accounting for the pressures placed on everyday men.

Historian Lynne Luciano traces the origins of male beauty culture, accounting for the elements missing from Cuordileone’s argument, specifically the vanity aspect. Her work traces men’s increasing preoccupation with their looks from the 1950s until the 1990s. Describing the contemporary effects of male vanity, Luciano argues, “the traditional image of women as sexual objects has simply been expanded: everyone has become an object to be seen.”<sup>13</sup> Women’s growing economic independence repurposed the male body as an object, the way patriarchy reduces female bodies to objects.<sup>14</sup> Naomi Wolf argues beauty “is the last system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations....”<sup>15</sup> Luciano would agree that “the beauty myth... is about men’s institutions and institutional power.”<sup>16</sup> However, as men lose hegemonic economic control they experience much of the same body scrutiny as women. While she starts her narrative with the 1950s, she ultimately dismisses the idea that male beauty culture had mass popularity until the 1960s. Ultimately, since the 1950s men have found out “what women have known for a long time: once the body becomes

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<sup>13</sup> Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

public, it is subject to admiration and lust, but also to critical scrutiny and judgment.”<sup>17</sup>

Luciano views men as reacting to this scrutiny because of economic and social changes.

Men felt the pressure to care about their looks as their bodies came under cultural scrutiny in the 1950s. Men needed the right looks in the 1950s for both financial and marital success.<sup>18</sup> However, the 1950s ultimately did not fit Luciano’s model of economics and patriarchy. Luciano relies heavily on psychologist Michael Solomon’s “Onassis Effect” theory. The Onassis Effect asserted “as long as men had almost total control of economic resources, they had little reason to worry how desirable they were personally; desirability existed quite independently of physical attractiveness.”<sup>19</sup> As men lost this control the Onassis Effect was “turned on its head.”<sup>20</sup> Since the 1950s remained “both in the boardroom and bedroom... a man’s world” the Onassis Effect remained intact.<sup>21</sup> While Luciano explores various diets, the impact of consumer culture, the Cold War, and fears of conformity, she ultimately concludes “exercise remained a low priority in American life; the only exception seemed to be Eisenhower’s popularization of golf.”<sup>22</sup> However, she dismisses male vanity as not being as prevalent in the 1950s as it would later become.

The importance of male vanity in the 1950s should not be dismissed because exercise did not catch on, or because the average weight of middle age men was higher in 1963 than it was in 1941.<sup>23</sup> A lack of physical results stems from the absence of adequate exercise information in 1950s diet plans, but that does not minimize the fitness culture’s

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<sup>17</sup> Luciano, *Looking Good*, 206.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-45.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

social significance. Many of the diets, time-saving exercises, and exercise products simply did not work. Results of men's diets in this instance are unimportant because the diets for men were popular. American culture emphasized the importance of men's bodies, as Luciano acknowledges, from a beauty standpoint for the first time. The Onassis Effect may explain the importance of male beauty culture in later periods, but not the 1950s. Male vanity reflected the attempt to demonstrate the sustainability of white-collar lifestyles. Male vanity did not emerge solely from the crisis of masculinity rhetoric or the cold war nor should the results diminish its importance.

Debates over men's bodies contained elements of both producerist and white-collar discourses. The body is not only a physical entity, but a site of cultural tensions. The body carries cultural meanings.<sup>24</sup> According to gender theorist and literary critic Susan Bordo, "... our bodies are trained, shaped and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, and femininity."<sup>25</sup> These cultural pressures manifest themselves through bodily discourses based upon images and cultural authorities.<sup>26</sup> These power relations have an "intimate hold" on the body.<sup>27</sup> Cultural practices such as dieting or brushing one's teeth "reflect the truth about our lives but they also produce and legitimize such truths."<sup>28</sup> Men's relationship to their work in the 1950s and the contested meaning of their work placed them in the middle between

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 26.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Bordo "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault," *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, edited by Susan Bordo and Allison Jaggar (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 25.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Aycock, "The Confession of the Flesh: Disciplinary Gaze in Casual Bodybuilding," *Play & Culture* 5 (1992): 342.

two competing ideologies. Both commentators and business leaders sought to define hegemonic masculinity. The competition between ideologies played out on men's bodies and through ideas about fitness and appearance. Ultimately, white-collar masculinity became dominant, but elements of producerist masculinity remained prevalent.

The body may be a receptor of cultural meaning and tensions, and scholars debate the degree to which these tensions influence people's decisions to engage in fitness and exercise. The debate between anthropologists Alan Klein and Fletcher Linder over the cultural meanings of modern bodybuilding offers a useful framework for fitness culture in the 1950s. Although they study the extreme of male vanity in the late twentieth century, the conclusions still offer insight in thinking about what the male body means in relation to exercise and culture. Some theorists on fitness like Klein view exercise and bodybuilding as a reaction to an unstable reality. Klein argues:

For many, as economic futures grow shaky and relationships grow problematic, as sex lives come under siege and youth ebbs slowly away, people experience a distinct feeling of losing control. This state of economic, cultural and psychic erosion can invoke a response that seeks to maximize what is left us, the necessity of finding areas of life that allow a sense of control, if not over our lives over our bodies... the fit body... connotes victories of the individual over society in troubled times.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, by shaping their bodies and demonstrating self-control and discipline, men repudiate notions of femininity. Men's engagement in physical activity or dieting serves as "a necessary part of achieving the desired state of heterosexuality..." by asserting a form of hyper-masculinity.<sup>30</sup> Not only does fitness reject any taint of femininity or

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<sup>29</sup> Alan M. Klein, "Man Makes Himself: Alienation and Self-Objectification in Bodybuilding," *Play & Culture* 5 (1992): 326.

<sup>30</sup> Alan M. Klein, "Pumping Irony: Crisis and Contradiction in Bodybuilding," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 3 (1986): 125.

homosexuality, but it creates a blue-collar identity both through physical labor and industrial imagery.<sup>31</sup> Klein's view of bodybuilding and exercise reflects the tensions illuminated by 1950s social commentators. Commentators criticized white-collar men for losing control of their lives, and for their jobs and home lives making them effeminate. In Klein's conception of fitness culture, the crisis of masculinity and commentators' assertions fully explain the rise of male vanity. If men could no longer control their own lives, as commentators asserted, then naturally white-collar men would turn inward to control their bodies. Exercise allowed for the repudiation of femininity and dieting invoked masculine images of self-control and discipline.

In many ways, Klein's view of bodybuilding and fitness culture echoes the approach of social commentators of the 1950s. Participation in the fitness subculture emerges out of some type of personal crisis. Anthropologist Fletcher Linder offers a very stark contrast to Klein's interpretation of bodybuilding. Bodybuilding and fitness culture offers a different way of engaging "with the world, each other, and ourselves...."<sup>32</sup> Klein and other academics depict bodybuilding as "masculinity run amok, a frightening example of alienated labor, or a disturbing expression of narcissism," an interpretation Linder dismisses.<sup>33</sup> Linder goes as far to assert, "it is worth asking whether bodybuilders or subcritical academics are more narcissistic. The group that works to develop the self through aesthetic practice, or the group that denies legitimacy to these aesthetic practices?"<sup>34</sup> Linder argues the overdeveloped, muscular body is a "positive engagement

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<sup>31</sup> Klein, "Man Makes Himself," 327.

<sup>32</sup> Fletcher Linder, "Life as Art, and Seeing the Promise of Big Bodies," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 3 (August 2007), 452.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 466.

with modernity,” which produces not only the body as art, but a positive set of ethics.<sup>35</sup> Not only do bodybuilders form a community, but lifting weights is a source of unalienated labor. The attributes necessary for developing the bodybuilder body are positive ones, such as discipline, and defy traditional ideas of narcissism.<sup>36</sup>

Average men in the 1950s did not engage in bodybuilding, and few found the overdeveloped body archetype Linder described as art desirable.<sup>37</sup> However, scholarly debate over the impact and meaning of the overdeveloped body offers some useful insights into body culture in the 1950s. First, Linder and Klein provide a more complicated picture of what exercise and fitness means. Working out is more than just a response to personal and societal crisis. Men can turn to the body as an object of personal control in the face of uncertainty, but fitness culture can be so much more as well. Fitness can also allow for a sense of community and self-worth. Historian Harvey Green asserts that, after the mid-1920s fitness, activities represented not just a search for a competitive edge, but “an expression of the desire for community and emotional bonding in a culture of men and women alone.”<sup>38</sup> Klein’s argument helps explain some of the overtones in the 1950s fitness culture, but Green’s and Linder’s ideas about community reflect the dominant narrative of 1950s male beauty culture. The idea that men turned to male vanity simply out of a cultural crisis seems too reductionist. It ignores the tangible benefits men perceive from participating in this culture, such as

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 465-466.

<sup>37</sup> Bodybuilding did have an appeal in the 1950s. Stars such as Charles Atlas were popular and had their own mail-order catalogs and products. These routines did not largely appeal to white-collar men, but were popular with “gawky” teenage boys insecure over their physiques. Luciano, *Looking Good*, 61-62.

<sup>38</sup> Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Spirit and American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 323.

perceived success in the workplace or better health. In the 1950s male beauty culture served as a way of demonstrating the respectability of the white-collar lifestyle or community. For some, the middle class was a masculine sphere the entire time, not a feminized space in need of revitalizing, and this theme was largely present within male beauty culture.

Part of the reason men turned to dieting was because of the great deal of importance on appearances in the 1950s. Beauty culture works emphasized the necessity of looking good to be taken seriously by strangers. This first appearance impacted everything from social and marital status, to facilitating business deals. Art historian Karal Ann Marling argues that the 1950s was a visual culture, and the superfluous details of an object, like a two-toned paint job, were “visual luxuries.”<sup>39</sup> The male body entered this visual culture quite literally as the male body was more exposed in 1950s culture than any period previously. According to Bordo, 1950s films often adopted the perspective of women starring at bare-chested men. Bordo asserts, “it’s fascinating to me that these mid-fifties movies... so often featured a gorgeous male body as the focus of a female subject’s sexual gaze.”<sup>40</sup> Bordo continues that this phenomenon was unique to the 1950s, disappearing in the more sexually liberal 1960s and reappearing in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 30.

<sup>40</sup> Bordo, *The Male Body*, 145.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 147. For a discussion of the male body in film under Regan see Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Regan Era* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

Bordo's idea that the 1950s was a "chest-fest," was not limited to films.<sup>42</sup> Bare-chested men in cartoons or photographs pervaded many of the popular diet books geared towards men and women. Two of the most popular figures of fitness culture in the 1950s, Elmer Wheeler and Jack LaLanne, placed the male body on full display. Jack LaLanne was a fitness icon, publishing numerous books, starring in a fitness television show, and selling fitness products for well over fifty years.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Wheeler, who targeted male consumers only, LaLanne appealed to both genders. Each photo of LaLanne in *The Jack LaLanne Way to Vibrant Health* pictured him in an abbreviated swimsuit fully exposing the thighs. Such a display served the nature of the book. LaLanne attempted to convince the reader to buy the book and follow his system using his body as a testament to its effectiveness. LaLanne's sculpted physique served as his credentials as an expert the same way Wheeler's weight loss made him an expert. Their bodies proved the legitimacy of their programs; just as the reader's new thin body would grant them status in their personal and professional lives.

LaLanne's body demonstrated to men that they too could lose weight, and, while they might not necessarily look like LaLanne, they could witness a marked improvement in their appearance. LaLanne wrote *Vibrant Health* for men and women, and it would seem reasonable that if his body served as a goal for men that the woman's body in his book would function in the same way, and that both would share similar levels of exposure within conventional white, middle-class norms. However, exactly the opposite is true of the women in *Vibrant Health*. While LaLanne appears virtually naked, the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>43</sup> [www.jacklalanne.com](http://www.jacklalanne.com) (accessed on April 9, 2012) offers an expansive biography of Jack LaLanne, his works and accomplishments.



woman demonstrating the exercises specifically for women is fully clothed. LaLanne wears light colored, revealing, mid-thigh tights to accentuate his tanned skin.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, an all black jumpsuit adorns his female model. Her long pants and short sleeves drastically contrast with the bare minimum LaLanne wore.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore she does not grab the attention of the viewer in the same way LaLanne does. The layout of the pages with LaLanne on them appears less cluttered, and the eye focuses immediately on LaLanne. The woman does not attract the immediate attention of the viewer in the same way as LaLanne. There is more text on her pages, and her all-black jumpsuit blends her into the background. The contrast between the fully clothed woman and the barely clothed LaLanne placed the exposed male body was on full display, which left the male body vulnerable to the judgmental gaze of the public.

Elmer Wheeler's immensely popular book *The Fat Boy's Book* also put the male body on display, but in a slightly different way. The images appeared in the book version of the *Fat Boy's Book*, but the diet also appeared as a series of newspaper articles. *Time* magazine called the series one of the most popular features the *Kansas City Star* had ever run. The series spread to seventy-seven daily newspapers all over the country, and was compiled into book form. In his immensely popular book, Wheeler unveiled the male body to the public. However, he did not only put the Adonis body on display, but the fat body as well. *The Fat Boy's Book* illustrated two contrasting pictures of bare-chested men.<sup>46</sup> The two images depicted two stages of fitness, the before and after. The book was about transformations, and by buying the book the reader assumed he will undergo

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<sup>44</sup> Jack LaLanne, *The Jack LaLanne Way to Vibrant Good Health* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1961), 204-219. For the photographs see Figures 1.1 to 1.3.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-197. See Figures 1.4 and 1.5

<sup>46</sup> "Diets for Men," *Time*, March 26, 1951, 65.

the same transformation as Wheeler. The before pictures in the front of the book, or the beginning of the journey, were meant to represent the reader's starting point. The before picture depicts an overweight man getting a routine checkup from his doctor. The man on the scale, who represented the reader, was an object of ridicule. Both his doctor and his inner temptation (in the picture represented by a devilish, two-legged pig head) ridiculed the overweight man as he stood exposed with his shirt off in nothing but his underwear. The man attempted to save face and dignity by proclaiming his fat was actually muscle, but it is clear to the viewer the man was not only fat, but ashamed.<sup>47</sup>

The fat man was not Bordo's fit object of sexual desire, rather an object to be scorned and ridiculed. The fat man's exposure was meant to be embarrassing and eye-opening, a moment of self-realization through mockery. Elmer opened the book with a long case of self-denial, and only a trip to his doctor made him truly aware of his health and weight problems.<sup>48</sup> The fat man holds the potential to transform into the confident bare-chested object of desire. The after drawing is of a man in swimming trunks strutting around what appears to be the beach. *The Fat Boy's Diet* depicted the skinny and fat man as showing the same amount of skin even though one was wearing swimming trunks and the other underwear. The fat man is looking down and ashamed of his physique, while the skinny man walks with his head held high. The skinny man exudes confidence. The confident man is at the forefront of the picture, encouraging the presumably heterosexual reader to recast his first glance on the bare-chested man rather than the female bathing beauties behind him. He is the object of desire not only from the women behind him, but

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<sup>47</sup> Elmer Wheeler, *The Fat Boy's Book: How Elmer Lost 40 Pounds in 80 Days* (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1950), 16. For these illustrations see Figures 2.1 to 2.4.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-21.

the reader himself. This picture not only identifies the change the reader will go through physically, but the attributes that would be brought on by such a transformation. Both the crowd and the reader admire and ogle the skinny man.<sup>49</sup>

The male body may have been on display, but it was not purely for the purpose of objectification. Men's looks mattered in the 1950s, but as Luciano noted men maintained economic hegemony.<sup>50</sup> Participation in male beauty culture may have helped men's love lives, but that was merely a byproduct and not the purpose for participation. Men participated in male beauty culture for two reasons: health and success. These two categories were not necessarily mutually exclusive, and often intertwined. Certain looks obtained through fitness, grooming, and hygiene helped men advance in the corporate sphere, and dieting attempted to fight the emerging epidemic of obesity in postwar America.<sup>51</sup>

Many of the concerns over postwar prosperity found their way into the discourse over men's health. Luciano notes, "Postwar America was the first society in the history of the world to become so materially advanced that human beings no longer needed to expend much physical effort to survive comfortably."<sup>52</sup> As many commentators noted, luxury and white-collar work produced effeminate men. Even those not critical of white-collar life blamed their weight problems on American prosperity. While these authors emphasized the negative effects of white-collar jobs, specifically the sedentary nature of office work, white-collar works argued that overworking was equally as detrimental to

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>50</sup> Luciano, *Looking Good*, 73.

<sup>51</sup> These diets all claimed they could help men lose weight. Very few had any real impact on weight, but they still promised men's lives would change if they used certain products or followed particular plans.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

men's health. Mr. Burns from *Woman's World* and Hopkins from *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* each suffered health issues from overworking. The key to combating the excess of American prosperity for many, but not all, diet experts was not to reject white-collar lifestyles in favor the producerist ideology but to make white-collar lifestyles healthier. Thus, sales consultant Elmer Wheeler blaming his "width" on "the 'broader' aspects of American prosperity," should not be read as a rejection of white-collar work or viewed as a producerist critique of white-collar men.<sup>53</sup>

Regardless of the reasons for the reasons of the weight problem in the 1950s, obesity was a very real concern in the 1950s. In a Gallup poll, in 1953 over thirty-four million Americans believed they were overweight. The American Medical Association called obesity "America's No. 1 health problem."<sup>54</sup> By 1961 the number had jumped to forty-eight million Americans overweight. The average American restaurant dish, according to *Time* magazine, averaged over three thousand calories per meal, seven hundred more than recommended for the entire day.<sup>55</sup> Americans were left "wallowing in their own grease."<sup>56</sup>

Some of the reactions to the idea of excessive prosperity mirrored the fears expressed by social commentators. The critics' portrayal of white-collar men as

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<sup>53</sup>Elmer Wheeler, *The Fat Boy's Downfall: And How Elmer Learned to Keep it Off* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1952), 153.

<sup>54</sup>"Battle of the Bulge," *Time*, August 10, 1953, 82; "Fat & Unhappy," *Time*, June 23, 1952, 66; "34 Million Fatties," *Time*, March 23, 1953, 69; "Half of the U.S. Youth Called Below Par in Physical Fitness," *New York Times*, April 25, 1962, 36; Gerald Walker, "The Great American Dieting Neurosis," *New York Times*, August 23, 1959, SM12; Jean Mayer, "Exercise Does Keep the Weight Down," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1955, 63; Dorothy Barclay, "Soft or Fitness," *New York Times*, May 13, 1956, 223; Lawrence Galton, "Why We Are Overly Larded," *New York Times*, January 15, 1961, SM 37; Robert Whalen, "We Think Ourselves Into Fatness," *New York Times*, December 3, 1950, SM12. All of these articles proclaim obesity as a grave national problem verging on an epidemic.

<sup>55</sup>"The Fat of the Land," *Time*, January 13, 1961, 48.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

continuously worrying about their status, leading sedentary lifestyles, and working in too comfortable jobs had health ramifications. *Time* asserted that white-collar “subordinates” suffered from higher blood pressure and artery disease than their executive bosses. Arteriosclerosis, “fictionally supposed to be the greatest killer of tycoons,” was more common in executive’s “minions” than actual executives.<sup>57</sup> *Time* magazine continued that a man in his fifties and still a subordinate most likely suffered from “inferiority feelings, a sense of injustice and frustration, whereas the top executive’s very position ensures him against the worst ravages of all these stressful, health-destroying emotions.” Corporations acted upon men making them passive. That passivity caused deep feelings of inferiority, which eventually culminated into serious health problems.<sup>58</sup> By allowing other men to determine their rate of success, thus giving other men control over them, social commentators believed white-collar men’s dependency caused such levels of self-doubt it impacted men’s health.<sup>59</sup> Despite higher levels of responsibility, and presumably stress, executives who controlled their actions supposedly suffered from fewer health problems.<sup>60</sup>

Blue-collar workers and workers who engaged in physical labor were not believed to suffer from heart problems the way white-collar men did. Hard physical labor did not damage a man’s health, but “work involving nervous and mental strains from hurrying, constant deadlines and too few vacations” caused serious health problems.<sup>61</sup> Social commentators believed the self-made man’s work shielded him from fraying nerves

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<sup>57</sup> Arteriosclerosis is the leading cause of heart attacks.

<sup>58</sup> “The Life of Stress,” *Time*, July 28, 1958, 95.

<sup>59</sup> *Esquire’s The Art of Keeping Fit*, 6.

<sup>60</sup> “The Life of Stress,” 95.

<sup>61</sup> *Esquire’s The Art of Keeping Fit*, 8.

because it instilled in him a character lacking in the white-collar worker. Values such as “hard work, thrift and abstemiousness” created a man capable of the risk and rigor required to succeed as an independent business owner. Since critics believed these values remained absent from white-collar life, the self-doubting, anxious, white-collar worker remained vulnerable to health problems.<sup>62</sup> White-collar work caused men to “go to pot.”<sup>63</sup>

The health imperative attached to men’s diet supposedly made them more effective dieters than women.<sup>64</sup> While this health narrative contained elements of the producerist ideology, it by no means confirms a crisis of masculinity. Many of the works acknowledge that some form of prosperity and sedentary lifestyles made men overweight, but they did not view the corporate lifestyle itself incompatible with masculinity. Diets called for men to reduce calories not switch careers. Many diet works sought to demonstrate the white-collar sphere’s compatibility with masculinity, not to highlight these men’s failings or reject the middle-class lifestyle. More importantly, this was not the only ideology shaping male beauty culture. Men not only used dieting and grooming to improve their health, but to succeed in the white-collar world.

Health reasons alone were not enough to catapult dieting to the levels of a “national neurosis.”<sup>65</sup> Even those who dieted for health reasons did not deny that it produced other much welcomed effects. Most importantly, dieting and beauty culture led to financial success. Not only did corporations prize men of “rationality,” “cool nerves,”

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<sup>62</sup> Henry, 44.

<sup>63</sup> *Esquire’s The Art of Keeping Fit*, xi. Pot means out of shape, obese, unhealthy.

<sup>64</sup> This is according to the American Medical Association, “Never Underestimate Diet Power of a Man,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1959, 19.

<sup>65</sup> “Never Underestimate Diet Power of a Man,” 19.

and a strong psyche, but they also needed a “sound body” and “passable teeth.”<sup>66</sup>

Looking a certain way provided a key element of success, and being obese or improperly dressed were cardinal sins in the corporate world. The ideal body image for executives emphasized “leanness.”<sup>67</sup> Overly developed muscles or a protruding gut did not make a man executive material.<sup>68</sup> Journalist and social critic Vance Packard asserted “these are managements that just won’t hire anyone who is not physically attractive, it seems, even though the person is otherwise fully qualified.”<sup>69</sup> Being considered handsome became an attribute in the white-collar world. In Melville Dalton’s study of a corporation, he noticed that one particular employee’s looks gave him prestige. Dalton linked the employee’s well-dressed appearance and overall attractiveness to his work ethic, as if one had caused the other.<sup>70</sup>

Not only did appearance allow for prestige, but it also determined acceptance. Workers who failed to maintain the proper dress or grooming habits found themselves as outsiders in their workplaces.<sup>71</sup> General Electric even listed “neat appearance in a moderate style” as a necessity for a good leader.<sup>72</sup> Many male beauty experts portrayed appearance and style as a necessity for success. Men’s fashion editor and syndicated fashion columnist Bert Bacharach especially emphasized the connection between looking good and success. *Right Dress* gave men advice on what types of suit coats went with what types of pants, which hats to buy for a particular face shape, and on other fashion

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<sup>66</sup> Vance Packard, *The Pyramid Climbers* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co, Inc., 1962), 29.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>70</sup> Melville Dalton, *Men Who Manage: Fusions of Feeling and Theory in Administration* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1959) 23-24.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>72</sup> General Electric, *Supervisor’s Guide to General Electric Job Information* (New York: General Electric Co., 1947), 12.

questions. Bacharach offered three pictures in his male fashion guide that stressed this connection. Being well dressed could get a salesman to see a client over another poorer dressed salesman. Dressing well gave men confidence, and confidence turned into business results.<sup>73</sup> The well-dressed man got “the girl,” “the job,” and “best table.”<sup>74</sup> The clothes, style and grooming reflected character. They told the world whether a man was “sharp, queer, or corny.”<sup>75</sup> The right wardrobe may not have guaranteed success, but without it success was impossible.

The right haircut, manicure, hat, etc. impacted a man’s career.<sup>76</sup> Men’s hair especially transmitted visions of success and power.<sup>77</sup> In the 1950s, the *New York Times* estimated men spent almost as much money and time in barbershops as women did in beauty salons. Barbershops brought in an estimated half a billion dollars a year in 1957. *New York Times* columnist Herbert Mitgang asserted, “[men] are looking in the mirror more often, preening and pampering themselves as seldom before.”<sup>78</sup> Another *New York Times* columnist claimed men seemed “to be more hair-conscious than ever.”<sup>79</sup> Barbers no longer wished to be seen as just barbers, but hair stylists. Men’s haircuts became hairstyles receiving their own names, such as the Elvis, Madison Avenue, Detroit, etc.<sup>80</sup> However, it was important to appear as if this style was effortless. *Esquire* asserted, “your hair should clear your ears, cheeks, and collar at all times... The perfect look

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<sup>73</sup> Bert Bacharach, *Right Dress: Success Through Better Grooming* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1955), 5-11.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-12.

<sup>75</sup> *The New Esquire Etiquette: A Guide to Business, Sports, and Social Conduct*, Editors of *Esquire Magazine* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott Co., 1953), 202. Queer means odd not homosexual.

<sup>76</sup> Bacharach, *Right Dress*, 104-106; *The New Esquire Etiquette*, 221-222.

<sup>77</sup> Although *Esquire*, *Right Dress* and other fashion magazines agreed a man cannot truly be well dressed without a hat.

<sup>78</sup> Herbert Mitgang, “About Men’s Haircuts,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1957, 214.

<sup>79</sup> Gerald Walker, “Baldness Unbare,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1959, SM62.

<sup>80</sup> Mitgang, “About Men’s Haircuts,” 214.



conspires up no visions of barber chairs, present or absent.”<sup>81</sup> Bacharach agreed, arguing, “The appearance, as well as health, of your hair contributes to your grooming--or detracts from it. Men must never want to look as though they need a haircut or as though they just had one.”<sup>82</sup> Hair, like many other elements of male beauty culture, was meant to seem natural and effortless. Men were not supposed to sacrifice or go through an unnecessary ritual to look good. Men needed to care about their appearance to be successful and manly, but appearing to care about their appearance was effeminate.

Failure to meet these standards meant likely social and physical misfortunes. The proper fit and right clothes either propelled a man to success or insured he failed. Three images in *Right Dress* illustrate the importance of maintaining the proper attire. Proper clothes brought with them success in the workplace, in love, and in one’s social life, the three key areas for a middle-class man. The first image features two men competing for a job. One man is wearing a pressed, well-fitting suit that matches with his hair neatly combed. His competitor arrives at the interview slovenly dressed. His hair is unkempt, his collar ruffled, pocket square improperly folded, and his checkered wrinkled jacket does not go with his light-colored wrinkled pants. The well-dressed boss is shaking the hand of the well-dressed man, signifying that the well-dressed man has the job. Meanwhile the slovenly dressed man looks down in embarrassment and shame. No context is given for the picture other than “The well-groomed man gets the job.”<sup>83</sup> The reader is left with only one clear conclusion, that the poorly dressed man did not get the

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<sup>81</sup> *The New Esquire Etiquette*, 222.

<sup>82</sup> Bacharach, *Right Dress*, 104.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. See Figure 3.1.

job because of his clothes, and if men did not consider their appearance this would happen to them.

The first image denotes that a man cannot succeed in business without dressing properly. The image suggests the white-collar world has no place for slobs. The other two images reinforce the idea that only failures do not dress properly, and neither women nor society appreciates a poorly dressed man. The second image is of a man and a woman walking arm-in-arm as a forlorn man watches them in the background. The couple is very well-dressed. The man is wearing a pressed suit with a properly fitting hat, and the woman is dressed very elegantly in white.<sup>84</sup> The man in the background is wearing a wrinkled suit and looks heartbroken as he watches the happy couple walk away from him. As with the earlier picture, there is little information given for this picture other than the “well-groomed man gets the girl.” The implication is she selected one man over the other based solely on their clothes.<sup>85</sup> The same couple in the next picture appears in a busy restaurant. They are being seated by the host, while a shabbily dressed man watches them walk away. The poorly dressed man looks annoyed about the couple being seated ahead of him given the impatient stance and furrowed brow, but “the well-groomed man gets the best table.”<sup>86</sup> Each of these illustrations drives home the point that in order to be successful one must look the part. Proper grooming, dress, and weight all

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<sup>84</sup> The book makes no comment on proper women’s attire, however given that the man she chooses is well-dressed it can be assumed that she is conforming to “appropriate” fashion standards for women.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. See Figure 3.2.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. See Figure 3.3.

gave the one man access to a manly world of love and success, while others faced perpetual rejection.<sup>87</sup>

Male fashion and diet guides predicted personal and social failures if men did not participate in the male beauty culture. Being fat or unkempt brought with it a host of negative attributes that made it difficult to compete in a competitive business world. Anything from unattractive teeth to obesity could prevent a potential sale or job. As one men's fitness book noted, "from a social and business angle, unclean or decayed teeth are an economic liability... [the teeth] may be repulsive to colleagues and business acquaintances or clients."<sup>88</sup> Poor grooming signified poor fitness, and obesity was a potential career killer.<sup>89</sup> Being fat made men slow, both physically and mentally. Fat men both acted and looked old, and they could rarely compete with younger, fitter, men. Elmer Wheeler asserted, "a salesman with a second suitcase is apt to bog down before he arrives in time to make a sizzling sale, only to find that Slim Jim, toting a midget-size briefcase got the order."<sup>90</sup> Elmer also noted that once he put back on the weight he lost from his first book his reflexes slowed, and he could not mentally compete with his skinnier, sardonic doctor. His fatness prevented him from coming back with rebuttals from the doctor's biting jabs.<sup>91</sup> Not only were "fat boys" slower mentally than their skinnier counterparts, they were depressed. Wheeler dismissed the idea of the jolly fat man, stating "He isn't jolly because he is fat... biologically fat boys can't be jolly... in

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<sup>87</sup> Weight is a part of dress, as Bacharach noted "the better you look-the better your clothes will look..." *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph Edmundson, *The Art of Keeping Fit: Modern Methods for Men* (New York: Emerson Books, Inc., 1963), 169.

<sup>89</sup> Edmundson asserts "good hygiene is part of good fitness." *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>90</sup> Wheeler, *Fat Boy's Downfall*, 113-118.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 35. The premise of the second book is that Wheeler gained all the wait back after touring the country given the success of his first book (1-21).

reality they are sad and distraught... no one really loves a fat man--but his mother!"<sup>92</sup>

Only by switching "from fat to trim" could Elmer regain his title of a man of distinction.

Wheeler depicted being fat as lonely and depressing. Being fat was the source of all of Wheeler's problems. Wheeler asserted:

No wonder I was tired at night. No wonder my shoes had bulged up two sizes... No wonder the gals hadn't turned to drink me in for the past five years. No wonder I didn't bother reading the Kinsey Report. No wonder I no longer dreamed of *Esquire's* calendar girls, but double-decker roast beef sandwiches instead.<sup>93</sup>

Overeating and being overweight caused Wheeler to be fatigued, lack energy, be uncomfortable, self-conscious, and feel unattractive. Extra "suet" became a catch-all for a myriad of social problems, including everything from "depression psychosis" to the "fits," even decreased sex drive.<sup>94</sup> Too much "suet" prevented men from living fulfilling lives the way they wanted. This idea was not limited the diet books, but pervaded popular culture as well. The main character of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman, comments on how his weight impacted his business. Loman tells his wife, "I'm fat. I'm very foolish to look at Linda...I happened to be calling F.H. Stewart, and a salesman I know, as I was going to see the buyer, I heard him say something about a walrus... they laugh at me."<sup>95</sup> Both Wheeler and Willy Loman found out that the corporate sphere was a thin man's world. Corporations wanted men who looked like they could do business anywhere. Business communications in the 1950s "spill over into clubs, breakfast, meetings, and conventions," and a man needed an appearance that could

<sup>92</sup> Wheeler, *The Fat Boy's Book*, i.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. One of Wheeler's "Poor Elmer's Almanac" phrases stated "Wimmen[sic] don't get chatty with men who are fatty (36)."

<sup>94</sup> Wheeler, *Fat Boy's Downfall*, 54-74. Suet is Wheeler's term for fat. Decreased "sexual vigor" also appears in Edmundson, *The Art of Keeping Fit*, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, 37.

work in any situation.<sup>96</sup> A man carrying around a “second suitcase” was not the kind of man corporations wanted.

To achieve this ideal type, and to avoid the nasty consequences of dreaded fatness, men took to dieting and sometimes exercise. Dieting remained essential in all conceptions of losing weight, but the merits of exercising were contested. Some believed exercising was a waste of time or even detrimental to losing weight. Others believed in the merits of exercising, but their conception of exercising differed from a modern conception of a fitness plan. Unlike today’s exercise plans which often require the use of equipment or at least intense exercise, the 1950s exercise plans often required minimal physical interaction. Intense weight lifting and running were not a part of the 1950s fitness ethos. These programs were meant to be done by busy men whose days were filled with various obligations whether that was work or family. Quick stretches in the morning and breathing exercises during the day was all most workouts required. Even fitness guru Jack LaLanne’s plan did not require any gym time, and it called for napping as part of the regiment.<sup>97</sup> A *New York Times* article conflated “tennis, squash, golf, swimming, skin-diving, skiing, and badminton” as all equivalent forms of exercise to burn calories.<sup>98</sup> Fitness expert Joseph Edmundson called for only twenty minutes of exercise a day maximum, and shunned ideas of a “Spartan lifestyle.”<sup>99</sup> In a speech directly addressing businessmen, Director of Health and Education at George Williams College, Dr. Arthur Steinhaus, suggested little more than golf and a series of stretches that could be done at a desk or at home as all the exercise one needed. Steinhaus

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<sup>96</sup> Packard, *The Pyramid Climbers*, 108.

<sup>97</sup> LaLanne, *The Jack LaLanne Way*, 36, 51.

<sup>98</sup> Curtis Mitchell, “Tennis, Everyone? Or Swimming, Or?” *New York Times*, April 23, 1961, 269.

<sup>99</sup> Edmundson, *The New Art of Keeping Fit*, 54, 167.

emphasized the ease and brevity of his workout plan, asserting that men needed little more than a few seconds of quick stretching to be healthy.<sup>100</sup> The exercise programs hardly channeled any form of lost masculinity. They required little sacrifice, and even less effort. Even a textbook designed to appeal to college freshmen did not call for demanding exercises, but a way to make movements more efficient to conserve energy.<sup>101</sup> These were exercises to make the middle-class lifestyle moderately healthier and slightly more active. Rather than spawning from a crisis of masculinity, these exercises sought to bolster men's white-collar identity. If men did feel inadequate or weak, it was because they let themselves go, not because of the corporate structure. Just as men could succeed or fail at General Electric based on their own ability, men were fat or skinny because of their choices. Men choose between being men of distinction or fat boys.

Many diet experts in the 1950s agreed that the best exercise was to “push away from the table.”<sup>102</sup> Dieting, diet products, and weight loss supplements were incredibly popular in the 1950s. Jack LaLanne lamented, “ten million Americans are duped out of five-hundred million dollars annually by nutrition quacks and health faddists.”<sup>103</sup> Entirely new industries emerged as a result of the dieting craze. Low-calorie soft drinks sold only fifty-thousand cases in 1952, but by 1955 over fifteen-million cases were sold.<sup>104</sup> In 1956, skim milk sold at a rate twenty-one percent faster than it did in 1951, and Brooklyn's Detecto Scales and Chicago's Borg-Erickson Corporation sold over two-

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<sup>100</sup> Dr. Arthur H. Steinhaus, “How Much and What Kind of Physical Exercise Should a Business Man Take?,” speech delivered at the Economic Club of Detroit, Michigan, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, February 13, 1956, 408-410.

<sup>101</sup> Eleanor Metheny, *Body Dynamics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952), vi-6.

<sup>102</sup> Steinhaus, “How Much and What Kind,” 411.

<sup>103</sup> LaLanne, *The Jack LaLanne Way*, vii.

<sup>104</sup> “Big Bulge in Profits,” *Newsweek*, July 23, 1956, 61.

and-half-million scales.<sup>105</sup> The labels of “low-calorie” and “nonfattening” became hallmarks of advertising campaigns. Over eighty different canners sold sixty different low-calorie products including everything from peanut butter to salad dressing. According to *Time* magazine over eighty percent of supermarkets had a section specifically for dieters which featured low calorie food.<sup>106</sup> *New York Times* columnist Gerald Walker commented on the “great dieting neurosis,” stating, “reducing has become a parlor game and almost everybody is playing to lose. In an era of compulsive calorie-counting the dieting public seems gullibly eager to try any scheme, however zany...”<sup>107</sup> Women still dieted more than men in the 1950s, but it was clear that reducing craze caught on with both men and women. Millions of men tried various pills, potions, and schemes to lose weight. As with exercise men were not seeking a Spartan life, but a way to lose weight, or at least try to lose weight, with minimal disruptions to their daily routines.

Ease and moderate changes marked the diets of the 1950s. Some products did not even require any change for men to lose weight. Pills, exercise machines, and fad diets proliferated in the 1950s.<sup>108</sup> Dieting supplements hit the market in droves and flooded television advertising. The Federal Trade Commission stepped in and barred one diet product from advertising on national airwaves, claiming its advertisements were “false and misleading.”<sup>109</sup> The drug Regimen claimed users could “lose six pounds in three

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> “Battle of the Bulge,” 82.

<sup>107</sup> Gerald Walker, “The Great American Dieting Neurosis,” *New York Times*, August 08, 1959, SM12.

<sup>108</sup> Lucanio, *Looking Good*, 58-62. Lucanio details many of the exercise machines available to men such as the Tone-O-Matic or the Relaxacisor.

<sup>109</sup> “Diet for Commercials,” *Time*, November 23, 1959, 65.

days-ten pounds in a week--or your money back!”<sup>110</sup> Before the FTC pulled Regimen the company spent \$1.5 million on television advertising alone, and over half a million dollars on newspaper and magazine advertising in 1958.<sup>111</sup> While the FTC targeted Regimen, the company was not alone in its tactics.

Magic formulas and methods all promised results. Albacal was a dieting supplement which served to replace all of the day’s nutrition in a nine-hundred calorie powder. The advertisement claimed the product was a “scientifically prepared food formula,” which “has been proved effective in medical tests” to help men and women to lose weight.<sup>112</sup> Albacal marketed itself as the “most convenient low-calory [sic] food of its kind on the Market. You can easily prepare it for lunch at home or at work... No bother of any kind. Takes only a few seconds to prepare your entire meal. Think of all the time you can save!”<sup>113</sup> Most importantly, Albacal was not just for women. The advertisement specifically included men. The advertisement included a weight and height chart for both men and women, and when explaining how overweight Americans were it listed men first.<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps the most extreme example of combining minimal effort with losing weight was the Slumberslim method. Slumberslim promised a way for men and women to “stop torturing” themselves.<sup>115</sup> The “medically” endorsed diet promised to be the “fat melter plan that works while you sleep... while you relax- and while you take it

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* The breakdown for advertising spending in the three mediums: \$1.5 million for T.V., \$443,028 newspapers, \$189,837 magazines.

<sup>112</sup> “Display Ad 40,” *New York Times*, September 15, 1960, 41.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> “Display Ad 172,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1963, 77.



easy...”<sup>116</sup> The advertisement offered no explanation of how the plan actually worked, rather it just lumped together pseudoscientific sounding phrases such as “oxidize the fat,” or having the fat “burn up.”<sup>117</sup> The only clear claim, besides losing weight, was how easy the product made weight loss. The advertisement made numerous claims such as, “without a single hungry moment,” “without starvation,” “without even giving up most food you want to eat!”<sup>118</sup> Dieting was not meant to be difficult. Ease was essential, and sacrifice was overrated. These diets were incapable of restoring men’s inner-directedness as some historians claimed. The diets emphasized none of the qualities prized by social commentators, such as discipline or self-control. Rather they served as a way for men to lose weight without any disruptions to their daily lives.

Ease remained an important part of male beauty culture even outside of the magic pills and powders. Diets often claimed the same thing diet pills did, that they were painless and required a minimal to moderate change in lifestyle. *The Fat Boy’s Book* did not make men give up anything, just eating smaller portions.<sup>119</sup> Other diets, such as The Drinking Man’s Diet, called for a reduction in carbohydrates. However, in reducing carbohydrates men could drink as much liquor as they wanted. According to Robert Wernick, author of the diet, losing weight was about counting carbohydrates, not calories, and alcohol did not contain any carbohydrates. The diet allowed for men to “keep pleasantly high without getting unpleasantly plump.”<sup>120</sup> The methods of The Drinking Man’s diet may have been unusual, but the theme was the same as the numerous other

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

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>119</sup> Wheeler, *The Fat Boy’s Book*, 78. The key was to only eat 4500 calories in a 3 day period.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Wernick, “I Wrote ‘The Drinking Man’s Diet,’” *Saturday Evening Post* May 5, 1965, 84-85. According to the author the diet sold over two-hundred-thousand copies and worked its way into a national discourse with it being referenced in *Time* and by Johnny Carson.

diet books in the 1950s. Moderate to minimum changes were all that was weight loss required. No Spartan lifestyles, no one meal a day (unless of course one was taking the filling supplement Albacal), and little to do with restoring masculinity. Male beauty culture, and the products that make that culture possible, sought to maintain white-collar men's masculinity. These were not diets of the inner-directed man, and it is difficult to imagine them having the approval of any of the social commentators. Male beauty culture was an attempt to avoid a strenuous life, not embrace it. Dieting while sleeping or drinking heavily was hardly a way to channel the producerist manhood ideal.

Male beauty culture in the 1950s reflected more than simply a response to a perceived crisis of masculinity or international tensions. It emerged in a specific period of two competing ideas of manhood. Male beauty culture reflected both elements of the debate over what it meant to be a man in the 1950s. The fear over postwar prosperity infiltrated the beauty discourse. Prosperity became one of the main reasons many believed men were overweight. However, the solution to the obesity problem was not a rejection of prosperity, but a slight modification of the prosperous lifestyle. In many ways fitness culture perpetuated the white-collar ideal over the self-made man. Beauty culture offered men avenues to advance their careers and their social lives. Men turned their physical capital into social capital.<sup>121</sup> Male vanity became an extension of the white-collar lifestyle. It attempted to curb the excesses of the middle-class prosperity by offering tangible results that could benefit men in their professions. Furthermore, it

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<sup>121</sup> Chris Shilling, "Educating the Body: Physical Capital and the Production of Social Inequalities," *Sociology* 25, no. 4 (1991): 654-656. Physical capital implies the work actually done by the body, whereas social capital is the creation of relationships which allow for career advancement. For example, a middle-class man can join a fitness club where he would socialize with other men of his class or higher. He is turning fitness into a social experience that could ultimately benefit his career. Access to these informal power sites helps preserve class, racial, and gender privileges because often it is only men of a certain status and race that have access to these places.

emphasized that individuality and white-collar lifestyles were compatible since men took responsibility for transforming their own bodies. Society and corporations may have valued a leaner male body, but men took it upon themselves to enact the changes. Dieting supposedly gave men real world benefits such as more energy and quicker mental abilities, which allowed men to fulfill masculine gender norms. Male vanity sought to improve white-collar men's lives and to elevate the white-collar lifestyle. By demonstrating that the middle-class prosperity could lead to an alternative besides out of shape and flabby men, fitness culture sought to demonstrate that the white-collar world was a manly world after all.

## Conclusion

### Summary and Implications for Future Research

English professor Bryce Traister ends his assessment of several early men's studies works by noting "...the by now foregone conclusion that masculinity is always constructed, contingent, and at crisis."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, historians and other scholars, until recently, continually asserted that masculinity is always in crisis. The crisis of masculinity becomes a generic catchall explanation for the history of masculinity. However, such a view is limiting and runs the risk of being formulaic. If masculinity is always in crisis no matter what the period, then there seems little necessity for historical inquiry. By strictly adhering to the idea of masculinity being in crisis, historians run the risk of starting with the answer. The history of masculinity is in danger of becoming a field of circular logic and self-fulfilling prophecies.

Fortunately for the field of men's studies, scholars are slowly moving away from the idea of a crisis of masculinity, the two most notable being James Gilbert's *Men in the Middle* and Lorri Glover's *Southern Sons*.<sup>2</sup> This study attempts to further that process. In the 1950s some perceived a crisis of masculinity, but not everyone agreed. Until recently, scholarship has overrepresented those actors who believed masculinity was in crisis in the 1950s. Postwar social commentators argued masculinity was in steep decline because of the rise of white-collar workers. Commentators argued with a fury that corporations and suburbs made middle-class men passive and conformists. They overwhelmingly called for a return to a producer-based masculinity, which fetishized

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<sup>1</sup> Bryce Traister, "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies," *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (June, 2000), 299.

<sup>2</sup> James Gilbert's *Men in the Middle* and Lorri Glover's *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007).

small business owners and farmers. However, commentators were not the only group who opined on postwar masculinity. Social commentators believed masculinity was in crisis, but they reflected only one discourse on postwar masculinity. Their claims may have been witty, well-articulated, and entertaining to read, but they still only reflected one group's ideology.

Scholars may have focused their attention on the social commentators, but other groups laid claims to a different version of masculinity. Business leaders championed white-collar lifestyles. They echoed Sloan Wilson's sentiments in finding the heroism in everyday life.<sup>3</sup> They showed that white-collar work did not create passive and effeminate men, but men that exhibited rationality, leadership, and that valued individuality. White-collar men were not objects of ridicule or scorn, but were celebrated for their importance to the success of the company. Corporate work did take place in groups and the companies were organized hierarchically, but corporate leaders did not believe the corporate structure or nature of white-collar work inherently emasculated men. White-collar leaders viewed themselves as inner-directed and as inheritors of previous generations' masculinity. For them there was not a crisis, and they offered an alternative ideal to which men could aspire. Men in the 1950s did not need to choose between masculinity and corporate work, because according to business leaders men could have both. The manager was a symbol of progress and rationality, not femininity. Corporations appropriated the language of social commentators, and applied it to their employees. While it is unlike corporations would have depicted their employees as effeminate, they portrayed their employees in a language of inner-directedness.

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<sup>3</sup> Balakian, "Talk with Mr. Wilson," BR17.

Corporations and business leaders consciously engaged with social commentators' critiques, and intentionally portrayed white-collar men as masculine. The language used by business leaders attempted to solidify white-collar men's identity in a period where their status in American culture was under attack by an influential group of intellectuals and popular culture.

These two cultural discourses profoundly impacted American men. Postwar emergence of the white-collar man challenged the producerist mentality of masculinity. This caused a perceived crisis of masculinity and a defense of the white-collar worker. Male beauty culture emerged containing elements of both discourses. Fears of postwar luxuries sparked a health craze. This dovetailed with men's attempts to gain advantages and succeed in increasingly competitive corporate jobs. Luxuries may have been a source of tension for some, but male beauty culture was not a rejection of middle-class luxury or white-collar work's sedentary nature. Men were supposed to engage in this vanity with minimal disruptions to their daily lives. With minimal effort they expected tangible gains. Men did not participate just to lose weight or regain their masculinity, although surely some did for those reasons. Men participated in this beauty culture because it served their careers without requiring sacrifice. If business leaders attempted to demonstrate the heroics of everyday life, then beauty culture attempted to preserve the hero with minimal inconvenience to his adventure. A crisis of masculinity cannot be found either within the corporate sphere or male vanity. Neither called for men to reject their middle-class lifestyles, as social commentators did, nor did business leaders or male beauty culture seek to drastically change men.

Social commentators are important in understanding masculinity in the 1950s, but their importance has been overly exaggerated. They did not speak for all men, and they were not the only group offering a version of masculinity. Other public discourses did not view masculinity in crisis. The origins of male beauty culture did not emerge solely from a crisis of masculinity. It was not an attempt to purchase inner-directedness or sacrifice to regain a masculinity stolen by large corporations. Male beauty culture should be placed within the context of these two discourses, and the rhetoric used by male beauty culture reflected more of the business leaders' ideas than the social commentators. As postwar scholars have noted, the emphasis on the body emerged out of social, political, and cultural upheaval. Rather than masculinity being in crisis, fitness and corporate culture emphasized the masculine nature of men's new roles in order to preserve white, middle-class men's place atop a changing social order.

While the purpose of this study was to analyze the role of male beauty culture in defining 1950s masculinity, its larger goal was to challenge the standard narrative of masculine studies. By emphasizing the business leaders and beauty culture the thesis sought to complicate the scholarly and historical conception of masculinity as being in perpetual crisis. Instead of accepting the "foregone conclusion" that masculinity was in crisis, it showed an alternative version of masculinity whose proponents viewed their masculinity as quite stable. By rejecting the idea of the crisis of masculinity, men's bosses and bodies attempted to legitimize their new positions.

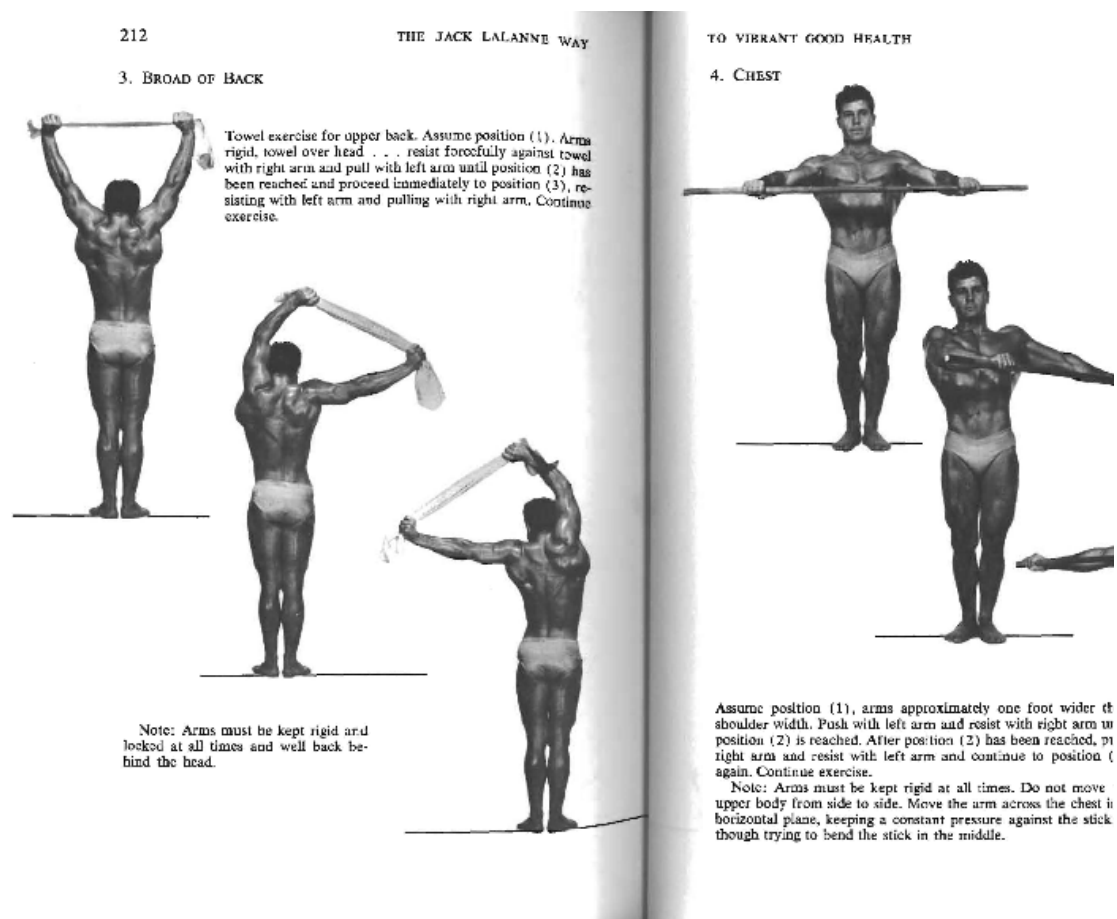
The 1950s represented a crossroads for masculinity. As men embarked on new careers, homes, and roles in the family, what it meant to be a man remained open for negotiation. However, it became increasingly clear that suburbanization and corporate

capitalism marked the path for the future of middle-class men, not producerism. Fitness culture and business leaders insured this new society remained male dominated as they legitimized men's new positions.

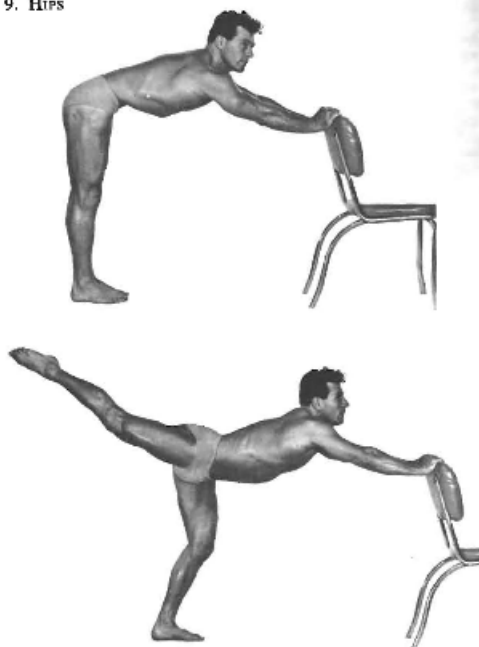


## Appendix A

## Pictures

Figure 1.1 Jack LaLanne, *The Jack LaLanne Way*, 212-213.

## 9. HIPS



Assume position (1), legs and arms rigid. Lift leg and head to position (2). Immediately return to position (1) until desired number of reps. have been reached and continue to opposite leg and perform the exercise in the same manner as you did for the other side.

Note: Keep leg that is being lifted rigid throughout the exercise . . . also keep the arms rigid. The leg that you are standing on may be bent slightly.

## 10. STOMACH



Assume position (1), legs rigid . . . head up . . . pull knees i chest, tucking up into a tight ball, position (2). Proceed to position (1) and continue exercise until desired number of reps. h been reached.

Note: The feet and legs should not touch the floor at any ti throughout this movement. The chin must be kept on the ches all times throughout the exercise.

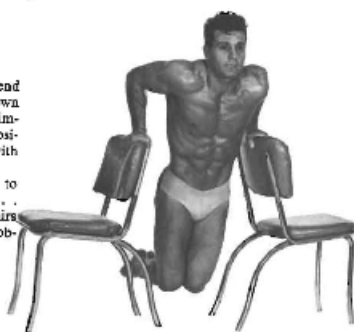
Figure 1.2 Jack LaLanne, *The Jack LaLanne Way*, 218-219

## 5. CHEST-TRICEPS



Assume position (1). Bend arms and lower body down to position (2) and immediately return to position (1). Continue with exercise.

Note: Bend knees to keep feet off floor . . . dip down between chairs as low as possible to obtain full stretch.



## 6. ARMS-TRICEPS



Assume position (1). Bend arms, keeping legs rigid, and lower position (2). After position (2) has been reached, return immediately to position (1). Continue exercise.

Note: Keep legs rigid at all times throughout the exercise a body as far as possible in position (2). Place chairs a few inches apart.

Figure 1.3 Jack LaLanne, *The Jack LaLanne Way*, 204-205.

## 2. HIPS

I like to refer to this as "the old back porch" which needs so much attention. You will use that straight chair for this one.

Assume Position 1, legs and arms rigid. Lift leg and head to Position 2. Return immediately to Position 1 and continue exercise for desired number of repetitions. Continue with other leg and perform the exercise in the same manner. Note: Keep the leg you're lifting rigid throughout the exercise; also the arms. The leg you're standing on may be bent slightly.



## 3. WAISTLINE



Assume Position 1, legs rigid, head up. Pull knees into chest, tucking up into a tight ball as in Position 2 and continue exercise for desired number of repetitions. Note: Feet and legs should not touch the floor at any time throughout this movement. The chin must be kept on the chest at all times.



## 4. ANKLES

We need no illustration to describe this exercise, which I antee to reduce bulky ankles. Sit on the straight chair (or a sofa while you're watching television). Right leg rigid, describe a circle with your foot. Keeping your foot rigid, do the foot circle in a clockwise motion. Start with circles of the ankle. Then rest and raise your left leg. Do the same circle with your left foot, moving counter-clockwise. Ten turns, then reverse; clockwise for the left foot and counter-clockwise for the right. You should work up to 25 repetitions per set and really trim down your ankles.

Figure 1.4 Jack LaLanne, *The Jack LaLanne Way*, 194-195.

## 7. TO OFFSET HIGH HEELS

American women constantly are telling me their legs and feet suffer from the hours they spend on high heels. (Of course they do since high heels tend to foreshorten the muscles in the backs of the legs and, I suspect, the pelvis is constantly tilted off shape.) One exercise to correct this would be to walk around the house as much as possible in stocking feet and on your heels. The exercise I prescribe in your book requires one chair and the book itself.



Lower leg. Assume Position 1. Rise on toes until Position 2 has been reached, then proceed back to Position 1. Continue exercise for desired number of repetitions and continue to work on opposite leg in the same manner. Note: Keep leg rigid at all times, body well over back of the chair. Be sure your heel is dropped until it touches the floor as in Position 1. Rise as high as possible in Position 2.

Figure 1.5 Jack LaLanne, *The Jack LaLanne Way*, 197.



Figure 2.1 Elmer Wheeler, *The Fat Boy's Book*, 12.

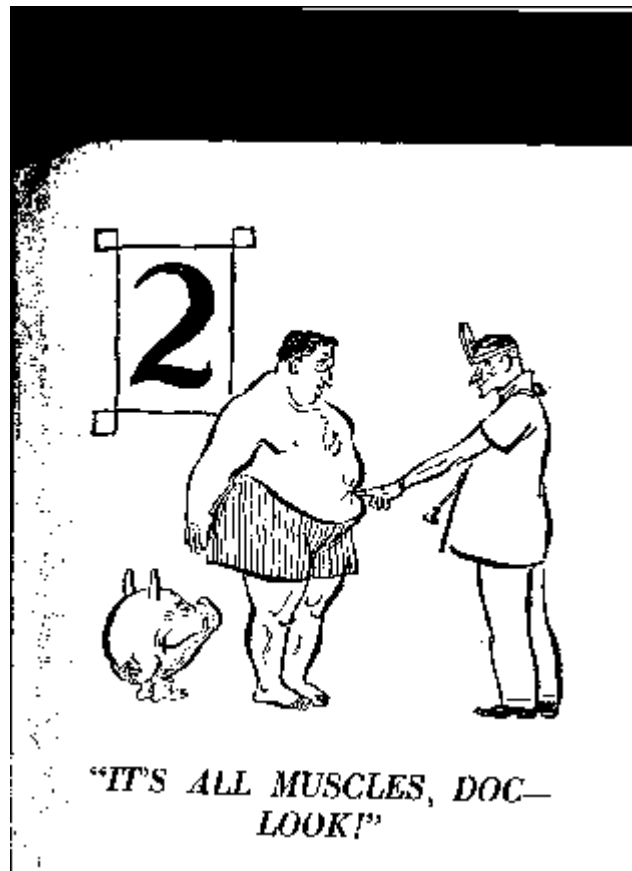


Figure 2.2 Elmer Wheeler, *The Fat Boy's Book*, 16.

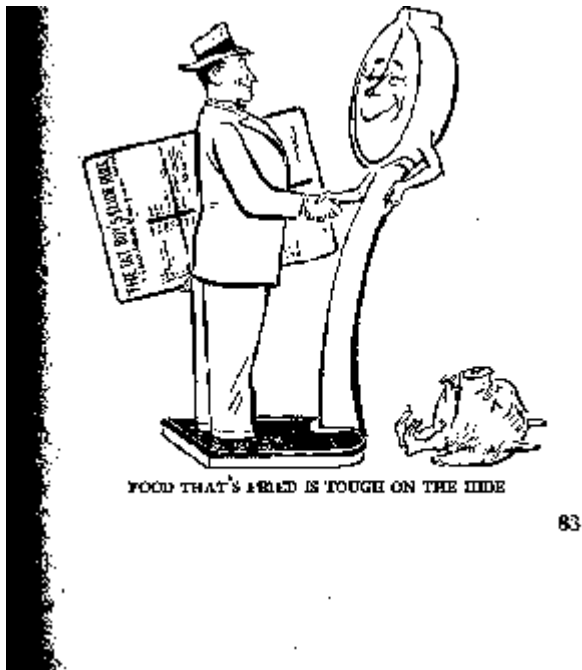


Figure 2.3 Elmer Wheeler, *The Fat Boy's Book*, 83.





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Figure 2.4 Elmer Wheeler, *The Fat Boy's Book*, 161.

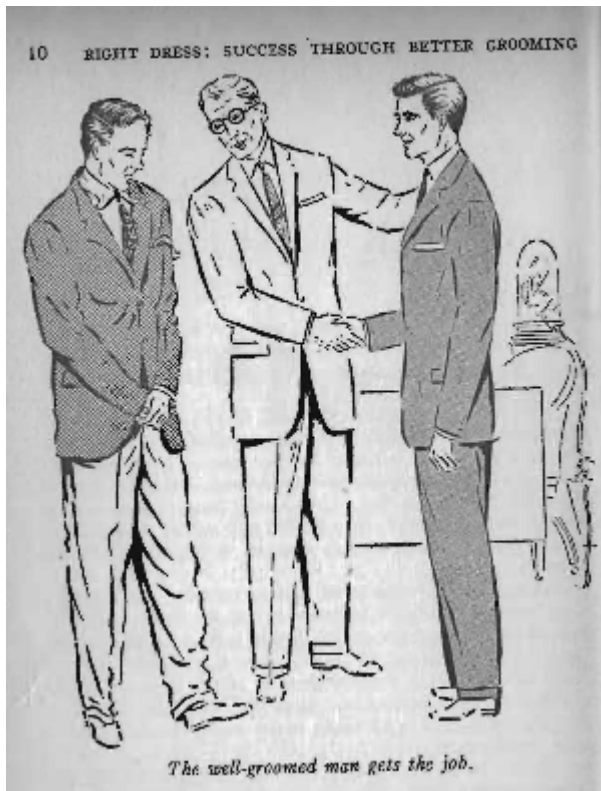


Figure 3.1 Bert Bacharach, *Right Dress*, 10.

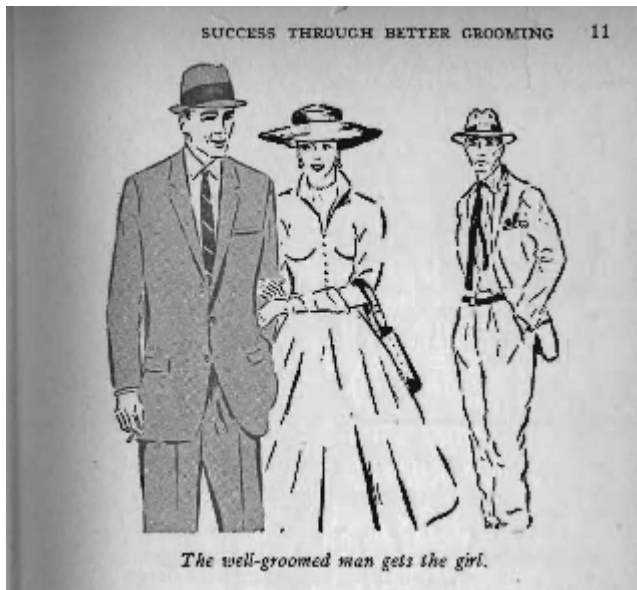


Figure 3.2 Bert Bacharach, *Right Dress*, 11

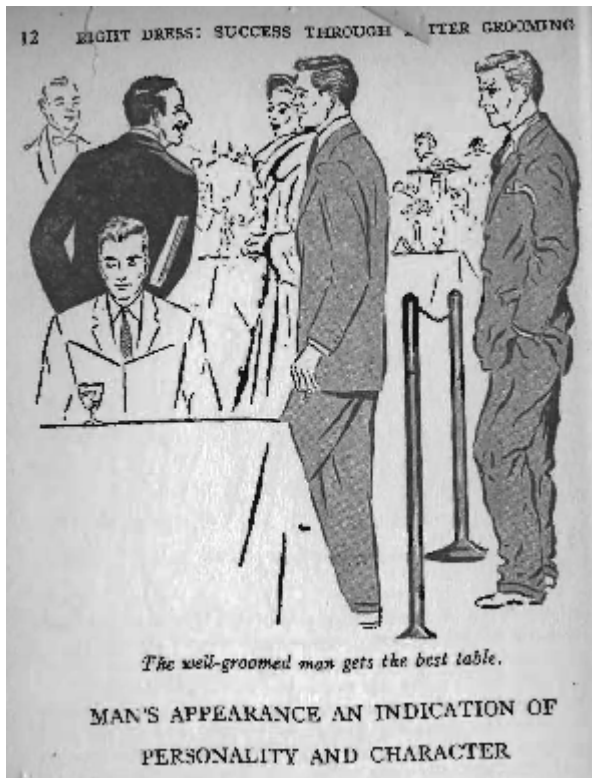


Figure 3.3 Bert Bacharach, *Right Dress*, 12.

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