



DRESS & FASHION RESEARCH

DRESS AND IDENTITY IN AMERICA

THE BABY BOOM YEARS 1946–1964

DANIEL DELIS HILL

BLOOMSBURY

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IDENTITY IN
AMERICA**

**The Baby Boom Years
1946–1964**

Dress and Fashion Research

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DANIEL DELIS HILL



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PREFACE

The baby boom era in America is usually defined as the years 1946–1964, during which a higher-than-average birthrate added more than 70 million babies to the population.¹ It was a period of sociopolitical conservatism, a backlash to the economic and cultural disruptions of the Great Depression and World War II. Politically, the nation shifted right significantly, electing a Republican president and Congress in 1952 after 20 years of Democratic progressivism. This rightward swing ushered in conservative extremism that manifested in McCarthyism, the establishment of the John Birch Society, a revitalized Ku Klux Klan, reinforced Jim Crow laws and policies, the purging of gays from government and the military, and a red scare from the Korean War and global communist expansion. The patron saint of postwar conservatism, William F. Buckley, summed up the goal of the right in the era when he wrote as the mission statement for the founding of the *National Review* in 1955: “A conservative is someone who stands athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it.”² This regressive conservatism was embraced by much of American society and persisted well into the 1960s. Looking back at those postwar years, Betty Friedan wrote in 1963,

We found excuses for not facing the problems we once had the courage to face. The American spirit fell into a strange sleep; men as well as women, scared liberals, disillusioned radicals, conservatives bewildered and frustrated by change—the whole nation stopped growing up. All of us went back into the warm brightness of home, the way it was when we were children.³

That introverted emphasis on the home redefined the identities of men, women, and children in the postwar years. For the 10 million men who demobilized from military service after the Second World War, their transition from soldier to civilian focused on a return to normalcy, to find a new identity that would allow them to put the war behind them and get on with life. The first four chapters explore the emergence of the forms of that identity, the corresponding dress, and how both impacted the broader ideas of masculinity from the late 1940s through the mid-1960s. For millions of veterans, the GI Bill guided them toward

marriage and the role of family breadwinner by offering guaranteed loans for homes and businesses as well as opportunities for advanced education and vocational training. In their role as family breadwinners, postwar American men readily found jobs in the booming economy and moved their wives and baby boom children into one of the new suburban communities that began to sprawl across the American landscape. There they settled into comfortable conformity and rivaled the Joneses next door in a race of consumption and materialistic indulgence. From their new ranch houses, they commuted six days a week to corporate offices in the city and joined the herds of other suburbanites in their quest for upward mobility.

With each of the new postwar masculine identities—husband, father, family head, suburbanite, corporate man—new styles of dress complemented each. The corporate breadwinner was the iconic man in the gray flannel suit, dressed in the masculine uniform of the era—the shapeless, straight-hanging Ivy League suit. Yet, in his leisure time as suburbanite homeowner and family man, his dress of colorful casual sportswear allowed some degree of personal style and expression.

In Chapter 5, the identity and dress of nonwhite men of the era is examined. In the years immediately before the beginning of the baby boom, many African American and Latino men expressed their pride of self through the zoot suit and the urban masculine performance that went with the style. Similarly, as the civil rights movement achieved legislative goals in the mid-1960s, Black men were inspired to claim their African heritage as a new identity, which they demonstrated with the Afro hairstyle, and African styled clothing such as the dashiki.

Women of the postwar years were especially impacted by the regressive and repressive sociocultural shifts in America. Chapters 6–8 look at how millions of women who had donned pants and had worked in defense factories and service sectors during the Second World War now were told to stay home and focus on being a wife and mother. Postwar women were not expected to pursue higher education, and especially were not encouraged to work outside of the home, let alone become career women. The whole of American society—the masses, government, religious institutions, medical and social science, popular culture—seemed to concur that a woman's place was in the home.

For millions of white, middle-class women, the traditional identity of homemaker was enhanced by the additional cachet of suburbanite. In their new ranch houses, in a new community development, many suburban women delighted in excelling in their expected roles as housewives and mothers. For them, the American dream was caring for a husband and children, and spending their days managing their homes with modern labor-saving appliances and conveniences. Their identities as American suburbanite woman, wife, and mother were additionally reinforced by their dress. At home, they dressed in an endless variety of comfortable, casual sportswear, and for women's club and

PTA meetings, they wore ready-to-wear versions of the cinched, ultrafeminine New Look fashions from Paris.

For many other women, though, the roles of suburban wife and mother were not sufficiently fulfilling. What came to be variously called the “woman problem” or “suburban syndrome” in the 1950s was a pervasive feeling of discontent and uneasiness among many American women.⁴ Their traditional roles of wife and mother seemed limiting. They felt isolated in suburbia and bored by unending and uninteresting housework. Richard Gordon called this life of “drudgery” in “disturbia” a “split-level trap,”⁵ from which there was no way out short of the unthinkable—divorce and child abandonment.

In Chapter 9, the children of the postwar era are collectively represented by two groups: those born in the late 1930s and early 1940s, who were school-aged and teenagers through the 1950s, and the baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964, who grew up to become the youthquake generation of the 1960s. Together, these millions of children became a new consumer demographic in the affluent postwar economic boom. Through various media, especially television, this youth market was directly targeted by makers of soft drinks, snack foods, toys and games, movies, comic books, rock and roll music, and clothing.

Yet, in the regressive conservatism of the era, children were subjected to strict gender role socialization by parents, teachers, religious leaders, and pop culture ranging from comic books to television programming. Boys in particular were inculcated with sociocultural standards of masculine behavior to guide them toward a proper manhood. Competitive sports, tool use, machine maintenance and repair, and healthful outdoor activities were vital training for America’s future Cold War soldiers, husbands, and fathers. Boys were restricted in the toys they played with, the clothes they wore, even the colors of their environment, ever avoiding anything that might remotely threaten feminization. A weak sissy was not to be tolerated.

Girls, though, were less limited, at least until their teen years. The tomboy schoolgirl in jeans and a boy’s sweatshirt who played ball with her brothers and boy classmates was indulged since she was expected to outgrow the phase. She could play with toy trucks and cap pistols where a boy was forbidden to touch a doll after toddler age. Even so, girls underwent rigorous gender role socialization too. Girls were given toy kitchen and home appliances, cookware and tea sets, play beauty kits, Barbies, and baby dolls to prepare them for their future roles as homemakers and mothers. Pink for girls and blue for boys became the norm. Academics were less important for girls than the development of their skills in cooking, sewing, interior decorating, and similar feminine activities they learned at home with Mom or at school in sex-segregated classes like home economics.

Children’s dress reinforced the gender identities of boys and girls. Most children’s clothing after the toddler age was basically scaled-down versions of adult styles. Boys wore the same boxy, loose Ivy League suit or casual sportswear

of their dads. Girls dressed in miniature versions of New Look dresses. Jeans were for all ages, just gendered by the way cuffs were turned: rolled once or twice at the ankles for boys, and rolled to the knees for girls. Some fashion fads were youth specific, such as poodle skirts and Scottie saddle oxfords for girls, and buckle-back strap slacks, chukka boots, and ripple sole shoes for boys.

Much of the period research material available on the baby boom era centers on white, middle-class suburban families. The overwhelming evidence of materials of the time from social scientists, psychiatrists and sociologists, journalists, government propaganda and policies, consumer surveys, movies, television programming, books, advertising, and other realms of popular culture demonstrates that the white, middle-class man in the gray flannel suit, the suburban housewife, and the consumption-driven teenager were the ideal. “In effect the [postwar] generation made a pact. The wives agreed to marry earlier and have more children than their mothers, at whatever expense to themselves. The husbands agreed to get ahead and take good care of them. This agreement was kept.”⁶ And even though these *identities* were not universal across America, whether through institutionalized exclusion, racial animus, socioeconomic inequalities, or religious and political biases, the *dress* of most Americans largely was universal. The men’s Ivy League suit, the woman’s New Look fashions, and the teen’s dungarees and saddle oxfords were worn by all ethnicities and sociocultural groups.

1

THE MAN IN THE GRAY FLANNEL SUIT: GROWING UP

Sociocultural legacies from his childhood

The American men who fought in World War II and returned afterwards to become suburban husbands, fathers, and conformist career men of the 1950s had their views and understanding of manhood shaped as children and teens in the Depression era. Their (white) male identities developed in the 1930s from the role models of their fathers, who had been the doughboys of the First World War, and their grandfathers, who came of age in the late Victorian period.

The identities of husband, father, and breadwinner were norms expected of every American man in the 1930s, as it had been for generations before. Key to a man's success in these roles was his ability to earn a living sufficiently to provide for a family. Despite the loss of jobs, wage cuts, reduced hours, and the constant threat of unemployment in the 1930s, the cornerstone of male identity in the Depression years was work. As sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd noted in *Middletown in Transition*, a study of middle America's culture and society in the mid-1930s, "The long arm of the job" determined "who one is, whom one knows, how one lives, what one aspires to be . . . Men get the living, i.e., earn the money to buy the living for the family; they pay for the children's education and the family's leisure, as well as for food, clothing, and shelter."¹ Children of the middle and working classes of the Depression years were inculcated with this unequivocal message of proper manhood from their parents, teachers, and religious leaders. Schools were oriented around the Victorian concepts of separate spheres—one set of guiding principles for boys, and a different set for girls. Community "patterns of customary acceptance," as demonstrated with

Lynds' research, were cohesive, regular, and repetitive. "The things a man is and does have remained fairly clearly and comfortably fixed," concluded the Lynds.²

In addition to the role models and guidance of parents, teachers, and community leaders, an array of fictionalized manly characters in popular culture of the 1930s exhibited defining qualities and traditional traits of American masculinity. Movies featured hypermasculine protagonists ranging from adventurers, detectives, and cowboys played by actors such as James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, Gary Cooper, and Clark Gable, to athletic heroes like Tarzan, portrayed by Olympic champion Johnny Weissmuller, and Flash Gordon, also played by an Olympic champion, Buster Crabbe. This idea of the manly man—strong, dutiful, and selfless—was also perpetuated in radio programs of the time, such as *The Lone Ranger*, *The Green Hornet*, and *The Shadow*, which instilled in boys the ideas of physical and moral strength, and a selfless duty. Comic strips and the first comic books were additional sources of masculine identities for Depression-era boys. Good-guy heroes such as Dick Tracy, Superman, and Batman were introduced in the 1930s, presenting strong men who fought the good battle against crime and injustice. In the first comic book that introduced Superman in 1938, he was described as a "champion of the oppressed"³—a comforting notion during the uncertainties of the Great Depression.

Surprisingly, sports for boys were not much of a consideration for Middletown in the 1930s. The Lynds did not even mention the topic in the chapter "Training the Young," and it was only briefly discussed as a spectator's activity in the chapter "Spending Leisure."⁴ Certainly boys of the 1930s enthusiastically participated in sports of all kinds, but this lack of emphasis on sports as a developmental tool for boys was a significant departure from a generation earlier. Their grandfathers had been proselytized as boys on several fronts—parents, teachers, civic leaders, mass media—with messages of the importance of sports for achieving a proper masculine identity and countering the threat of feminization.

During the late nineteenth century, American society had become obsessed with a fear of the feminization of boys. Increasingly, breadwinner fathers left farms and rural communities to work in urban factories and offices, usually for ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. The absent fathers meant boys were mostly in the care of women all day—mothers and elder sisters in the home, women schoolteachers and neighbors, and other female caregivers. In addition, middle-class homes of the Second Industrial Revolution were filled with modern conveniences—labor-saving appliances, manufactured prepared foods, efficient furnaces and indoor plumbing, and abundant ready-made clothing. Competitive athletics were advocated as a counter to the emasculating influences of women and modernity. Athletics taught boys manly virtues such as "coolness, steadiness of nerve, quickness of apprehension, endurance . . . and above all, courage . . . Team contests demanded a strength, vigor, and physical assertiveness that undermined the ease and debility of modern affluence."⁵ Schools established

team sports for boys such as baseball adopted from the American National League established in 1876 and intercollegiate football organized in 1873. New team sports were invented at the end of the nineteenth century to teach boys the manly values—basketball in 1891 and volleyball in 1895; the Olympics were revived from ancient times in 1896.

Equally important for what a man should be was what he should not be. The Lynds documented a number of those views and conventions. One of the core beliefs of Middletown's middle class was, "in being, when in doubt, like other people."⁶ This idea of sociocultural conformity was strongly impressed upon American boys of the 1930s and would remain integral to their adult notions of manhood in the 1950s.

The Victorian fear of the feminization of boys also remained a powerful concern for Depression-era parents. Not only was the threat of feminization debilitating for boys—making them weak, subordinate, and effeminate—but also strong influences from women, they thought, could make boys into homosexuals as adults. Late nineteenth-century medical science introduced the concept of homosexuality as a mental disorder, which remained a potent worry for American parents, teachers, and religious leaders of the twentieth century. "We are prone to distrust and hate those whom we regard as uncommon," observed a Middletown newspaper editorial. "Deviant members" of the community "who were too radical, too unconventional, too artistic, too little imbued with community loyalties, too different in any respect to be happy in and accepted by Middletowns have been thrown off to the Chicagos, the Clevelands, the New Yorks."⁷ In the 1950s, homosexuality would be at the top of the list for what not to abide in the American male—a condition that was considered a mental disorder by medical science, criminal by law, sinful by religious dogma, and a national security threat equal to communism by McCarthyite witch-hunters.

The masculine dress identity of the Depression-era man was the drape cut suit, also called a blade cut for the way it fitted over the shoulder blades, or the London cut, since it originated with Savile Row tailor Frederick Scholte. As an apprentice in the 1910s, Scholte worked for the tailors who dressed the Royal Household Guards and came to admire the masculine silhouette of the athletic V-shape fit of the young guards' jackets and coats. When he set up his own shop after the First World War, he developed a new cut of the men's jacket with gentle horizontal drapes in the back that narrowed across the shoulder blades without padding. In the front, the fabric descended from the shoulders in discreet ripples rather than a smooth, shaped construction over stiff, layered interfacings. "Correct drape causes wrinkles, but they are quite legitimate and entirely graceful," advised a men's wear journalist in 1928.⁸ Lapels were rolled rather than lying flat, which provided the illusion of a broad, muscular chest. The upper sleeves were generous to allow a wide range of motion, and the armholes

were cut high and small to prevent the collar from gaping at the neck when the arms were lifted. The waist was slightly raised and slimly tapered, and the skirt was trim over the hips. By the beginning of the 1930s, the athletic drape cut silhouette had been adopted in America by both tailors and ready-to-wear makers. (Figure 1.1.) The style would be the distinct masculine dress identity through the 1930s and into the early 1940s when wartime restrictions on fabrics and other materials would impact most men's and women's apparel.

The trousers for the drape cut suit were also a style departure from the previous trends in men's suits. During the 1910s, men's suit jackets had been trim and fitted, and trousers were snugly cut with what was jokingly called a



Figure 1.1 From the late 1920s into the early 1940s, American men's suits were based on the English drape cut, an athletic silhouette with broad shoulders, tapered waist, and muscular sleeves and trouser legs. Men's single and double-breasted suits by Oliver E. Woods, 1936.

sausage casing fit at about 15 to 16 1/2 inches in circumference at the cuff. For Scholte's new suit silhouette, the trouser legs were a more capacious 22 inches at the cuff, and pleats were preferred since, as a fashion editorial noted, they "give a great deal of comfort and make it easier to use the pockets without drawing the trousers out of shape."⁹ Pleats were usually in pairs at each hip, with the front leg crease descending from the innermost tuck. Inverted pleats that faced inward became especially popular in the 1930s.

One of the controversial advances in men's wear of the 1930s was the addition of zippers to fly front closures, replacing the centuries-old button style. Versions of hookless closures had been developed since the mid-nineteenth century, but in 1923, a slide closure made with interlocking brass teeth was introduced by the rubber manufacturer B.F. Goodrich for their galoshes. Named the "zipper" by a company executive, the slide closure was initially used for utilitarian items such as shoes, purses, tobacco pouches, and luggage, but by the second half of the 1920s, it was applied to outerwear and children's playwear. Gradually through the 1930s, the zipper was added to other garments, notably the fly front of men's trousers. Tailors resisted the device, and many men were wary of the location of interlocking metal teeth. But in 1934, the Prince of Wales began to have his trousers custom-made with a zipper fly closure by a New York tailor, and quickly, US ready-to-wear makers adopted the new trouser construction for the mass market.

Despite the social conservatism of the Depression era, one of the new dress identities of the 1930s that American men widely adopted was sexual exhibitionism. Popular culture was abundant with depictions of nearly nude athletic men, ranging from ads for Charles Atlas body building regimens to movies of former Olympic athletes portraying Tarzan. This exhibitionism took two paths in American men's wear, one public and one private.

The public form was swimwear, sexualized styles of which had been emerging since the late nineteenth century. In addition to bared arms and legs, the formfitting knit swimsuits were especially clinging and revealing when wet. During the 1920s, the standard set of swim shirt and trunks or singlet style of swimsuit was gradually diminished by shortened trunks and crab back styling that reduced tops to a bib with straps around the torso. As suntans became increasingly popular in the late twenties, men began to turn down the tops to expose more skin to the sun. In response to the trend, during the early 1930s, swimwear makers produced singlet swimsuits with removable tops attached to the trunks at the waist with a zipper.

Two radical developments of men's swimwear designs in 1932 furthered men's erotic near-nude exhibitionism. First was the appearance of a shirtless brief cut swimsuit on the beaches of the Riviera. The fashion press called the abbreviated style the "pearl diver's model"¹⁰ because it was similar to skimpy swimsuits worn by Pacific island divers who worked the oyster beds. By the mid-1930s, the

shirtless brief style swimsuits were common on beaches and poolsides across America. In 1936, mass-market retailers such as Sears included the swim brief in their seasonal wish book catalogs. The second development in men's swimwear that emphasized an erotic exhibitionism was the introduction of a new type of two-way stretch knit made from an elasticized yarn called Lastex. Earlier types of knit fabrics were formfitting, but Lastex fabrics molded the body like a coat of wax.

Inspired by the popularity of the new brief cut swimsuits, in 1934, an executive at the Coopers knitting mills of Kenosha, Wisconsin, developed a new form of men's cotton knit underwear modeled after the swim brief but with an elastic waistband. Because the brief cut underwear reminded company executives of athletic jockstraps, the style was branded Jockey. For men of the Depression era, Jockey briefs—and similar versions produced by competitors—were a private form of sexualized clothing. “Jockeys are snug and brief, molded to your muscles,” avowed the copy in a 1936 ad for Coopers’ “masculinized undergarments.”¹¹ The formfitting underwear brief was an instant success and changed the way men thought about underwear and their bodies.

The physical identity conveyed by men's wear of the 1930s was muscularity and brawn. The boys and teens of the 1930s grew up wearing the styles of their dads: shaped suits, sport coats, and outerwear that projected broad shoulders and chest and a trim waist. Trousers were fuller than in the 1910s and early 1920s, but still emphasized narrow hips and strong thighs. Even if men were not the “physical marvel” that Superman was declared to be in his first comic book,¹² the drape cut suit helped make him look it.

Yet, by the 1950s, the dress identity of the American man was distinctly different from that of his boyhood in the Depression era. A transition in men's wear that developed through the 1940s evolved into something very different—a masculine dress identity reflective of the era of the Cold War, McCarthyism, and a socially conservative backlash to the war years.

American manhood during the Second World War

In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and Europe erupted into the Second World War. In Asia, imperial Japan, already at war with China since 1931, began a conquest of other regional territories in 1941 for the resources and raw materials needed for their war machine. In December 1941, Japan attacked the US fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, violently wrenching America from its isolationism into the global conflict.

In anticipation of war, President Franklin Roosevelt had signed the Selective Training and Service Act in September 1940, requiring men between ages 21 and

45 to register for the military. It was America's first peacetime draft. At that time, the entire US armed forces had just over one million men. By December 1941, the war in Europe had been going on for more than two years, yet America's military had barely doubled its manpower. But within a year of the attack on Pearl Harbor, by November 1942, 6,773,809 men were serving; and by October 1943, the US armed forces were at 10,425,916 men.¹³

The boys and teens of the Depression era came of age in the 1940s. Journalist Tom Brokaw wrote of those boys who became young men during the war and served in the military as "The Greatest Generation":

They answered the call to help save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs. They faced great odds and a late start, but they did not protest. At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they were fighting, often hand to hand in the most primitive conditions possible, across the bloodied landscape of France, Belgium, Italy, Austria. They fought their way up a necklace of South Pacific islands few had ever heard of before . . . They were in the air every day, in skies filled with terror, and they went to sea on hostile waters far removed from the shores of their homeland.¹⁴

And all Americans keenly understood the courage and sacrifice of their young men so far from home. They were anxious for their sons, brothers, husbands, and, later when the draft was expanded, fathers, who were in harm's way, but they were also very proud of them.

The young, vigorous serviceman of the war years replaced the patriarchal breadwinner worker of the Depression era as the American masculine ideal. "The Second World War provided a crucial opportunity for men to demonstrate characteristics such as strength, bravery, and usefulness that had been called into question during the 1930s."¹⁵ Whether they had voluntarily enlisted or been drafted, the hero servicemen were protecting the nation, their homes, and their families. As *Time* magazine noted in 1942, "The heroism of the soldiers of democracy is . . . a record that glows like an endless string of pearls. For they have made World War II a time of gallantry, sacrifice, incredible toughness; of comradeship among all fighters for freedom."¹⁶

The significant masculine dress identity of the war years was the military uniform. Servicemen were required to be in uniform at all times, even when on furlough. The uniform was evidence of American manhood at its finest—proof that the man had measured up and met the test. The man in uniform was a celebrated icon in popular culture from movies to mass-market advertising. (Figure 1.2.) Among the Hollywood stars who famously donned a uniform and went to fight for America were Jimmy Stewart (*Air Force*), Clark Gable (*Air Force*),

That Extra Something!
... You can spot it every time

Oh, far-fetched and holed here! Everybody's hometown has extra something no other place possesses. Family ties... familiar things... familiar scenes and places. A place like the old neighborhood and fountain, for instance. And the happy times of youth spent there.

And at the soda fountain... here! Coca-Cola, the drink everybody remembers... and looks forward to. And with good reason.

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Drink **Coca-Cola**
Delicious and Refreshing

Ice-cold Coca-Cola gets a hearty welcome. It's the answer to thirst that adds refreshment. Coca-Cola has that extra something to do the job of complete refreshment. It has a taste that's uniquely satisfying — a quality that's unmistakable. That's why the only thing like Coca-Cola is Coca-Cola itself. Thirst asks nothing more.

5¢

"It's the real thing"

It's natural for popular names to require friendly advertisements. They will not bear counterfeit. Coca-Cola and Coca-Cola stand the same thing. — Do not drink — or anything coming from a single source, and well known to the consumer.

1942

Have a Coca-Cola = Howdy, Neighbor

... or greeting friends at home and abroad

One of the first places they head for, when they get back, is the neighborhood soda fountain and all its old associations... among them, Coca-Cola. Many places overseas, too, your American fighting man meets up with that old friend... ice-cold Coca-Cola. It's always like word from home to hear the friendly greeting "Have a 'Coke'" in a strange land.

Yes, around the globe, Coca-Cola stands for the peace that refreshes... has become a symbol of our way of living.

Coca-Cola
The global high sign

It's natural for popular names to require friendly advertisements. They will not bear counterfeit. Coca-Cola and Coca-Cola stand the same thing. — Do not drink — or anything coming from a single source, and well known to the consumer.

1944

Have a "Coke" = You're invited to our house

... or how to make sailors feel at home

Home, these days, are often playing host to our fighting men and their friendly allies. There's one sure greeting that will put them all at ease. It's "Have a 'Coke'." To an old friend, Coca-Cola from your own refrigerator can friendship the world over.

Home, these days, are often playing host to our fighting men and their friendly allies. Stronger, you being. At home, in camp, and overseas, Coca-Cola stands for the peace that refreshes... has become the symbol of American friendship the world over.

Coca-Cola
The global high sign

"Coke" is Coca-Cola. It's natural for popular names to require friendly advertisements. That's why you see how Coca-Cola stands "Coke".

1944

Figure 1.2 (this page and facing page) The military uniform projected the masculine identity of the American hero who had measured up to the challenges of manhood in wartime.

Everybody's happy... Have a Coke



...the pause that refreshes brightens the trip

A familiar custom followed them when they went overseas... *the pause that refreshes* with ice-cold Coca-Cola. *Have a Coke* was a welcome greeting heard at one time or another behind nearly every fighting front. Now they are headed for home. Back to the folks, their friends, the old home town and the gang.

Back to their American kind of life... with its happy ways and customs. In far away lands, ice-cold Coke brought them a touch of home, a glow of friendliness. It brought life, sparkle and comradeship to brighten many a drab moment... just as it goes on brightening happy moments at home.



1944

Kirk Douglas (Navy), and Henry Fonda (Navy), to name a few. American movies of the war years that portrayed the sacrifice and valor of American soldiers included *Standby for Action* (Robert Taylor, 1942), *To the Shores of Tripoli* (Randolph Scott, 1942), *Air Force* (John Garfield, 1943), *December 7th* (Walter Huston, 1943), *A Guy Named Joe* (Spencer Tracy, 1943), *Sahara* (Humphrey Bogart, 1943), and *The Fighting Seabees* (John Wayne, 1944).

Opposite of the war heroes, though, were the 4-F men. The US Selective Service appointed local boards of civilian volunteers to interview and examine men for qualifications to serve in the military. A final decision was made at induction centers by medical examining staff. The director of the Selective Service in conjunction with the Surgeon General's Office issued a "list of defects" in 1940 as a guide for disqualifying recruits (or sometimes classifying them for limited service).¹⁷ In addition, in October 1943, every Selective Service board was assigned a medical field agent with the authority to investigate the background of each registrant, including education, work history, personal medical records, and even hobbies. All were compiled by the military into a profile to determine acceptance and the best assignment for the registrant.¹⁸

Men who were determined as unfit for military service were issued a 4-F classification. In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), the Jimmy Stewart character is classified 4-F because he is deaf in one ear. The townsfolk know this fact and are understanding and sympathetic. But for most 4-F men, especially in large towns and cities, a 4-F classification was a social stigma that haunted the bearer his entire life. Besides the obvious physical conditions such as a lost limb, obesity, or blindness, a broad assortment of other concealed physical conditions was cause for a 4-F status, such as hernia, surgical removal of certain organs, poorly healed bone fractures, or dental deficiencies, and diseases like tuberculosis, arthritis, diabetes, and syphilis, among others. Between November 1940 and the end of the war in August 1945, 6.4 million men, or 35.8 percent of registrants, were rejected for active service.¹⁹

A 4-F status also included mental and personality disorders. The largest number of disqualifications for service between 1942 and 1945 was due to "mental illness," nearly two million men or more than 30 percent of registrants.²⁰ Examiners especially watched for indications of homosexuality, which was classified as a mental disorder until 1973, when the American Psychiatric Association removed it from their diagnostic manual on mental disorders. Not only were homosexuals vilified as defective men who would make poor soldiers, but also psychiatrists of the era thought that openly homosexual men might spread their perversion to other men, thus affecting troop morale. Social and political views, too, could get registrants branded as 4-F. For instance, if African Americans replied negatively to questions about segregation and Jim Crow laws, they were often rejected with a 4-F status as mentally deficient.²¹ Even illiteracy was viewed as a mental deficiency, for which many men were disqualified, particularly among poor Southern whites and disadvantaged African Americans from rural communities. Intelligence tests that indicated a registrant may have difficulty with rapid learning or following instructions disqualified still other men. And men were rejected on grounds of moral integrity that included criminal records such as murder, rape, or kidnapping, and sexual perversion that usually meant homosexuality.

Although recruitment center physicians had been instructed to “exercise care in labeling a registrant with a diagnostic term which might in some way be injurious to him,”²² a 4-F rating was a difficult stigma for most men. Unless a physical condition was obvious, young men not in uniform were commonly asked by family, friends, neighbors, and even strangers on the street why they had not enlisted. Servicemen and civilians alike viewed the 4-F-ers as either defective rejects or slackers. The social opprobrium against 4-F men was compounded when, in 1943, the US military began drafting married men and fathers.

Even those who were inducted but were classified for support roles felt some degree of shame for not participating in combat. In the movie *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003), the male instructor of Italian at Wellesley College in 1953 was thought to have acquired his language expertise in the Italian campaign, but instead had spent the war in a military language center on Long Island. When confronted, he simply replied that people assumed he had been in combat and he just never corrected them.

To distinguish honorably discharged soldiers from those often disparaged as “4-F draft-dodging bastards,”²³ veterans in civilian clothes were provided with tiny gold-plated pins of eagles to wear in public, which helped reduce tension and public contempt for men not in uniform. The 1945 ad shown in Figure 1.3 features an illustration of the pin and a depiction of an honorably discharged father explaining to his son that the “simple gilt button . . . says a world of things”:

It says a service well done for our country . . . for freedom and humanity the whole world over. It says that America, every American, is proud of the wearer . . . be it your dad, or any one of the 13,000,000 men and women who, like him, served in the armed forces. It says that America will not forget their service—but will strive to make sure their service was not in vain.²⁴

More importantly, a 4-F identity could especially hinder a man’s employment or career advancement, especially since Selective Service records were available to employers in the 1940s and 1950s. It was common practice after the war and well into the 1960s for employers to ask what a male applicant did during the war, with preference points granted to veterans. Into the 1990s, the World War II records of political figures such as President H.W. Bush and presidential candidate Bob Dole were included in campaign materials and mentioned in news reports.

Civilian dress and identity during the Second World War

When America entered the Second World War, the design of American men’s clothing was significantly impacted by materials shortages and rationing. Within the early weeks of the war, restrictions were put in place to conserve wool for

“What does the button say—Daddy?”



All men and women honorably discharged from the armed services of the United States are entitled to wear this button.



ACTUALLY, SON, it doesn't really say anything. There's no inscription lettered on its face. But in another, larger sense that simple little gilt button in the lapel of your dad's jacket says a world of things.

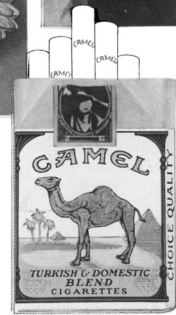
It says a service well done for our country... for freedom and humanity the whole world over.

It says that America, every American, is proud of the wearer... be it your dad, or any one of the

13,000,000 men and women who, like him, served in the armed forces.

It says that America will not forget their service—but will strive always to make sure that their service was not in vain.

The makers of Camel cigarettes publish this in tribute to the men and women of the armed services, and pledge that as they go on to final victory they have first call on Camels.



The Service First

Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard—wherever they go in their winning of the war, they have first call on Camels!

Camels

Figure 1.3 Honorably discharged veterans of the Second World War were presented with a gold-plated eagle pin in recognition of their duty and service to the nation.

uniforms and blankets, silk for parachutes, leather for boots, and metal for armaments and munitions. In January 1942, the US War Production Board (WPB) issued Order M-73, a series of sweeping regulations for the manufacture and sale of men's, women's, and children's clothing. These "style simplification" orders were later rolled into the broader, more detailed WPB L-85 series of General Limitation Orders in April 1942.²⁵

The athletic silhouette of the men's drape cut suit jacket, with its rolled lapels, broad shoulders, and trim, tapered waist, continued into the early 1940s. But following the implementation of L-85 regulations, many elements of construction and details were reduced in size or eliminated altogether. As *Men's Wear* reported in February 1942, styles of the new wartime "economy suit" shown at the recent annual convention of the Merchant Tailors and Designers Association were much trimmer and narrower than a year earlier. Jacket skirts were shortened, lapels narrowed, inner facings reduced, and pocket flaps and patch pockets eliminated. Some jackets were without lapels, and others completely collarless. Trousers were without pleats and cuffs; leg widths were reduced from 22 inches to 18 1/2 inches at the hem. The new suits used 2 5/8 yards of fabric compared with the typical 3 1/2 yards.²⁶ The muscular, athletic drape cut suit jacket now resembled more the slim, boyish styling of World War I suits. "Extremely wide shoulders and excessive drape are hardly in accordance with the spirit of the WPB conservation regulations," advised *Esquire* in 1942, "nor do they conform to the present standard of good taste in dress."²⁷ Similarly, style simplification rules were instituted for other woolen men's wear, including prohibitions of "tucks, bellows, gussets, yokes, belted backs and vents of suit coats."²⁸ Where previously most tailored and ready-to-wear suits came with two pairs of trousers, the second pair was prohibited by WPB sales regulations, as was the vest that came with three-piece suits. By the fall of 1943, though, some restrictions were relaxed as wool fabrics were successfully stockpiled through conservation and improved trans-atlantic shipping that had increased imports from Britain. Allowed once again were trouser cuffs and pleats, and jacket pocket flaps and patch pockets, particularly with suits made from reprocessed wool or wool/rayon and wool/cotton blends. Lengths of non-wool suit jackets were permitted a half-inch more at the skirt, and the limits to trouser inseams were rescinded. (Figure 1.4.)

Conclusion

The masculine identities of postwar American men had been shaped through their childhood gender role socialization in the 1930s. They had learned from their fathers and grandfathers the traditions of manhood rooted in the Victorian notion of separate spheres—one set of traits and guiding principles for men and a different set for women.

In the Depression era, fictional characters in American popular culture also provided boys with reinforcing messages of traditional masculinity. Movies of the 1930s were filled with hypermasculine role models such as adventurers, detectives, and cowboys whose moral strength and selfless duty defined them. Radio program storylines similarly featured men who were strong, dutiful, and