

FOCUSING THE RESEARCH

Harvey symbolized the cultural shifts of the 1970s and his garment represented the themes of sexual liberation, anti-war sentiments, and challenges to the hegemonic masculinity. It forces an inquiry into the military influence in fashion. Specifically, how did the military influence ideas of masculinity in LGBT men's fashion in North America in the 1970s?

In simply observing the garment, one can certainly say the choice of materials was purposefully different from the original bomber jackets. Sobel was undeniably conspicuous, in his decor aesthetics, lifestyle, and fashion choices. How does Sobel's bomber jacket exemplify the act of conspicuous consumption (Trigg 101)?

Finally, the bomber jacket is just one instance and a very literal example of military influence in fashion. There are a variety of different manifestations of the military in fashion throughout history and in the present-day. In keeping with the idea of aesthetics over functionality, a video timeline will portray these influences as we transition through the decades. In exploring these channels, Sobel's bomber jacket will be theoretically dissected from its material to its deeper meaning.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN?

Masculinity is constructed. It is solidified through social and cultural practices, such as fashion and dressing, that are performed to establish identity (Barry and Martin "Dapper dudes" 6). In the LGBT community specifically, "gay refers not just to something you are, but also something you do" (Halperin 13). Butler explains this idea of gender as a performance through establishing masculinity and femininity as inherently unstable categories that, through repetition, one can produce a perception of gender by which they identify (527). One of these performance categories is the choice of one's clothing (Barry and Martin "Gender rebels" 228).

In the 1970s, gay men wanted to associate masculinity with homosexuality. They did this by forming the "clone" subculture; a movement to disrupt the idea that the societal notion that gay men were feminine. This subculture adopted the stereotypical heterosexual male image by wearing plaid shirts, denim, and bomber jackets (Barry and Martin 228). Some gay men who were part of The Gay Liberation Front of the 1970s actively blurred the societal lines between masculinity and femininity by combining female and male fashion and dressing practices in a single outfit.



Fig. 6. Blackglama Advertisement of Maria Callas wearing a mink fur coat in the 1970s by Richard Avedon. <https://www.ebay.com/itm/BLACKGLAMA-MARIA-CALLAS-Vintage-1970-advertising-poster-MINK-FUR-COAT-22x28-NM-/202253012888>.

This idea of merging masculinity and femininity can also be seen in Sobel's bomber jacket. The bomber jacket silhouette stems from an inherently male figure of the soldier. By combining this with essentially female materials, animal print and fur. It combines ideas of sexuality and the untamed woman with ideas of war and military prestige. If we unpack the use of mink fur, we can see Sobel's was intending to make a statement of luxury and status, while blurring the lines between male and female fashion signifiers (see fig. 6). "Because a fur coat represents probably the most expensive and luxurious fashion commitment a person can make... the buying process is as much psychological as it is financial" (Eitorre). Sobel was making a statement about gender, sexuality, status, and the economic climate with one fashion choice.

VEBLEN'S THEORY OF CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

In choosing these materials to create an apparently custom bomber jacket was the ultimate symbol of conspicuous consumption. Veblen believed that to establish one's identity and status in society, there must be a display of wealth. This display of wealth could be done by participating in leisurely activities or lavish spending on commodities or services (Trigg 101). Veblen also outlined that "to have property is to have status and honour", which Sobel did.

Everything about Sobel was conspicuous, his lifestyle, his design aesthetic, and his fashion. These visual displays through fashion were not only used to establish his identity in the LGBT community but also his status within the greater society. Although the home was historically related to femininity and defined as a woman's space, the accumulation of wealth through objects has remained "constant in the definition of bourgeois domesticity" (Potvin 15). Sobel used interior design, of his own home and the homes of many others, as a method of placing his identity in society. This idea is expressed by Potvin, as he notes, "queers make sense of a space by making it uniquely our own as a vital means to allow for our embodied selves to take place, whether in, out or on the threshold of the proverbial closet" (287). Sobel embodied the dissolving of these archaic lines between gender and pursued a career and life encapsulated by design, art, and the home. Just as the LGBT community subverted the meaning and images surrounding the bomber jacket used by the skinheads, Sobel furthered this redefinition through his fashion.


His bomber jacket, seen in figures 4 and 5, is purposeful in its appearance as he made aesthetic value the primary focus. He could have used another cheaper material to make the jacket functional for the cold weather, but he chose mink fur. An essentially luxurious, feminine object. This value of aesthetics over functionality was also, ironically, seen within the military. The visual appeal of uniforms was commonly used to entice potential soldiers. They were attracted to the "most flamboyant uniforms" (Peoples 18). There are many parallels between the practices of attraction and the aesthetic value placed on fashion items between the military and the aforementioned LGBT community. While the decorated, heroic soldier was the image of ideal masculinity in the military, gay men took that image and turned it on its head by adding feminine fashion items or hyperbolizing the hegemonic masculinity. Ultimately reimagining and fetishizing masculinity.

THE MILITARY INFLUENCE ON FASHION

Despite the establishment of hegemonic masculinity in military uniform and dressing practices, various subcultures adopted these fashion items and redefined military fashion. Peoples addresses the deep influence of the military on fashion as “ripple effects of [the] military education” (18). Throughout history and in the present-day, from high-end luxury to fast fashion, the military influences have established long-standing trends within the fashion industry. These trends span societal communities, gender, sexuality, and many more social and cultural distinctions. Since this influence has turned the functionality of military uniforms to purely focusing on its aesthetic value, there is no better way to examine these influences than through a visual medium. To understand the movement of military fashion through history, I have created a video that will showcase images and video clips from magazines, fashion shows, advertisements and photographers (see fig. 7). Through this visual timeline, we can see how the military influence in fashion has manifested and survived to present-day.

Fig. 7. “Military Influence on Fashion: A Visual Timeline”, YouTube, Sara Abraham, 20 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSOViqytaX8>

THE MILITARY INFLUENCE ON FASHION: A VISUAL TIMELINE



Alexander McQueen A/W 2011

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