

# **Contemporary men's fashion and new technology; shifting perceptions of masculinity, menswear aesthetics and consumption**

Menswear; masculinity; cross-gender styling; cross-cultural; high-low technology; gay aesthetics; semi-bespoke, male consumption

## **1.0 Introduction**

This paper will explore contemporary menswear fashion and aesthetics in order to evaluate if the notion of 'masculinity' viewed through the prism of dress has shifted society's perception of what is considered acceptable to be a well dressed man. Entwistle writes that 'There is no natural link between an item of clothing and 'femininity and 'masculinity' but an arbitrary set of associations by which clothes connote masculinity in a culturally specific way (2003; p 143). Davis contextualises this gender difference in dress in Britain from 1837 when men clothes were to symbolise a 'highly restricted dress code' while women were permitted the freedom of an 'elaborated code' of dress (1994; p 39). This is linked to the period of industrialisation when men and women lived separated lives and men dressed sombrely to accord a successful working career. This restricted dress code has for decades been linked to male identity. However in the last decade new and emerging technology has aided menswear design and manufacture, particularly in the high end-luxury market. Combined with changes in male consumer attitudes and behaviour to fashion this has challenged the conventional restricted dress code. This appears to mostly affect luxury, high-end fashion brands, but if this becomes common across all markets then 'men and women will be free to express their unique individuality drawing from the broad vocabulary of masculinity and femininity' (Welters and Lillethun; 2007; p 135).

This paper aims to answer three key questions in the following discussion of contemporary menswear.

RQ1: Have men's fashion aesthetics become inclusive of 'cross-gender styling'?

RQ2: Has new technology been a driver in enabling men to become more able to co-create and consume their own fashions and masculine identity?

RQ3: What are the key challenges of menswear design, manufacture and consumption for the future?

## **2.0 Structure and Methodology**

This study will take a meta-view of several previous research studies conducted in the last six years by the author on the topic of menswear aesthetics and new technology in order to evaluate if a paradigm shift has taken place that could be described as 'cross-gender' or 'androgynous' male fashions. Or a minimum objective is mapping change from 'restricted' to 'elaborate' codes of dress that will affect the fashion industry. A paradigm shift occurs when a dominant paradigm set of beliefs is replaced by a new paradigm which is concluded from observations studying more than one component change occurring at the same time. This will be considered by reviewing several exploratory research studies published by Ross, which have been revisited and reviewed for this paper (2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). These studies were conducted using in-depth interviews with a sample of bespoke tailors, menswear designers and consumers in order to give a better insight and understanding

of upmarket menswear fashion by considering contributing critical factors including new technology, aesthetics, consumer behaviour and attitudes. It is accepted that a theoretically informed interpretation of research data generates rich descriptions of everyday contemporary tailoring, fashion design and consumption and can therefore be considered a legitimate scientific approach (Hackley; 2003; p 98).

Qualitative data was appropriate rather than statistics as the research is based on the acquisition of phenomenological knowledge. This took the form of transcripts and/or audio-recordings of interviews with field notes of observations and viewings (Hackley; 2003; p) of e-commerce sites, tailors press books, editorial advertisements, books and promotional cards. Ethnography is often considered 'just another form of observation' (Payne, 2004; p 74) but others explain that carrying out ethnographic research includes making subjects feel at ease and gaining 'trust' in relation to the researchers intervention so that material can be gathered about their working lives and circumstances. (Hackley; 2003; p 129) Such opportunities were presented when attending the MA Fashion Design Technology Show at the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Boutique menswear shop created for the static exhibition in 2010-11 respectively. Attendance at the fashion show allowed an overall feel for the new menswear collections and their aesthetics. While attendance at the Boutique (created for the exhibition for fashion buyers and fashionistas) gave the researcher the opportunity to view close-up the menswear garments from the collection. This enabled sensory perceptions, touch, feel and photography of the collections in detail and was complemented by in-person interviews with some of the 2011 graduate designers as well as the Course Director. Some researchers share the beliefs of the early anthropologists that in order to understand the world from a first hand position you must participate yourself rather than just observe from a distance. Described as 'participant observation' this is a main component of many of these studies (Silverman 2003; p 45).

The other main methodology utilised in all previous published studies is 'Content analysis' this can be used for either text-based or image-based analysis and was considered a suitable way of presenting evidence from the recorded transcript interviews and other visual material such as fashion shows, textile swatches, press books and internet e-commerce web sites. Silverman (2003; p 123) states that 'content analysis' is a favoured method in which researchers establish a set of criteria or categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each designation.

As well as reviewing previous published studies as a body of work on menswear aesthetics, masculinity and production-consumption trends two current interviews were conducted with prominent menswear professionals from London College of Fashion. Darran Cabon the Postgraduate Fashion Design & Technology Course Director of the Menswear programme and the Savile Row bespoke tailor and LCF Professor Ramroop, (OBE) to discuss new approaches to fashion design and tailoring practices (respectively). In addition informal conversations with menswear graduate designers, samples and biographic texts were made available to the researcher, all of which greatly contributed to the study.

However, in order to obtain an overview of the previous research studies a contextualisation of men's fashion style changes from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to date will help identify key changes in the dress codes; this will be followed by a discussion of consumption, new technology in manufacturing and 2010-11 graduate menswear designs in order to conclude with future trends for menswear design and manufacture.

### **3.0 New Male Consumption patterns**

It is important to identify the fact that until the 1980-1990's consumption was considered a feminine trait. Shopping signals performance as presentation of masculinity and according to Edwards in the Men's Fashion Reader (2009; pp 470-471) the development of a self-conscious and narcissistic masculinity, promoted in men's magazines is a significant factor in the change of attitudes and perception of the new man. Other critical factors that determine the shift in male interest in shopping include demographic changes such as the increase of single males with disposable income, lifestyle aspirations, and the cross-over effect of gay fashion styles in fashion (discussed in section 5.0).

Two studies conducted by Ross from 2006 and 2010 on luxury menswear consumption highlight key changes to a more self-conscious and sensitive male consumer. The first study tests men's sensory perception of textiles in identifying luxury fabrics with quality and authenticity in fashion apparel in store. This was based on the premise that the 'new man' is emotionally literate, sensitive and in touch with his feminine side and that he is into clothes, fashion and shopping. Ten different fabrics cotton, linen, wool, silk, cashmere, rayon, acetate, nylon, polyester and acrylic were shown to the participants to identify. A Likert scale from low to high sensory satisfaction and indicators of high quality was explained pre and post training sessions. In order to determine visual sensations and tactile sensations of fabrics and the reading of the two senses combined actual garments (without labels) were set out for touch and visualisation. The sample group was international men aged 35-55 two groups of ten males in each test showed that 'new man' was able to identify the luxury fabrics such as silk, cashmere and wool and evaluate quality by tactile sensory perceptions as well as with visualisation of the fabrics. Importantly the sensory panel testing provided a framework of how male consumers from a representative sample of Eastern and Western nationalities can interact with luxury fabrics. The implication for store designers and marketers is that the new male consumer is indeed able to shop and evaluate quality by experiencing touch from fabrics. For store managers and visual merchandisers this means menswear display must allow for touch of apparel especially luxury garments. (Ross; 2006; 454-457) Women have always touched garments when shopping to evaluate how the garment would feel on the skin and men now appear to have 'sufficiently evolved from the restricted codes of heterosexual masculinity in order to fully enjoy the retail therapy sensory experience in the same way as women' (Ross; 2006; p 458).

The more recent study of 2010 assessed if the niche co-design mass-customisation of formal menswear markets for same-sex suits could have cross-over appeal to the heterosexual customer (Ross; 2010; pp175-198). The conclusions showed the exploratory study gave an insight into the potential for a 'Professional' gay tribe (those that dress in an invisible gay style, except for codes read only by other gays) of consumers who were interested in style advice and co-design of their menswear apparel crossing over into the heterosexual mass market. This indicates that the traditional heterosexual formal market had sufficient 'cross-over' appeals not to distinguish the gay aesthetic from the 'new man' in his consumption of formal dress.

### **4.0 Menswear: Cross-gender, Cross-Cultural, Androgyny and Unsex styles**

According to Davis (2003; p 33-34) the practice of 'cross-gender' emulation in dress was common for men in privileged classes. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century men have played with adaptation of clothes that are originally gender-specific and could suggest femininity rather

than masculinity. These include the 'peacock revolution' of the early 1970's when brighter colours, pattern and softer textiles draped in a looser fashion to that of the traditional business suit or casual clothes became fashionable. These were influenced by three key social-cultural factors; black migrants from the colonies, subcultural youth styles and gay aesthetics emerging in Britain from the 1950's. As Ross (2007a; p 117) writes quoting Levy (2004) from her novel *Small Island*, many migrants, invited as British citizens from the colonies came to the UK in the 1950s and 60s and developed their own cultural interpretation of English style and identity. Stuart Hall claims that West Indian migrants have literally "styled their way into British culture" (quoted after Gates 2000: 171). Ross writing on black male dress aesthetics (2007) argues black males are often stereotyped as "the Classic Dandy" a form of feminizing and de-powering of the male (Powell, 2001 pp 217-239) highlighting the dichotomy that they are also credited with challenging the status quo in dress which is perceived as the threat of 'other' (Tulloch 1992: 84-85). These colonial strategies for containing the black man can be combined as in Powell's writings on 'Dandy Jim' who is represented as both a figure of fun and a feminised male by his choice of dress style (2001, pp 220). The black males attention to grooming and fashion detail related to the dandy-style may be ascribed as a form of black cultural performance, a heterogeneous response to "racial oppression" (Ross 2008; quotes McMillan, 2003, p 403). The wearing of a Zoot-style suit (made famous by the jazz musician Cab Calloway) was an exaggerated style made with luxurious fabric, big shoulders, a long jacket and high-waisted trousers with wide cuffs, often worn with braces and a wide colourful tie. Although in England the Zoot was less extravagant and luxurious The English subcultural reading of the black Zoot style was still countercultural to the status quos and certainly not worn by gentlemen. Hardie Amies, considered the repository of all knowledge on English dress, identified the key features of a gentleman's English suit as originating from the tight-fitting riding jacket (1994; p 43) the binary opposite of the Zoot. This black dandy style for men became a trajectory of the rebirth of 'the new dandy' which emerged in England during the 21st century. Breward considers that this rise of this Dandyesque style 'has more to do with self-actualized consumerism...than it does with any effeminization of traditional masculinity' (Breward in Cicolino; 2005; p 13).

## **5.0 Menswear Gay or Cross-Gender Styles?**

Ross (2009; p 5) writes quoting gay fashion historian writer Cole (2009) that the social and legal environment in both the USA and UK up to the 1960's meant that many gay men did not have an overtly gay identity through their dress choices. However during the menswear revolution of the 1960s the negative association of an interest in fashion and homosexuality began to diminish, with the rise in subcultural fashions sold by new menswear boutiques. This made it acceptable for young men to once again be interested in fashion and spend time and money on clothes and their appearance (p 391). But many of these subcultural fashions developed originally from a gay style. For example contemporary styled suits and jackets were initially sold to a predominately gay, "theatrical and artistic" clientele by Bill Green from the shop Vince near Carnaby Street. John Stephen, known as the 'King of Carnaby Street,' worked at this shop with the Beatles tailor - Dougie Millings. John managed to produce these styles faster, cheaper, and for a younger male market. (Ross; 2009; quotes De La Haye, 1999; p 146 and Gorman, 2001; pp 35) In the USA this close fitting "European style" (as it was known) was worn primarily by gays and also sold from boutiques in Greenwich Village. With the demands for equality and recognition, gay men began to address their appearance. There had always been gay men who dressed in a conventionally masculine

style, but in the 1970's ultra-masculine styles became prevalent. Such styles had the new-tribal name of 'Clones' as they were extremely tight-fitting copies of heterosexual styles. (Cole p 393) Wilson writes how this almost uniform styles of dress had a number of advantages the most important being 'The look would not offend at work for most colleagues would miss the significance' (2003; p 202).

The discourse on self-concept and self-image which shapes the new masculinity studies (Edwards, 1996; Mort; 1996; Nixon; 1996 and Beynon 2002) looks for shifts away from the stereotype ideal of man as 'active, physically powerful and heterosexual' and explain this change through men having more involvement with the family and home which encourages feminine-associated traits. As contemporary women are also more independent men are encouraged to pay more attention to their own appearance and grooming to win a sexual partner. Therefore heterosexual men's attitudes to fashion and consumption are now no different to gay men. In fact, according to Beynon (2002) 'men are increasingly trying on new and different masculine identities' and it must be presumed the next generation of men will be even more experimental with their style and grooming.

What is clear from the discussion of the evolution of subculture and gay styles is 'At both ends of the fashion spectrum, couture and subcultural style, there is space for experimentation' (Ross; 2009; p 8 quotes Arnold, 2001; p 109) and this experimentation can now be fulfilled by the male consumer co-designing with the fashion company. Since the women's and gay rights movements of the 1960-70's led to a questioning of the stereotyped masculine and feminine fashion 'Androgyny' became a key word and this manifested itself in variety of ways. Initially, the move was towards a more feminine look for men, but the radical lesbian and gay community rejected this in favour of a more masculine look for both genders. (<http://www.glbtc.com/arts/fashion> 'Androgyny' or 'Unisex' styles as it was also referred to, were epitomised in the extreme manifestation of the Gucci autumn/winter 1996/7 collection of suits modelled by a male and female looking like identical twins. (Ross 2009; p 8 quotes Arnold; 2001, pp118-119) Arnold considered that at this time of economic downturn designers used the unisex diffusion range as a means of staying afloat (p 120); this parallels with many fashion companies now who are design reactive and can adopt 'same-sex' or 'unisex' styles for the mainstream heterosexual menswear market as fashion has become more playful and references gay culture since the 1980s.

## **6.0 From 'Highly-Restricted' to 'Elaborated Dress' Codes**

The fashion designer who best epitomises a shift from 'highly restricted' to 'elaborated' men's dress codes is the French couture Jean-Paul Gaultier who introduced sarongs and pants-skirts in his fall 1984 men's collection. The sarong was made famous by the metrosexual football icon David Beckham wearing his wife Victoria's beach sarong and being photographed by the media. Gaultier's view on male identity and masculinity was that men could share the same wardrobe as women but men will be masculine and women feminine in their dress styles. This statement could be interpreted as 'cross-gender' fashion acceptance at least in the luxury menswear market (Davis; 1994 pp34-35). Interestingly the avant-garde designer Rudi Gernreich predicted in 1970 'that by 1980 male and female dress would be interchangeable' (Welters & Lillethun; 2007; p134). However this is clearly still only in the high-end luxury menswear sector and with a niche target market.

In summary men's fashion in the late 20<sup>th</sup> to early 21<sup>st</sup> century had undergone significant change and societal acceptance of the 'cross-over' appeal of gay aesthetic styles and the enculturation of black ethnic groups leading to subcultural and hybrid styling. This may

indicate a shift in the perception of what has been perceived as traditional masculine dress codes and indicates a more 'cross-gender' fashionable look. The next section will discuss how new and emerging technology has changed design, manufacture and consumption of menswear in luxury and niche markets.

## **7.0 New technology for design and manufacture of menswear**

The recent study conducted in 2011 (Ross) identified the shift in consumer attitudes and behaviour towards the top end of tailoring; the target market had become more democratised and less niche. This larger younger male market was not so entrenched in traditional bespoke services and manufacturing methods and was therefore more readily accepting of suits made in the 'Semi-Bespoke' method. The description is a fusing of traditional ready-to-wear design and cut-to-make with technical elements of craftsmanship in finish; a mixture of haute couture and made-to-measure industrial manufacture (Mintel: 2005; pp 1-7).

Italian menswear company's Cornellani and Ermenegildo Zegna use machines that provide almost bespoke services. The measurements are taken for the pattern in London or it is possible to scan the person's body shape and just feed it into a computer, with the fabric the person selects. The computer will then draw up a template of the person, allowing a visualisation of how the fabric would flow. An avatar is also available now that can rotate 360 degrees showing the customer how the clothes will look from all angles. A photo of the customer's face can also be uploaded for a realistic simulation if preferred.

Professor Powell identified shifts in the mass market which is now fragmenting into niches where manufacturers can reduce the costs of specialised products with advanced technology and the transfer of digital information. This has already been successful in the bespoke footwear market and "digital tailoring" in the USA. Brooks Brothers successfully combines the traditional with the new by turning round customised suits in two weeks from scanning-to-finish (2003; pp 1-9). This means that a larger section of the market can benefit from good quality clothes and have a say in their look by co-designing. In terms of new online environments such as web 2.0 and 3.0 tools which enable the consumer to participate in the co-creation of their suit design Ross (2010) studies the possibilities through the 'pink market' for civil-partnership suiting and other gay styling that could be a growth niche-market for online-mass-market tailors.

In the 1960's and 70's if you wanted different individualised style you had to seek out a tailor who could make clothes to your specifications rather than buying ready to wear menswear, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is possible to do all of this online through e-commerce sites that enable you to co-create your own look. Additionally look-book and style advice can be given online or in person if the consumer requires an additional service. According to several writers (Mort, 1996; Nixon, 1996 Edwards, 1996 and Beynon; 2002) the most significant change in masculinity in the last two decades is through consumption, with fashion and grooming products being effectively spread through magazines and the media.

## **8.0 E-commerce and E-magazines for men**

Until the 1990s men were not considered consumers of, or interested in, fashion and therefore their own fashion magazines did not exist. Now there is not only traditional fashion media for men such as GQ, Maxim and Men's Vogue but also new style online magazines such as the recently launched Port edited by Dan Crowe; that contains style briefings and lifestyle

including poetry and celebrity fashions. Also as an interactive blog fashion magazine MFM (men's fashion magazine) gives news and views on brands from Prada to Topman and keeps men up with the future trends in Fashion week around the world. Edwards considers that gay sexuality was a significant if unacknowledged factor in the 'development of men's style magazines targeting men and masculinity' (1997; p 74). The fashion and style magazines that emerged in 1980-2000 represented men as narcissists styled and photographed in a homoerotic way and this included the use of 'androgynous models like Nick Moss (brother of Kate Moss)' (Jobling; 2006; p 144).

In addition to fashion magazines online fashion boutiques have been emerging including ASOS Black launch in September 2010 followed by Net-a-Porter's launch of Mr Porter for men in January 2011. Both e-commerce sites used editorial-style photographs as well as look-book styling for men. The typography, packaging and fashion show presentation is modernist in style and in line with female fashion gifting. The purchased products are boxed and wrapped for delivery in order to create the excitement of a received upmarket gift, an experiential strategy learnt from female consumption of fashion products. Slater (1997; 193) writes that "commodity aesthetics" now comprises the product, design, packaging and advertising imagery to combine in the symbolism of the objects constitution. Fashion mediation established for men and growing in demand means men having as much access to style advice and consumption choice as women and expecting the same design, production and consumption experience.

## **9.0 The Hi-Low technology masculine/feminine debate**

For the last two decades there has been a debate between traditional craft methods used in fashion and high technological mass production. Sewing, crocheting, embroidery and lace-making were considered feminine crafts and since the 20<sup>th</sup> century many of these have been lost to manufacturing methods. The discourse on the art/craft divide and its associations with femininity and domestic practices has been established since the 1980's by feminist art historians such as Rozsika Parker (Burman; 1999 quotes Parker 1984 and Turnbull, 1987; pp 9-10 and Parker and Pollock 1992). However in the last few years this has shifted to a hybrid combination of what is known as 'hi-tech-low-tech.' MIT Media Lab research this new context in technology, which they describe as enabling diverse audiences to design and build their own technologies by developing tools that will democratise engineering and enable traditional crafts, textile design and fashion design to be explored (Buechley; 2011). Put simply this means the combination of new digital technologies and the resurgence of craft in a contemporary context. Usually considered as binary opposites, craft and technology are combined successfully. Menswear designers are now incorporating crafts such as lace-making and crocheting in to their collections establishing both a cross-gender aesthetic and craft production which is no longer associated just with women's work. A case-study of this cross-gender aesthetic and hi-low technology is the LCF menswear prize winner, MA Collection of the Year 2011 graduate Matteo Molinari.

## **10.0 Traditional menswear tailoring with feminine techniques**

Born in Bellunio Italy, Matteo focused his collection on menswear that fused traditional tailoring with craft textile techniques such as intricate hand-made crochet. When interviewed he discussed his collection as 'Menswear based on feminine techniques.' He wrote that the work in his final collection considered the gender differences and which characteristics are naturally associated with the feminine, knowing that this was not logical but how culture and

society build a system of values in mutual relationships. This affirms Davis contextualisation of gender difference in dress from when men's clothes were to symbolise a 'highly restricted dress code' while women were permitted the freedom of an 'elaborated code' of dress (1994; p 39). The dress value code system appears to be innate but is contrived to be a completely natural gender divide, however in the 21<sup>st</sup> century this is now breaking down. Matteo confirms this by writing 'Doing menswear based on a exclusively feminine technique such as crocheting was....a big challenge I took to develop something new and original' (Molinari biographical text; 2011).

Matteo's collection uses a black and white palette and includes a figure-hugging bolero jacket with crocheting panels on the back. Another example from the collection uses a large cowl-neck crochet collar on the coat that can be used as a hood. The shape and form of his tailored clothes are modern and slim-cut with feminised details. The general look is masculine but with shades of androgyny or cross-gender aesthetics (See picture 1 and 2 below).

**Picture 1**



The early 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a revival of interest in handcrafts by both men and women as well as an improvement in the quality of yarns used for crocheting this enabled Matteo to utilise borders and shell-shaped stitches on his collection. However he insisted on the stitches being geometric and graphic in style to 'enforce the menswear nature of the collection and to avoid the effect of lace on male garments' this was achieved by openness of the stitches. Matteo manages successfully to achieve a 'cross-gender' style aesthetic using hi-lo techniques again blurring boundaries between women's work and menswear technology design and manufacture for his collection. This reinforces Gaultier's view on male identity and masculinity that men could share the same wardrobe as women but men will be masculine and women feminine in their dress styles (Davis; 1994 pp34-35).



**Picture 2**



Although Matteo uses feminine techniques fused with traditional tailoring his colour palette remains dark and formally masculine. However Ozwald Boateng UK menswear designer and Andrew Ramroop both use either bright colours for their menswear or exotically designed linings creating a hybrid of West Indian/African colour and design to their traditional bespoke tailoring that is again considered cross-gender in palette. Ramroop recently launched a signature suit with lapels and pocket stitch lines cut at an angle which emphasises the body's natural curvature and shape and which he suggests will be equally acceptable as an aesthetic style for both male and female suits (Interview July 2011).

### **11.0 Cross-Gender Styling**

From the 2010 Victoria & Albert Fashion Show, Boutique Exhibition, LCF Graduate Showtime texts and interviews, other design and ornamentation utilised on menswear and more usually associated with feminine design are identified. These include use of a brightly coloured palette, pattern, corsetry details, fur trim, beading and sequins. Interestingly Darran Cabon explained that the menswear and womenswear collections were selected purely based on suitability for this retail space and with no concept of gender-related fashion.

Examples discussed include Asger Juel Larsen MA Fashion Design and Technology graduate 2010 who utilises eyelets and cord on a panel in the shape of a V on the back of a menswear collection jacket that evokes memories of ladies corsetry. Another 2010 graduate Elizabeth Barker was an apprentice at Savile Row and so her design collection tries to push boundaries

between the ‘conventionality of menswear by questioning the colour, texture, pattern and shape with a radical approach’ (Biography; Showtime LCF; 2010). Entitled ‘Romantic Affections’ her collection show strong influences of womenswear corsetry pattern cutting and draping with silk, jersey and taffetas for the metro sexual man. Angela Sung Nga Kok fuses hi-low technology with masculine/feminine fabrics such as her knitted rabbit fur suit! (Biography; Showtime LCF; 2010). Thomas Miller exploits and experiments with the concept of ‘men in skirts’ which originated from Gaultier (V&A Exhibition, February 2002). Miller cultivates the eccentricities of English dandyism with skirt-suits (Biography Showtime, 2010).

Other contemporary examples at the Fashion show and Boutique exhibition included brightly-coloured digital prints, which Darran Cabon describes as ‘Moving away from a digital mirror image effect which has become synonymous with McQueen. The new Digital print technology is now a form of artistic expression.’ These printing techniques offer the opportunity to fuse art and fashion with designs used innovatively on many of the menswear collections. (Interview February 2011).

Darran also explained the new techno synthetic fur, which is soft and not like general fake furs that have a cotton base, but because this fabric contains more rayon it has the ability to soft-drape. This new techno-fur fabric enables the designer to achieve a cross-gender sensory look and feel for their menswear collections. An example of this is displayed on a male mannequin at the Boutique exhibition, a black fur shirt softly draped over satin trousers layered with a long sequined waistcoat, sensual and androgynous in style. Real fur is also used on much of the menswear collection. Darran comments ‘Techno-fur and real fur for menswear are connected by innovative techniques of either novel fur pattern cutting, drapery or pleating’ (Interview February 2011).

## **12.0 Shifting perceptions of masculinity and menswear aesthetics**

Returning to the question raised by RQ1: ‘Has men’s fashion aesthetics become inclusive of ‘cross-gender styling?’ It appears that contemporary fashion as reviewed over the last six years from previous studies and recent research places less emphasis on gender distinctions on dress codes and more on a ‘cross-gender’ style with shape, colours, patterns, fabrics and trimmings all freely utilised for menswear design. This also challenges the conventional restricted male dress code of the past identified by Davis (1994; p 39) and enables a more elaborated code to be established as natural for menswear. It also reinforces the fact that men over the last decade are becoming increasingly interested in fashion and grooming and this is an integral part of their masculinity and not a feminised or homosexual trajectory.

RQ2: ‘Has new technology been a driver in enabling men to become more able to co-create and consume their own fashions and masculine identity?’

The commercial success of new and emerging technology in many areas of the fashion industry has enabled a shift in men’s fashion design, manufacture and consumption. Examples discussed in this paper include the birth of men’s fashion magazines, traditional and e-journals. Online fashion shops running parallel with women’s stores, giving lifestyle advice and up-to-the-minute news of fashion trends for men, provide fast consumption and delivery. 2D and 3D technology enabling men to participate in the design process and co-create their own styles. Digital technologies such as print, body-scanning and 3D manufacturing giving more rapid and less costly access to formal and informal fashion

apparel, means more male consumers having the opportunity to consume luxury well-fitted apparel.

RQ3: 'What are the key challenges of menswear design, manufacture and consumption for the future?' To keep abreast with the shift in attitudes to masculinity, menswear design and aesthetics, by not adhering to conventional, pre-conceived masculine colour-ways, fabrics and shapes but experimenting with a more elaborated dress code influenced by cross-cultural, cross-gender styling. And demonstrating an understanding of how this fits the 'new man' ethos. In terms of men's consumption there is evidence that they shop in a discriminating fashion using all sensory perceptions and expect a positive experience that includes visual display, style advice from magazines, professional stylists and other fashion mediation. The studies show that the choice of co-design, good advertising and marketing presentation of men's fashion and accessories is a critical instigator leading to consumption.

The future fashion and consumption trends indicate men are now considered interested in style and appearance and many are dedicated consumers of fashion, like their female counterparts. This demand from 'new man' is set to continue, with menswear at the top end reinventing itself to include cross-gender aesthetics, which shows a shift in how many men and society view fashion and masculinity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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