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Suited for Success? Suits, Status and Hybrid Masculinity

This article analyzes the sartorial biographies of four Canadian men to explore how the suit is understood and embodied in everyday life. Each of these men varied in their subject positions—body shape, ethnicity, age and gender identity—which allowed us to look at the influence of men's intersectional identities on their relationship with their suits. The men in our research all understood the suit according to its most common representation in popular culture: a symbol of hegemonic masculinity. While they wore the suit to embody hegemonic masculine configurations of practice—power, status and rationality—most of these men were simultaneously marginalized by the gender hierarchy. We explain this disjuncture by using the concept of hybrid masculinity and illustrate that changes in the style of hegemonic masculinity leave its substance intact. Our findings expand thinking about hybrid masculinity by revealing the ways subordinated masculinities appropriate and reinforce hegemonic masculinity.

Keywords: hybrid masculinity, embodiment, menswear, suits, sartorial biographies

Introduction

Sociologist Tim Edwards (2011) tells us that "the suit is … the very essence of men's fashion and, indeed, of masculinity" (53). But what makes the suit masculine? And, moreover, what *kinds* of masculinities are expressed through the suit? Researchers on masculinity have tended to ignore clothing in their work, despite that fact that dress is one of the most immediate ways in which people read and express gender identity (Kaiser 2012). Fashion scholars have examined the shifting designs, practices and semiotics of suits at various historical and cultural moments. But they have often simply assumed that suits are masculine, without addressing how men's lived experiences of wearing them supports, challenges and nuances their claim. Research into the bodies that don suits is vital because dress, as Joanne Entwistle (2000) theorizes, is an embodied practice: it "operates on a phenomenal, moving body … that involves individual actions of attending to the body" (Entwistle 2000, 10-11). In this article, we explore the relationship between masculinity and suits through men's embodied experiences. We use the concept of embodiment to refer to how people's experiences of their body form the basis for their sense of self (Hewson 2013; Turner 1996). Specifically, we ask: what do men's embodied experiences of buying, choosing and wearing suits reveal about masculinity?

To answer this question, we employed a sartorial biography methodology. Sartorial biographies combine life histories and object interviews to explore how clothing materializes identity (Woodward 2015, 1). Entering the wardrobes of four men, we examined their suits and interviewed them about these garments. This approach allowed us to uncover the ways in which the materiality of men's suits was intertwined with their embodied experiences of masculinity. What results is a rich description of the suit as material culture artefact through which overlapping subject positions are negotiated by the four men in our sartorial biographies. Our

research advances thinking about the emergence and consequences of contemporary changes in masculinities. These transformations in masculinities, according to Tristan Bridges and C.J. Pascoe (2014), can be explained through the concept of hybrid masculinities. Masculinity scholars use this concept to describe men's selective incorporation of identity elements that have been associated with marginalized and subordinated masculinities and femininities. The way that our research participants' subject positions were negotiated through use of the suit, which is often understood as a symbol of hegemonic masculinity, provides unique insights into the workings of hybrid masculinity. By uncovering men's embodied experiences, we argue that suits not only remain a symbol of hegemonic masculinity but also that their embodiment further reinforces gender inequalities.

We follow Edwards' (2011) definition of a suit as an outfit composed of jacket and trousers made from the same materials. It was first worn in 17th century England by King Charles II, and became the garb of country life for the 18th century gentry. Its codification into the uniform of business during the 1800s reflected a relaxation of British sartorial conventions (Shannon 2006). By the end of the 19th century, the two-piece combination of jacket and trousers was standard dress for men attending business and evening events in the West. It was in this period that the suit trickled-down to the middle-class. In comparison to the ornate and impractical clothes that had previously been worn by the aristocracy, the suit was a classless alternative promising democracy and rationality (Hollander 1994; Zelinsky 2004). By the mid-20th century suits had trickled down to the working-class as well. The wearing of suits had become a social norm, and large-scale mass-production of suits had made them more affordable (Edwards 1997; Zelinsky 2004). In Britain, working-class soldiers returning from both World Wars were issued with 'demob' suits, while more stylised suits were also an important part of the

dress of post-war working-class youth subcultures such as the Teddy Boys, Mods and Skinheads (Breward 2002; Hebdige 1979). In the United States, the mass affluence of the post-war period and the expansion of post-secondary education made the Ivy Look, with its signature sack suits, the *de-facto* uniform of the American male (Mears 2012). In 1950s America, suits were so ubiquitous that they had come to symbolise mass conformity, as famously exemplified by Sloan Wilson's 1955 novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and the 1956 film of the same name. The relaxation of sartorial codes since the 1960s has meant that suits are worn less often today; however, suits remain common attire for business and those who do not wear suits for work will often still have a suit for formal occasions such as weddings and funerals (Zelinsky 2004).

Suits and Masculinities

As suits have changed over time, so too have cultural notions of masculinity. While there are many forms of masculinity, we use the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' in this article to refer to the most culturally-exalted, dominant configuration of gender practice that justified dominance and inequality (Connell 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is expressed through various discourses such as appearances (e.g., fit bodies), affects (e.g., rational), sexuality (e.g., heterosexual) and behaviours (e.g., assertive (Pringle 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is the benchmark against which all others forms of masculinity are judged—for example the gender practice of gay men—and are subsequently subordinated. This form of masculinity is also hegemonic in the Gramscian sense, for it is constantly reconfiguring itself, co-opting elements of other forms of gender practice to remain dominant (Connell 2005). Connell (1995; 2005) recognises that masculinity is tied up with a range of subject positions such as race, class and sexuality. Masculinity is therefore not singular but multiple, not static but in motion. In certain contexts, some male subject positions become more pronounced whereas in other contexts those

same aspects of identity fade into the background. To capture the dynamic nature of men's gendered identities, scholars speaks of masculinities as opposed to masculinity (Beynon 2002).

Sartorial practices express varying forms of masculinity and conformity to particular sartorial codes is one way men express hegemonic masculinity (Ugolini 2007). With its connotations of rationality and the renunciation of femininity, suits are often understood as emblematic of dominant masculine ideals. The cut of suits masks and de-sexualizes the male physique (Collier 1998) while emphasizing the wearer's mind over their body (Reynaud 1983). Many cuts of suits also widen the wearer's shoulders to make them appear broader, while the v-shaped opening of the jacket draws attention to the chest, making the wearer seem more powerful and commanding (Edwards 2011). Accordingly, the form and cut of suits reinforces socially-constructed notions of men as rational and powerful disembodied subjects (Petersen 1998). The wearers of suits become anonymous and ubiquitous: the image of impersonal authority (Thornton 1996). The notion that suits are an archetype of masculinity can be traced back to Flügel (1930). He famously argued that suits represented a movement in men's clothing away from flamboyance and individuality to modesty and uniformity, a 'great masculine renunciation' of fashion in favour of universal brotherhood at the end of the 18th century.

Although suits are a symbol of hegemonic masculinity, there is nothing essentially masculine about suits. Suits are perhaps seen as symbolic of patriarchy because they form the international uniform of government and business (Flicker 2013). As a result of declining formality in dress even in office environments (Janus, Kaiser and Gray 1999), suits have come to be associated with the money and power of those in the high-status occupations where suits are still required by dress norms (Edwards 2011). Yet while suits might seem to represent power and high social status, they sometimes simply represent formality, for the demands of formal

occasions such as weddings and funerals mean that ownership of a suit is not strictly determined by social class (Edwards 2011; Zelinsky 2004). They have also been symbols of various marginalised masculinities. In the United States, variations on the suit have been an important part of African-American culture, from those worn by the freed slaves of the antebellum South (Foster 1997) and black dandies of the 19th and 20th century (Miller 2009), through to the jazz musicians of the 1960s (Mears 2012). Similarly, in the middle of the 20th century, Latin-American "pachucos" wore zoot suits to gain visibility (Cosgrove 1984). These various ways in which suits have been worn demonstrate the complex and multi-faceted nature of the suit. As such, what we are really looking at in this article is not the singular 'suit' but its plural form - 'suits'.

Embodied Suits

The examples above show how when suits are worn by bodies that do not fit the configurations of hegemonic masculinity, they take on new meanings through the interaction between the body, cloth and culture. This dynamic highlights Joanne Entwistle's (2000) theory of dress as a "situated bodily practice" (11). According to Entwistle, the human body meets the social world through the material culture of clothes. Dressing is an intimate act that affects how people feel in their bodies. Dress is also central to how the body is expressed in social settings, and the ways in which people dress their bodies are shaped by social norms. While suits are designed for particular bodies, the body is often absent in analyses of suits. Scholarship on suits has tended to be historical (e.g., Kuchta 2002) or theoretical (Edwards 1997; 2011) in nature, or it has focused on workplace norms (e.g., Kiddie 2009; Peluchette, Karl and Rust 2006, Peluchette and Karl 2007) and impression management (e.g., Forsythe 1990; Goudge and Littrell 1989). As is the case with most everyday clothing (Buckley and Clark 2012), there is little

research on suits as an embodied form of everyday dress. This is a troubling oversight, for as Frith and Gleeson (2004) and Barry and Martin (2016a) have shown, men's dress practices are shaped by body ideals, with men seeking to highlight or hide their body parts depending on whether they meet these ideals.

There are, however, a few studies that do look at how men experience their suits (e.g., Janus, Kaiser and Gray 1999; Kaiser, Freeman and Chandler 1993), and the recent work by Erynn Masi de Casanova (2015) warrants discussion here. In her book *Buttoned Up*, Casanova interviews 71 white-collar men about their dress practices choices for work. She argues that white-collar men strategically embrace conformity in their workplace clothing because it enables them to maintain their male privilege. As they do so, however, the trend towards slim-fit menswear and the saturation of the lean, toned male bodies in popular culture has made men increasingly body consciousness when they don office-wear. Given the importance of bodies in Casanova's analysis, it is surprising that discussion about the ways diversely shaped bodies embody their office clothes remains missing. She generalizes about men's body consciousness without highlighting the unique experiences of fat or thinly-farmed men, for example, when discussing their selection of office clothes; she also overlooks the ways other intersectional identities interact with body size. By analyzing four men of different body shapes, we build on Casanova's analysis by discussing the relationship between men's experiences of their bodies and their suits.

Methodology: Everyday Fashion as Material Culture

Findings for this paper stem from a larger project on men's clothing consumption and dress practices. The project employed a sartorial biography methodology, with interviews carried out in the homes of 50 men of diverse ages, body shapes, ethnicities and sexualities orientations.

All of the research participants lived in Toronto, Canada. These men were selected by sending requests to social, political and professional groups as well as to our network of contacts. Participants did not need to have an interest in fashion to take part. In selecting the final participants, we sampled for demographic diversity. The participants were first asked questions about their clothing practices including: How has your style changed throughout your life? What influences your clothing choices? The participants were then asked to provide a tour of their current wardrobes and discuss the memories, uses and feelings that they attached to the pieces. As participants discussed each item, we probed to better understand the relationship between the garment and their body image, subject positions, consumption practices and social encounters. Exploring what participants said as they touched their clothing allowed for "an understanding of how particular garments materially evoke the sensory experiences of wearing" (Woodward 2015, 8). We therefore paid close attention to how language articulated men's experiences of the material. We also photographed the men's wardrobes. To protect the anonymity of the participants, names were changed and none of them were photographed in their outfits.

For this article, we selected four interviews from the larger sample. Our criteria for choosing them were that each of the men owed a different number of suits and had distinctive perceptions of suits. We also wanted to have diversity in the sample. To this effect, the men had different bodies, ethnic backgrounds and gender identities which enabled us to investigate the ways intersectional identities impacted men's relationship with their suits. The research participants described in this article were Dave, a white heterosexual MBA student, Winston, an East Asian heterosexual _____, Bob, a white transgendered Professor and Kanwar, a South Asian heterosexual elected official. We note that while the four men come from different class backgrounds, the group's current class position is homogenous: they are all white-collar

professionals. Men who were working-class, bohemian and wore gender-nonconforming clothes took part in our research but they did not wear suits and had little to say about the outfit. We therefore decided their interviews were not relevant to this article. In focusing on just four participants, we use the small-scale case study approach recommended by Buckley and Clark (2012) who argue that it recognizes the complexity and richness of individuals' lived experiences. Similarly, our small number of participants is consistent with studies of Downing Peters (2014) and Barry and Martin's (2016b) which both employed sartorial biographies. Small samples enabled these researchers to deeply engage with each participant's clothing histories, dress decisions and wardrobes.

To provide geographic contextualization to our study, all of our participants were born in Canada with the exception of Bob who was born in the UK. They all live in Toronto which is the fourth biggest city in North America. Casanova (2015) argues that place matters for dress norms. In her study, New York City, Cincinnati and San Francisco each had unique style cultures which influenced how white-collar men dressed for work. Toronto is a major center of both commerce and culture but it is in the second-tier of "global cities" (Hume 2007) and is not considered a "fashion capital" (Berry 2012). We have noticed that the men in Toronto's central business district are not dressed particularly formally compared to those we see around New York's Wall Street or in the City of London. However, this is changing: more men are wearing suits and fashionable suits in Toronto's business district. While it is difficult to pinpoint the cause of these changes, one could look to global trends such as the popularity of men's online shopping and menswear blogs (Rothman 2015) or simply the fact that Toronto is a rapidly expanding metropolis that has recently been deemed "cool" by tastemakers (Marche 2016).

Dave

Dave is a 32-year-old white, heterosexual MBA student who is 6'2 with a lean build. He first became interested in clothes as a child through his love of basketball. His interest in basketball clothing led to a more general fascination with the hip-hop styles that were popular when he was a teenager in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Dave had been an avid sneaker collector but in the past few years he has made a concerted effort to dress in a manner he perceived as more "grown-up." Dave was passionate about clothing and enjoyed shopping at upscale menswear department stores and boutiques. However, Dave's feelings towards fashion were ambivalent; he described a desire to keep up with the latest styles and look "cool" but he was also wary of clothes that would make him look "not masculine"—what he further described as "prissy" or "dainty." He did not like the clothing silhouettes that "don't enhance the very male form," such as those that made the body appear "really willowy." He also did not like wearing dress shoes that "clip clop, like high heels" because these shoes made him "feel feminine, and I don't like that." Dave had an extensive wardrobe of street wear and athletic clothes—so extensive in fact that his clothing took up an entire room of the house that he shared with his girlfriend. While self-conscious about the length and thinness of his legs, he described how he works out "like crazy" to make his legs more muscular and—after having spent his youth in baggy hip-hop style clothing—had recently started wearing fitted clothes that accentuated the more muscular physique he had worked to achieve.

Although Dave embraced many aspects of menswear, he struggled with suits. Dave had to start wearing suits when he enrolled in his MBA program. He explained that he felt different from the conventional male business student: "I'm a little bit of an outlier from all the guys in my program … It's a very cliquish, very uniform. They're all in banking and they all golf like crazy, and they all are competitive over their suits." Although Dave perceived casual and athletic

styles to represent his personal aesthetic rather than suits, his program nevertheless came with expectations that students dress for the business world. For Dave, suits were very much the symbol of masculine sobriety and mass conformity that Flügel (1930) held them to be:

> There's something about wearing a suit that I find kind of constricting for a man. I don't find, maybe I don't understand the nuances enough, but I don't see a lot of self-expression ... Everything's already done for you when you put on a suit.

Dave's concern about the restraint placed on self-expression seems to support the notion that for some, the suit really is the epitome of faceless conformity as conveyed in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Dave said of the men who work in Toronto's financial district, "those guys, they wear one type of suit and that's really boring." Wearing suits also made Dave feel physically and psychologically uncomfortable, as he explained how his suits made him "feel stiff and uncool." The slim cuts of contemporary suits further made Dave feel that his body conveyed a feminine appearance by "enhancing how long and thin my legs are" which was "a part of myself that I wouldn't want people to see."

Out of Dave's four suits, the only one he was fond of was too outside of today's fashion norms to be worn as business dress: a 1920s-style Versace suit from the 1970s. Depicted in figure 1, this suit was purchase at a second-hand store on a holiday in San Francisco. He would wear the suit to special events but would not want to be seen wearing it at business school because it made him "stand out too much." Where Dave's other suits made him feel "stiff and uncool," he explained that when he wore this one he felt "cool wearing it—it's very different." It was therefore not the form of the suit itself that Dave found restricting but instead the perceived expectations within his MBA program that one should wear a suit consistent with the hegemonic notions of masculine sobriety. Dave's Versace suit enabled him to be distinctive in a suit instead of blending in with other suited men.

Insert Figure 1

When asked about which of his 'normal' suits he felt most comfortable in, Dave told us that his favourite was a black Hugo Boss suit purchased for his brother's wedding. While Dave had objections to suits because he felt physically and mentally constrained by them, this suit was cut in a style that made Dave feel both confident and comfortable when he wore it:

> It's taken in really well in the waist, and the shoulders are left wide, and I like the way that makes me look. Just the tailoring ... I really like the look of like broad shoulders on myself. I like looking athletic. I like looking strong.

Dave made references here to many of the cultural signifiers associated with hegemonic masculinity—specifically "broad shoulders" and "looking athletic". Contrary to suggestions that suits render the body invisible (e.g., Collier 1998), this suit highlighted those contours of Dave's body which are most traditionally associated with a strong masculine physique. As a middle-class white man in good physical shape, Dave's tall and lean body is precisely the type of body that is validated as the norm within the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, and his Hugo Boss suit was cut in a manner that it accentuated his idealized masculine body. Dave explained that he could easily buy suits off-the-rack that perfectly fit his body, not requiring tailoring. Despite the fit between the standardized cut of suit and Dave's physique, Dave perceived suits to be uncomfortable and for him, they represented the loss of individual expression. Dave could nevertheless easily wear his suits when needed, reaping the benefits of the suit's association with masculinity and business success.

Winston

Like Dave, Winston struggled with suits; however, unlike Dave, 35-year-old Winston is a man of size and colour and subsequently outside of the appearance traits of hegemonic

masculinity. Feeling excluded from this norm made Winston believe he was undeserving of expensive clothes:

> I don't feel like I am worthy to spend expensive clothes on because I still feel like a part of me doesn't want to wear expensive, nice clothes because I'm fat. I don't want to show myself. I don't want to stand out. I just want to blend in. So when it comes to buying clothes, it's always a huge sense of insecurity with me.

Winston described how difficult it was to find clothes that fit well, because he is 5'5 and 250 pounds. For example, with pants "the crotch always goes to the knees for me because I'm big and short. I don't have the ideal body." Winston's larger body shape forced him to shop at specialty stores, increasing his feelings of exclusion. He experienced such a strong feeling of marginalisation based on his body size that he compared it to racism:

> It's awful. This is a special section for you fatties. I don't want to feel excluded. I just want to be included with everybody else. I want to be able to go into the regular section and just have it go up to my size. You know how back in the day they used to have a section for black people? I feel like this is a separate section for fat people. It's just a different type of discrimination. Instead of race its body.

Winston's choice of metaphor expressed how deeply alienating an experience it was for him to buy clothes. Shopping for clothing also brought back troubling childhood memories of exclusion based on class and race. Having grown-up poor, Winston was also racially marginalized because his Vietnamese family lived in a primarily white community. He explained, "It goes back those childhood feelings, like excluded and hurt and you don't fit in and you can't be like the skinny, white kids with money. You're excluded again and you're not part of society."

While Winston now works in finance and is middle-class, his class background meant that he did not feel comfortable buying clothes that he considered to be expensive. As he explained, "I grew up very poor, so anything we bought had to be on sale and so that carried with me. So now when I buy things, I have to get a good deal otherwise I can't justify paying full price." Although all of our participants were middle-class, they did not all grow up in these

positions. Casanova (2015) found that families, and fathers in particular, shaped how men dressed: they either socialized them into standards of dress or provided examples of how men did not want to dress. Men learned that dress facilitated class reproduction or class mobility. Appearance mattered for men from lower status families who lacked economic resources. Men from these backgrounds were socialized to view clothing as a necessity that should require minimal economic investment and they had a difficult time shaking those values as adults. Winston's family's thriftiness, brought about by spending constraints, continued to influence him. Thus his price-consciousness was a product of Winston's working-class family upbringing.

Since Winston's body differed from the norm for which off-the-rack suits are designed, he found it difficult to find a suit that fit well in the price range he was willing to pay:

> If you want a suit that's going to fit and be stylish, it's going to be super-duper expensive. It's going to be definitely custom-made, but it's going to be even more expensive because I'm plus size. I have a friend who owns a custom-made suit store. He still has to charge me more because I'm plus size … So $300 additional to the custom-made suit, which is already, like, between $400 and $600, so I'm looking at $1,000 after everything. It's not even a designer suit. I'd rather have a roof over my head.

Winston felt discriminated against by this extra charge and the fact that there were no off-the-rack suits that fit him well, concluding that it was "impossible" for him to buy a suit. Winston owned only one suit, as shown in figure 2, that he had purchased online. Entering 19 body measurements, he had hoped to get a suit customised to his body at a reasonable price. However, the suit was cut completely wrong for his body: "It's too baggy in the pants. It's too tight around the belly. It's too loose round the shoulders." The way in which Winston's body filled this suit reminded him of how his body diverged from the hegemonic masculine norm. Winston described this divergence as "triggering":

> Putting on the suit and then realizing it's too tight here or it's too loose around the pants. It's triggering. It reminds me of those terrible memories … I feel very

unhappy because it makes me feel like if I had a typical body then I wouldn't have this issue, but because I have this body I have these issues.

Insert Figure 2

Not only did Winston find suits physically uncomfortable to wear, he also found them to limit his ability for self-expression. He explained that while he is "jealous of women because women get to play around" with work clothing, he feels "definitely restricted by the suit" because "you can't really do much with it." Winston's attitudes towards suits were reflective of the suit's preferred reading as a symbol of hegemonic masculinity. He described suits as restrictive and monotone, asserting that suits made him feel like he was "an office drone, not individualistic at all." With Winston's emphasis on how suits were impossible for him to wear because of his body and his interpretation of suits as bland clothing, there was a close overlap between popular interpretations of suits and hegemonic masculinity. The fit of the suit expresses the masculine body ideal while its blandness conveys the masculine traits of restraint and sobriety. Winston's identity was comprised of multiple, overlapping subjectivities (Vietnamese, working-class, fat) and none of these, in his mind, were compatible with wearing a suit. Taking the most dominant reading of the suit at face value, Winston perceived the suit as symbol of masculinity from which he was marginalized.

Bob

Bob is a 53-year-old white professor who transitioned from female to male. Before transitioning, Bob had been in relationships with women but did not identify as a lesbian. Many of the cisgender men in our sample had not actively thought about their own masculinity or how it was expressed through their clothing; Bob's trans identity meant that he did not have that privilege. Bob's responses to our questions were highly reflexive, demonstrating his conscious understanding of masculinity as a performance. Bob had one suit—illustrated in figure 3—which

he wore to embody the male identity into which he had transitioned. He was mindful of how the

fit and details of men's suit jackets—compared to women's—signified that the jacket was

designed for a man and enabled him to feel male. However, since off-the-rack suits are designed

for the proportions of a 'typical' cisgender man, Bob had to get extensive tailoring to make his

suit fit his 5'3 and 120 pound body. Bob had worked on his body to gain more masculine

proportions, undergoing surgery to remove his female chest and going to the gym to gain

muscles in his shoulders and across the back. He explained the fit of clothing was important to

him because it highlighted his new, male body:

> I've worked on my body through surgery and going to the gym and through being on
> testosterone and it's now much more how I want it to be so I want to have it visible, I
> don't want it hidden.

The disconnect Bob felt between his gender identity and biological sex created a fit dilemma few

cisgender men encounter: what size of penis to wear when buying suit trousers. Since trouser

styles have different fits in the crotch, Bob had to choose amongst his various prosthetic penises:

> When I was going shopping for the suit I texted my friend and I said I'm shopping for a
> suit, which dick should I go with because I have a bigger one and a probably more average
> sized one and he says well I always like to go out with my biggest dick. Then I was
> thinking well I don't know because if someone is going to be on their knees in front of me
> helping to fit the pants and pin them I didn't want to have some like enormous bulge there.

Insert Figure 3

Bob's suit was purchased in preparation for a promotional interview at work. He was

seeking to move into an administrative role as chair of his department. Since he had started his

job before transitioning, it was important for Bob to present himself as masculine, and Bob told

us how he wanted a suit that "signaled a certain kind of grownupness, good taste, that kind of

affirmed my transition and my masculinity." Bob's decision to wear a suit reflected an

acceptance of wider social mores that associate the suit with masculine professionalism and

sobriety while at the same time reflecting his own individual sense of identity as a transman:

> It was important for me to dress in a way that said yes this is me, I'm your oddball
> colleague who is now more of an oddball because I am transgendered but I think I'm
> suitable to play a leadership role in this department so I wanted to dress in a way that
> expressed somehow all of that.

Bob used his suit to emphasise his own masculinity, with an understanding that leadership and

professionalism are still gendered as masculine traits. Wearing a suit subsequently made Bob feel

confident going into the job interview for a leadership role within his department:

> It made me feel empowered because it's such a classic piece of male masculine clothing
> particularly in a professional context, and so being amongst one's colleagues and people
> on the search committee its a classic professional situation where you're presenting
> yourself and people are asking you about you. They are interviewing you to see if you are
> suitable to play a particular role in a very conventional hierarchy and a very conventional
> workplace so I wanted to dress in a way where I felt like I am an appropriate person to be
> a candidate for this job and I feel like I'm dressed in a way where I signal that.

> That same suit helped Bob navigate his father's funeral. He approached this event with

much trepidation because his family had not seen him since transitioning and he was worried that

they might see him as "kind of disgusting" or a "circus freak." Drawing on the suit's image of

formality, sobriety and masculinity allowed Bob to feel appropriate and confident when

presenting his new male identity to his family during this event. He explained that that suit:

> … helped signal the fact that I wasn't presenting myself in a way that made me
> look like the circus freak … I felt that what I was able to do was to be me, to be
> appropriate and to feel totally comfortable that I was doing all the right things.

In the cases of his job interview and father's funeral, Bob used the codes associated with the suit

to signal traits associated with masculinity: professionalism, respectability and sobriety.

> During our interview, Bob was considering purchasing more suits as he had recently

taken on a more senior role at work as director of a graduate program. He reflexively drew on the

meanings associated with the suit because he wished to convey the authority of his new position though his clothes:

> I'm going to be amongst a conventional academic hierarchy and notions of gender and who is a leader, who is responsible, what does that type of person look like? Suits are expression of formality and a type of seriousness that fits into conventional systems of what's serious and who is serious.

Bob stressed that wearing a suit did not mean that he wanted to be known "as one of the guys," but instead to "dress in a way that allows room for me to tweak that identity which can come through me being perfectly put together in the suit but then tell someone that I'm trans." He hoped to appropriate aspects of masculinity from suits that would benefit him without being what he called "stealth" and losing his trans identity to a dominant masculine identity. The term "stealth" has been used by trans people to describe their attempts to successfully pass as their identified gender. In her analysis of trans people at work, Carole Connell (2010) found that most of participants openly identified as transgender rather than performing stealth due to increasing legal protections. In this context, Bob's goal was not reject his trans identity and embody hegemonic masculinity through the suit. Instead, Bob's suit allowed him to draw on its discursive practices in order to negotiate his own trans masculinity in the world. Wearing his suit enabled Bob to externally embody aspects of hegemonic masculinity and, in turn, *feel* masculine—accessing the privileges associated with hegemonic masculinity. While Bob identified as a trans man, his professional ambitions demanded that he identified as a hegemonic man. In the context of these overlapping identities, Bob's suit enabled him to embody aspects of hegemonic masculine subjectivity by drawing on the meanings associated with this form of male dress.

Kanwar

Kanwar is a 36-year-old elected government official. Although Kanwar's family background is upper-middle class, he grew-up feeling like an outsider in a mostly white and Christian community where he experienced racism as a result of his South Asian ethnicity and Sikh faith. As a high school student, he used clothing to protect himself against the racism he experienced, describing his clothing as "social armour." Kanwar styled himself in an "urban or hip-hop" aesthetic that consisted of dark colours and oversized silhouettes. His intension was to convey "a toughness, kind of some of that street edge" through his clothes. When he started law school, he wanted to "still convey that same strength and confidence" of his previous style "but in a more professional way." He began not only to wear suits but also to learn about them. Describing the suit as a "language," he wanted to understand its "syntax" and "grammar." He said: "If I understand how a suit should fit, if I understand the difference between off-the-rack and a bespoke … the better I can demonstrate my understanding of the language of fashion." By studying the suit, he could embody his knowledge of its codes in the suits he wore:

> Knowing how big your lapel should be and knowing where your button placement … All these subtle things were me saying, I am understanding the nuances of the language and I speak it very fluently, so when I wear it, I wear it with fluency.

Kanwar owns 17 suits and—during his interview—he provided many examples to demonstrate that he understood the nuances of a suit's design and fit. As depicted in figure 4, he showed us that the sleeves of his suit jacket had surgeon cuffs (i.e., working button holes)—revealing it was custom. Wearing his suits expertly was a strategy for Kanwar to disrupt racism by demonstrating that he understood Western sartorial conventions better than those of European descent:

> It is a way of saying to people without saying it, I speak your language, and in fact I speak it even better than you. And not because of any ego that I want to be superior to someone, but as a way of communicating that, though you may look at me and think that I am in some way less or I am an other or I am different, I actually speak the language that you respect.

Insert Figure 4

Kanwar used the suit to protect himself against discrimination by drawing on its most dominant meanings: power and prestige. As a South Asian man who wears a turban in his daily life, wearing a suit changed how he perceived people to engage with him: "When I wore suits, it would discourage people from mistreating me; if I walked into a store, I would get more respect, day-to-day I would get increasing respect. So I used it as that." He not only wore his suits subversively, undermining the suit's associations with white privilege, but he wore suits with a strategic intentionality that was communicated throughout our interview:

> A suit … disarms people who otherwise might seek to be rude or seek to treat me inappropriately, it pushes the balance, like I don't know if I should push him, maybe he will sue me or something, maybe he's like a fancy lawyer, he's, I don't know what he is, right? So it was kind of throws people off their balance. Otherwise you would just look at a person and go okay, they are a turbaned person, or they're a bearded person, I'm just going to be rude to them or treat them in a certain way or have a certain stereotype about them. But the way I dress, the way I did it kind of offset it.

By adopting an appearance that is most associated with hegemonic masculinity, Kanwar drew on the privileges of gender and class that come with the suit. As with the "urban" clothes Kanwar wore when he was younger, he similarly used the metaphor of "armour" to describe suits:

> Suits to me are like suits of armour. I feel putting on a suit is like putting on a suit of armour, and it is an outward expression of confidence. So I feel I am ready to go to battle … So putting the armour on, I'm ready for the fight.

While Kanwar was mindful of how different suit styles and textiles were appropriate for different contexts, he nevertheless felt that the suit jacket's structure enabled him to feel protected. Take, for instance, his description of his summer evening suit pictured in figure 5:

> In an evening, you're relaxing, you want a little bit more of a flowing kind of breezy look, when you're in court, you want to have a little bit more stronger armour, thicker steel, so this would be like a lighter armour, still armour, because it's still mentally, protect me from some of the class prejudice that exists but this is thinner armour.

When describing the feeling of wearing his suits, Kanwar explained how the way suits felt on his body enabled him to feel powerful. In this way, when he wore suits, Kanwar felt that he embodied masculine traits: "Because the suit hugs me a certain way, I can feel the reassurance of it just moving with the body and fitting in the right way. I know I am ready to go to battle and fight." Embodying conventional masculine traits of aggression and strength through suits was further expressed in Kanwar's description of the design of one of his suit jackets in figure 5:

> The lapel is a bit wider than usual, and a wider lapel conveys a bit of strength,
> even this has a wider lapel, wider than most. So it's a bit of a strong kind of look,
> a bit of an aggressive look. It's a bit of an aggressive strength.

Like our other participants, Kanwar was mindful of how suits fit his body. He had the financial resources to have suits made specifically for him and became aware of how the suit emphasized his body shape through the tailoring process: "I have really broad shoulders, so an English cut is already kind of bulky, so it makes me bulkier, so to soften it a bit, the Italian cut is a softer silhouette." Not only did bespoke suits allow Kanwar to develop an awareness of his body but the experience also propelled him to view suits as distinctive. Pointing to one suit jacket, he elaborated: "I had certain things that I wanted … I drew a picture and showed the tailor." Due to his class position, he was able to customize suits to his tastes and body instead of buying off-the-rack.

Insert Figure 5

Kanwar's understanding of the suit drew on discourses of masculinity from popular culture. He reminisced about growing-up watching James Bond with his father and idolizing the movie character—who was always dressed in a tuxedo—as the embodiment of masculine power. While James Bond has taken many different forms over the years, his crude representation of hegemonic masculinity has remained consistent as an upper class, womanizing and man-of-

action figure (Cox 2014). Much attention has been directed towards Bond's wardrobes (see for example McInerney 1996) and unsurprisingly, Kanwar saw Bond's hegemonic masculine characteristics as embodied in his clothes—power, adventure and heterosexuality. Kanwar felt that since James Bond's suits embodied masculinity traits, he would signal these traits—and other would recognize these qualities in him—when he wore his tuxedo: "If there's ever an opportunity, I feel like it's my James Bond moment, where I can just break out my tux and go to an event. For me, wearing a tux is the ultimate power." Kanwar also wore a tuxedo to symbolize social class status: "You are obviously someone big time if you are wearing a tux because you obviously went to some fancy shindig that was black tie." By associating the tuxedo with wealth, Kanwar believed that wearing this outfit allowed for him to proclaim social standing based on financial success. While he understood the masculine codes he expressed by wearing a tux, he was also aware that he was being "disruptive" by wearing this garment as a "brown skinned guy, a turbaned person with a beard" in the "ultimate form of men's fashion."

Discussion

While the men in this study were diverse, the meanings that they associated with suits were not. Despite the diversity of their subject positions, all four men analyzed in our sartorial biographies subscribed to the most dominant meanings associated with the suit, approaching them as ways to embody rationality, power and social status. These are configuration of gender practice associated with hegemonic masculinity, and our participants donned the suit to access the privileges that came with it. While these men are marginalized by the gender hierarchy, they were part of on the ongoing process through which hegemonic masculinity reconfigures itself. In this way, the sartorial biographies reveal the nuanced ways in which hybrid masculinities, despite being more diverse and inclusive, still reinforce systems of power and inequality.

One aspect of hybrid masculinities involves a set of practices that Bridges and Pascoe refer to as "strategic borrowing" (252). A long-time fan of both basketball and hip-hop, Dave's personal style incorporated aspects of fashion associated with black masculinity Dave's favourite suit was a yellow, double-breasted, Prince of Wales checked number. This colorful suit was reminiscent of those worn by African and Latino-American men to affirm their marginalized identities (Cosgrove, 1984; Miller 2009). While Dave appropriated this style, he did not wear it to business school. He was concerned that his professors and peers might question his credibility since the yellow suit did not fit into white middle-class dress norms. Dave's subject position as a white man with a lean, tall body is important here. Racialized men and/or those with diverse bodies would not have the freedom to pick and choose when to confirm to hegemonic masculinity because their bodies always mark them as outside of it. Men with societal power, however, can choose when to break from configurations of hegemonic masculinity.

In another example of hybridity, Dave's enjoyment of fashion—a field coded as both gay and female (Edwards 2011)—could been seen as indicative of declining 'homohysteria' and the incorporation of 'feminine' traits amongst heterosexual men (Anderson 2009). Dave's race, class, body and sexual orientation placed him in the category of the most powerful men in society but his large wardrobe and concern with appearance mixed in aspects of marginalized masculinities. However, Dave's clothing choices were guided by a desire to look "masculine" rather than "prissy." In disparaging men who looked effeminate, he distanced himself from those aspects of fashion associated with feminine and gay men. This was an example of what Bridges and Pascoe (2014, 254) refer to as "fortifying boundaries." They use this concept to describe the ways men with power "masculinize" those parts of marginalized identities that they co-opt, while at the same time disparaging elements of those identities associated with subordinated

masculinities. This practice reinforces the boundaries between hegemonic masculinity and the marginalized masculinities whose practices have been co-opted. In Dave's case, he appropriated aspects of feminine and gay masculinities but he spoke about his fashion choices in such a way that his own, more privileged form of masculinity did not become associated with them.

Our sartorial biographies extend the boundaries of hybrid masculinities by exploring the experiences of marginalized men. Bridges and Pascoe (2014) note that research on hybrid masculinities has focused on young, white and heterosexual men. They argue that hybrid masculinities are often motivated by an understanding that white, heterosexual masculinities are "less meaningful than more marginalized or subordinated forms of masculinities" (247). But our analysis questions to whom this normative masculinity is "less meaningful." Our marginalized participants perceived white middle-class masculinity as meaningful—so meaningful that they borrowed from it, in the form of the suit, in an attempt to attain social status. According to Tristan Bridges' (2014) theory of "sexual aesthetics," white middle-class men are often considered cool and progressive when they co-opt marginalized masculinities and, in this way, benefit from gender and sexual inequality. In contrast, Kanwar, Peter and Bob were not granted this same heightened status when they appropriated from dominant masculinities. Instead, appropriation only helped them offset discrimination and be seen as possessing the competence of white middle-class masculinity. This suggests that a double standard exists in way men with power versus marginalized men are perceived when they enact hybrid masculinities. While powerful men are perceived as gaining higher status, marginalized men are only seen as reaching equivalence. The double standard fortifies masculine hierarchies along racial and class lines.

Our sartorial biographies also reveal the contradictory consequences of hybrid masculinities. Suits enabled our marginalized participants to successfully enter and engage in

systems of power by assimilating to dominant masculinities. By facilitating entry into these systems, suits allowed marginalized bodies to be visible in spaces from which they have traditionally been excluded. While being visible can trouble systems of power, none of our participants' hybrid masculinities challenged the configurations of hegemonic masculinity. In fact, they reinforced the notion that to be successful is to approximate as closely as possible the appearance of white middle-class masculinity. They all donned the standard business suit as a means to minimize the effect of racism, transphobia and other forms of discriminations on their careers; their marginalized subject positions meant that they could not risk rejecting the dress norms of their professions. They felt that their career aspirations left them little option but to wear standard suits in order to incorporate aspects of hegemonic masculinity into the marginalized masculinities which they embodied. Wearing standard suits affirmed the notion that elements of dress deemed masculine are symbols of power. In this way, hegemonic masculinity was extended to marginalized men without substantively changing its gender configurations. As Michael Messner notes "men of color, poor and working-class men, and gay men are often in very contradictory positions at the nexus of intersecting systems of domination and subordination" (1993, 734). While the marginalized men in this study gained power through changes in their own style (i.e., wearing a suit) and the style of hegemonic masculinity (i.e., increasingly inclusive of marginalized men), the wider structures of male power remained intact.

By focusing on how men embodied their suits, our sartorial biographies illuminate the nuanced ways hybrid masculinities are manifested through the relationship between clothing and the body. Most of Casanova's (2015) participants did not view their bodies as a whole but instead scrutinized each part of it. Expanding Casanova's work, our participants not only viewed their bodies as distinct parts but evaluated each part according to its associations with hegemonic

masculinity. They then used clothing as a tool to conceal or reveal each body part based on their assessment. Dave wanted suit pants to hide his legs because he perceived them as thin and weak, whereas Kanwar wanted a jacket to highlight his broad shoulders in order for them to appear strong. This concern, however, could be seen as a rejection hegemonic masculinity because appearance is popularly associated with women and gay men (Entwistle 2000). However, studies of men's magazines have shown that consumer culture has promoted appearance management as an acceptable component of white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity since the 1930s (Coulter 2014; Osgerby 2001). In its 1980s "new man" incarnation, for instance, this "commercial masculinity" (Beynon 2001) explicitly appropriated gay male culture (Mort 1996; Nixon 1996). But Messner (1993), who was an early theorist of hybrid masculinity, describes "new man" as "more style than substance" because it involved little more than a change in the appearance of masculinity (732). Rather rupturing the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, our participants' interest in their appearance is therefore reflective of historical shifts that have appropriated appearance and style into configurations of dominant gender practices.

Our inclusion of men with fat, thin, tall, short figures allowed us to explore how bodily differences influenced men's engagement with suits. As previously mentioned, Casanova's (2015) analysis ignores how differences in men's body shapes influences their dress decisions at work. Although all men critiqued aspects of their bodies, we found that fat men, as evidenced by Winston, are excluded from easily strategically borrowing the suit as a symbol of hegemonic masculinity because it is unavailable in larger sizes off-the-rack. The fat body is a symbol of femininity in Western culture, lacking strength and discipline (Monaghan 2005; Whitesel 2014). Clothing allows men to disguise parts of their bodies that fail to conform to hegemonic masculine configurations but they cannot conceal their entire body shape when it symbolizes

femininity. The design of the suit also physically reminds men that their bodies do not conform to masculine norms, despite their efforts to wear the outfit. For example, the poking of Winston's belt buckle against his stomach produces this sensory prompt that his body is not designed for the suit. We therefore argue that clothing fortifies new hierarchies of power and inequality along the lines of body shape, placing men with fat bodies at the bottom. In this way, our work tempers Casanova's (2015) argument that men strategically embrace conformity through office-wear by demonstrating that this privilege is not available to larger men.

Our research also reveals how hybrid masculinities operate at the intersections of class, ethnicity and body shape. Fat bodies not only symbolize femininity but also lower class because fat people are seen as not having the money or time to engage in body work (Herndon 2005; Monaghan 2005). Fat bodies are understood as an embodiment of social class (Warin et. al. 2008) and "the war on obesity" has been described as a form of "symbolic violence" directed at poor and non-white overweight people (Wachs and Chase 2013). While our participants with thin or average-sized bodies could purchase suits off-the-rack which only required minor adjustments, this was not possible for Winston who needed to purchase a custom suit. Even when he did, the suit still did not fit because he used an online made-to-measure service instead of a more expensive bespoke, in-person tailor. Because he had grown up poor, Winston's class habitus prevented him from making such a purchase. Bespoke suiting is trumpeted for its ability to make men of all sizes look good, meaning that fat men can offset the association between fatness and lower-class by wearing a suit that fits them. But if fat men do not have the necessary disposable income to buy a bespoke suit or are uncomfortable doing so, their body physically manifests their failure to embody power and status. Winston further complicates the intersection of class habitus and body size as a man who is also Vietnamese. Winston's experience reveals

that having a lower-class habitus and fat racialized body can produce triple marginalization through clothing. Non-Caucasian fat men are excluded from structures of power yet, if they have grown-up poor, they are unlikely to buy a bespoke suit and challenge their exclusion.

Conclusion

Our participants all displayed thought and consideration when making suiting decisions. We have argued that this effort was driven by accessing status and power. We would also suggest that these men wanted to minimize the risks that can occur from wearing the "wrong" clothing. As our participants explained in their interviews, they were mindful of avoiding certain dress decisions that could lead them to be mocked, teased or belittle—all qualities that would make them appear weak, vulnerable and thus feminine. But we argue that underlying their anxiety was not only the fear of being seen as *feminine*; it was the risk of being found *not masculine*. Wearing the suit was a disguise that shielded them from being found out as a fraud in their masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is an unrealistic ideal that is unachievable for anyone to embody (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). While our participants shared this view when they considered their personal identities, they still believed that hegemonic masculinity was a configuration of gender practice that was achievable for others. They therefore put great effort into choosing suits that allow them to present the impression that they embodied hegemonic masculinity even though they did not see themselves as truly reflective of what that style of masculinity was meant to look like. This serves to illustrate the power hegemonic masculinity has over how men think about themselves and each other.

We encourage scholars to continue to unpack how men's engagement with various types of gendered clothing relates to changes in the configuration of masculinities. What do men's embodiments of sports apparel or the current military trend reveal about hybrid masculinities?

Alternatively, how do men's embodiments of typically feminine aesthetics, which are a popular feature of contemporary men's fashion, reflect changes in masculinity? Researchers exploring these questions should examine men from a range of subject positions to uncover the complex influence of privilege and inequality on the appropriation of different masculinities. By using clothing as a lens to explore hybrid masculinity, researchers can better understand how this principle mode through which gender is made visible can push understandings of men and masculinities.

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