CONSUMING CAPITAL, FASHIONING IDENTITY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF
MEN'S LUXURY FASHION CONSUMPTION

by

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Abstract

Men's clothing consumption is an under-researched area. Assumptions about the "femininity" of being concerned with one's clothing and appearance has prevented scholarship in this area. This study attempts to test a theory of identity based on Bourdieu's cultural capital and Giddens' narrative identity, asking: Do men who buy luxury fashion do so in order to support the story of their lives? This theoretical framework may also be applied to future research on identity. Interviews with adult male luxury consumers were conducted in order to test this theory and find information on the current purchasing habits of male consumers. Key themes that emerged from these interviews included a confirmation that clothing plays an important role in building men's self-esteem, that interest in luxury clothing often coincides with a pivotal time in a man's life course, and that class still plays an important role in style and purchasing choices.

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Introduction

Men's consumption of fashion is historically an under-researched area. Unlike most other areas of research, studying women is normative in this field (Galilee, 2002; Entwistle, 2004). Fashion has long been deemed frivolous, and has only recently become the subject of serious academic study. However, this does not mean that men do not consume fashion goods or consider them important (Kates, 2002; Entwistle, 2004; Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012). This research will address gaps in the literature pertaining to men's consumption of luxury goods and their impact on identity. Following from the notion that consumers use the goods they purchase to shape and maintain their identity (Warde, 1994; Shankar, Elliott & Fitchett, 2009; Stebbins, 2009), this research will examine how consumptive practices are used to create a narrative about one's life.

It is important to expand on the research in this area because the relationship between men and their fashion purchases is under-studied. The market for men's luxury goods is expanding. For example, the recent shift in attitudes towards men's grooming has caused a boom in the area of men's toiletries. The market in the UK totalled £917 million in 2010, and is expected to grow to £1.1 billion by 2015 (*Men's Toiletries*, 2012). Furthermore, despite the recent recession, the luxury market only suffered a temporary decline of 8%, while the most popular luxury brands actually reported increased sales during that time (Sherman, 2009; Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2011). Prior to the recession, the luxury market was expanding rapidly (Amatulli & Guido, 2011), and this expansion was attributed to three causes: First, that the wealthy were consuming more luxury goods than in previous years; Second, that the number of wealthy individuals was increasing globally (due mostly to economic growth in China and India); and third, and important for this study, the middle and lower classes began to purchase

luxury goods (Truong, McColl & Kitchen, 2010). These trends are continuing since the beginning of economy recovery after the recession, and the men's market is mirroring this growth. Even in the midst of the recession in Canada, men's luxury retailer Harry Rosen reported healthy sales figures and plans major expansions across the country (Wong, 2012). Larger luxury brands and chains also continue expansion in established and emerging markets as demand for luxury goods grows. Further expansion in China and India, as well as footholds in Korea, Latin America, and the Middle East (Tynan et al., 2009; Choo, Moon, Kim & Yoon, 2012) will serve to increase interest for and acceptance of men's luxury fashion consumption. As well as exploring this increase in spending from the consumer's point of view, this research will also illuminate the ways in which men connect with their material world, and how they both justify the expense of luxury goods and build them into their self-concept.

Wisman's study of household savings in the United States as compared with other developed countries has showed that half of individuals and households in Canada are foregoing savings and even going into debt to outspend their neighbours and supposedly achieve a higher standard of living (2009). Finally, studies such as Shankar, Elliot and Fitchett's (2009) examination of how identity is shaped and exhibited through music consumption has contributed to the literature in this area. However, the way in which fashion and luxury items shape the identity, particularly for men, has not been explored.

In this study, one-on-one interviews with male luxury fashion consumers were conducted to examine how their clothing helps to construct their self-identity. Questions concerning not only their buying habits, but also their relationship with clothing and how they use it to bolster self-confidence will allow for a nuanced understanding of men's relationship with their material goods.

This paper will attempt to explain these findings according to a framework combining Giddens' (1991) work on self-identity, namely narrative identity and the reflexivity of the self, and Bourdieu's (1984) understanding of taste and capital, especially cultural capital. An explanation and justification for this combination theory will be provided in the following chapters, along with an exploration of current research on masculinities, especially with respect to self-image, fashion and identity formation, modern consumer culture, cultural capital and related marketing and consumption practices.

Theoretical Framework

Identity theory is a large and prominent subdiscipline within sociology, with many competing theories and schools of thought on how to best conceptualize individuality in a collective sense. Two of the most respected theories of identity to be put forward in the modern context are Giddens' reflexivity of the self (1991) and Bourdieu's habitus and related social capital theory (1984). Taken together, these theories can explain the reasons for men's luxury fashion consumption as it relates to identity formation and maintenance. To begin, it is important to explain these theories and highlight some critiques and pitfalls of both Giddens and Bourdieu. This will explain the reason for combining their ideas to create a new framework for the study of self-identity.

The Reflexive Project of the Self

It is essential in understanding Giddens' concepts and theoretical positioning that one first understands the context in which he situates them. Late modernity (or high modernity), as Giddens describes, is defined as the current (at the time of his writing) phase of development of modern institutions, "marked by the radicalizing and globalizing of basic traits of modernity" (p.

243). Giddens defines these traits as belonging to the industrialized world, beginning in the era of post-feudal Europe, but reaching their peak in the 20th century. Modernity is dependent on a number of axes, of which industrialization is only one. Capitalism is another major force that shapes high or late modernity due to its impact on individuals in shaping their labour power (see Marx, p. 58-61). A third dimension Giddens credits to Foucault. He writes, "surveillance refers to the supervisory control of subject populations, whether this control takes the form of 'visible' supervision in Foucault's sense or the use of information to coordinate social activities" (p. 15). Finally, late modernity is characterized by the possibly of "total war" in which the potential destructive capability of armaments exceeds by far the previous eras (p. 15).

Taken together, these four axes of modernity are shaped by the conditions of late modernity to produce a distinct social world characterized by risk. Of particular interest to this study is the absence of psychological security and the reflexivity of the self which Giddens posits exists in the contemporary world. The reflexive project of the self is essential in Giddens' understanding of late modernity because it reinforces the fragmented nature of life in this time period. He writes that all people are "in some sense" aware of how reflexivity affects their own lives (p. 14). Contemporary life is not nearly as prearranged as in previous eras, and so questions about identity and lifestyle choices have to be confronted day-by-day. "The self becomes a reflexive project" (p. 32) so that the individual will know at all times "what one is doing and why one is doing it" (p. 35). In this way, one's life becomes a narrative, a story that is continuously upheld by decisions and actions concerning behaviour. In order for the narrative to be consistent and desirable (to the self and others) the individual must follow a path of actions that is based on a coherent storyline of his own devising. How that story is devised and how it can be consistent across time Giddens does not fully explain, and this has been the source of many critiques of his

work which will follow. However, Bourdieu does explain this consistency in his theorizing, which is one of the strengths of combining their work, which will be discussed later.

If the individual diverges from their narrative identity as hitherto expressed they suffer anxiety about the self and about the "false self" which they are creating. They become "disentangled" from their bodies, or "unembodied" leading to a feeling of the body being separate from the mind, Giddens says, as the puppet is from the puppetmaster (p. 59). The degree of comfort with the self and the body is directly related to the degree of adherence to narrative identity, which will become evident in later exploration of the interviews. Giddens writes, "Shame bears directly on self-identity because it is essentially anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography" (p. 65). The explanation for this is that identity is not a mere set of traits that one can possess but is "*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography*" (p. 65, emphasis added). Knowing one's own life story and related choices is an indispensable feature of late modernity.

The project of the self is further complicated by the great number of lifestyle choices available in the late modern age, the accessibility and number of which have been compounded in recent years by the widespread use of social media, and the internet more generally. Choosing who to be is a complicated action in what Giddens terms a "risk culture" (p. 108). Late modernity is characterized by risk assessment. Choices are made according to conjecture, a thinking-through of how things may turn out. Each significant action is therefore subject to appraisal: Will this fit with my narrative of myself, and will this action be either a low-risk or a balanced risk worth the projected outcome? The plethora of available choices also carries a risk that the individual can choose the wrong path and fail to self-actualize. Giddens borrows from

Friedan's theories to posit that "modern culture does not gratify the basic needs to grow and fulfill [one's] potentialities as an individual" (p. 216). The myriad choices available concerning who to be necessarily comes with certain doubts – a person may not always be confident in their choices.

Furthermore, these choices and options regarding actions are subject to limitations based on class, which will be linked with Bourdieu in the end of this chapter. The various potential choices may not be available to all individuals at all times. One factor constraining individual choices is class background: "In late modernity, access to the means of self-actualization becomes itself one of the dominant focuses of class division and the distribution of inequalities more generally" (p. 225). Class, and especially class background, plays an important role for some participants in this study, and the differences between: 1. Access to self-actualization when a participant has risen in class status, and 2. Attitudes about self-actualization between those men and others who originated in a higher social class. These points will come under discussion especially as related to Bourdieu's theories.

Lastly, it is important to outline Giddens' concept fateful moments, which he defines as "moments at which consequential decisions have to be taken or courses of action initiated" (p. 243). This concept will be essential in explaining how interview participants came to develop their appreciation for luxury clothing, and explaining what spurred their interest in clothing and cultivating their appearance. Giddens' description of fateful moments leads in an obvious way to negative interpretation of these events due to the language he uses to describe them. He says that fateful moments are disturbing and radical shifts that force individuals to rethink parts of their narrative and their plans for the future. However, in light of the interview data, fateful moments

may be understood as a positive force that allowed interview participants to change their narrative to incorporate an identity as a man who enjoys clothing and luxury.

Critiques of Giddens

Several scholars have criticized Giddens for advancing a theory of self and of practice that is unfinished. Warde asserts in his 1994 article that modern processes of consumption are a form of suicide, contrary to all previous writing on the subject. Suicide, he writes, is patterned in such a way as to suggest that

> isolable social forces underpin the propensity … It is less a
>
> personal decision than might be imagined; social circumstances
>
> as well as individual inclinations determine its incidence. There
>
> are strong parallels between suicide and consumption" (p. 884).

He goes on to say that consumption has defied total explanation by social scientists, and that his account may shed new light on the reasons for consumption behaviour. However, his critiques of Giddens are what is of central importance to this paper. Warde makes a valid critique of Giddens in saying that Giddens contradicts himself by asserting that standardized behaviour is at play in mass consumption habits, but in his section on lifestyle and lifestyle sectors, saying that the related choices are based on a process of differentiation. However, Warde's following critique, that in Giddens' explanation of the choices that lead to the development of the personal narrative are never the wrong choices, it seems like a failure to understand Giddens' writing. Warde says, "It seems… if you make a lot of inappropriate choices you simply become a different person … you cannot have a wrong self, though the self may exhibit some pathological attributes" (p. 881).

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He says that consumption is not the risky process that Giddens asserts takes place within a risk society. However, as previously explained in the above section, Giddens (1991) clearly states that the wrong choices can lead to anxiety and a feeling of being separated from the body, which is more than the minor anxiety that Warde interprets from his study of Giddens.

Warde further states that, in order to achieve self-actualization, the individuals on Giddens' theory must be highly disciplined and "turn egoism into a virtue" (p. 889). However, considering that Giddens' theory really does allow for the leeway that Warde has overlooked, a few "wrong choices on the path to self-actualization can be assimilated into the identity (fateful moments, perhaps?) causing anxiety, but not derailing the self-identity. Warde fails to realize what Giddens truly means by the reflexive *project* of the self. It is an ongoing process, and the end goal is subject to change as the individual faces new obstacles, reacts to fateful moments, and changes their circumstances of living.

Finally, Warde makes a fairly solid point that Giddens' individuals appear not to need the affirmation of others to make their choices and feel confident in them. While Giddens (1991) does acknowledge that social pressures may make one feel out of place in unfamiliar surroundings, and whom one chooses to socialize with has an effect on the self, he does not give a formal account of how 'the other' plays into the reflexivity of the self. This is another instance of how Bourdieu can supplement a deficiency in Giddens' theorizing.

Schatzki (1997) also poses valid critiques of Giddens' work. He posits that both Giddens and Bourdieu over-intellectualize their accounts of practice theory, and suggests that study of Wittgenstein can offer a simplified version of practice and actions (Schatzki's critiques of Bourdieu will appear in a following section).

Giddens and Bourdieu also both assert that structures are in place which govern the actions of individuals. For Giddens, actions exist in a structure whereby each action contributes to the reproduction of the structure. This nexus of actions becomes a practice which upholds the structure. Schatzki critiques Giddens in saying that he does not explain why the individual's "interpretation of the rules" is classified as a procedure of action (Giddens, p. 23). This knowledge is tacit, though Giddens fails to explain how this process works. This failure to flesh out the logic of practice is definitely a failing in Giddens' work which may be partly remedied by Bourdieu's account of practice that the habitus is "a feel for the game", the game being the field (*The Logic of Practice*, p. 66).

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's (1979) study (later published in English in 1984) *Distinction* was an attempt to explain the reproduction of social class in France in the mid-20th century, However, his theories that emerged from his analysis, habitus, taste and capital, have been used widely by sociologists in an attempt to explain he structure of social life elsewhere in the developed world. While Bourdieu's theory is not without its critics, and may grow less and less applicable as the world advances into post-modernity, his concepts are still useful in explaining motivations for action from a class standpoint, which is a useful lens for understanding the men in this study. To begin, it is necessary to explain the above mentioned concepts thoroughly. Habitus was a concept that Bourdieu continually worked on throughout his career, and although it played a large role in *Distinction*, the most widely accepted and clear definition comes in his later work *The Logic of Practice* (1990):

> systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures

predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles

which generate and organize practices and representations that can be

objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious

aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in

order to attain them" (p. 53)

Like Giddens, Bourdieu believes that these structures reproduce themselves; however, it is through class dispositions in his account that habitus and the field the subject operates in are reproduced. Habitus is acquired through tacit learning: "Most often [competence] results from the unintentional learning made possible through domestic or scholastic inculcation of legitimate culture (*Distinction*, p. 28). Bourdieu refers here to the habitus of the upper classes, who easily comprehend high culture and the "right" choices and actions due to their early learning, their habitus. However, each individual's habitus is adapted for the field and class that they operate in. The mastery of practice, or "feel for the game" Bourdieu speaks of, is equally applicable to those of any social standing within their own field. This knowledge of how to act and who to be is tacit within one's own social world. It is when one is outside of their understood field of practice that they become uneasy in their choices and actions (*Distinction*, 1984; *The Social Structures of the Economy*, 2005).

Taste is developed through the learned class habitus and is directly related to cultural capital in that it is produced by and reproduces class distinction. Tastes are foundational to class identity, and the negative judgment of taste (as Bourdieu notes in his working class interviews, "that's not for the likes of us", p. 380) is as much a description and boundary of classed taste

judgment as a positive appraisal. In fact, Bourdieu says that it is sometimes easier to define one's taste by describing the things one does not like. Negative judgment of the tastes of others is used as a gatekeeping tool to reinforce what is "good taste" for each class segment. These negative assertions were present throughout the interviews in this study.

Bourdieu's understanding of taste in is contrast to classical writing on the subject. Kant's (1987, originally 1790) judgment of fashion in the context of taste stipulated that fashion is antithetical to good taste, stemming from human vanity, and inconsequential when judged against the dictates of art and high culture. Taste, for Kant, is not definable, nor does it belong to any one segment of society. Taste is personal, and Kant seems to imply that it is also tacit. Bourdieu, in contrast, clearly prizes the tastes of the upper classes as being legitimate in *Distinction* (1984).

Before Kant's time, matters of taste were thought to be self-evident, and capable of being learned by all. Gronow (2001) writes, "making judgments of taste, and distinguishing beauty from ugliness, was as self-evident and easy as telling salt from sugar" (p. 91). These good tastes were, of course, the tastes of the dominant class, and though Bourdieu (1984) believes that the dominant classes have greater power of judgment in these matters, he acknowledges that once elite tastes become part of mass culture, they are abandoned in favour of the new.

The three primary types of capital (subject to later critique and emendation) that Bourdieu (1984) outlines are economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Economic capital allows those with high reserves of it to consume a greater quantity of material and cultural goods. Economic capital reproduces itself in that class position also tends to reproduce itself. Those that grow up in a wealthy family tend to get high-paying jobs and vice versa. High

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economic capital also supports the acquisition of cultural capital because it gives access to cultural goods, as previously stated.

Social capital refers to those networks of influence, support, and personal relationships that one can draw on to their own benefit. Bourdieu explains how this form of capital also reproduces itself, especially in terms of the education system which he studied in detail. In addition to academic and cultural learning, the elite also form close networks that allow for the advancement of those in the network, and the reproduction of their tastes and values. The number and quality of these connections make up the stores of social capital for the individual.

Finally, and of particular interest for this study, cultural capital comprises the skills, knowledge and education that a person gains from socialization in the family, formal education, and wider social networks. While some of this capital is transmitted very literally, as in the case of schooling, a great deal of it, Bourdieu argues, is transmitted in the same way as taste, through tacit learning instead of direct teaching. This capital is linked directly to the habitus, and is attained in the same way. Cultural capital is directly related to consumption and the consumption of fashion in that Bourdieu posits that taste in clothing is class-based (relative to amount of cultural capital). He writes,

> The naïve exhibitionism of 'conspicuous consumption' which
>
> seeks distinction in the crude display of ill-mastered luxury, is
>
> nothing compared to the unique capacity of the pure gaze, a
>
> quasi-creative power which sets the aesthete apart from the
>
> common herd by a radical difference which seems to be inscribed

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in persons (p. 31).

The link between taste and cultural capital is quite obvious, and the class-based component of these concepts will become quite evident in the analysis of the interviews in this study. The judgment of taste in fashion is undeniably linked to class upbringing, and larger stores of cultural capital also bring with it a greater sense of assurance in one's style (echoed by Rafferty, 2011), and more confidence in one's ability to carry out actions and choices in the field of fashion.

Bourdieu's structuralist account can seem very rigid when one studies only his theoretical concepts that spring from *Distinction*, but Bourdieu does build agency into his account of practice. Despite the structuring effects of habitus, field and class, he posits that an individual's practice is always a *strategy*, in order to maximize personal benefit, and also to achieve higher social standing and accumulate capital. Lury (1996) writes of Bourdieu's theory: "Although the habitus provides a framework for action, it is not static, and can be shaped by the outcome of the interaction of the strategies adopted by different social groups" (p. 86).

Critiques of Bourdieu

One of the main critiques leveled at Bourdieu is that he does not account for emotion as part of his practice theory. Rafferty (2011) explains that "emotional capital" (p. 245) is central to an understanding of the logic of practice, and control of one's emotions, or displaying the proper emotions, is also a site of class division and an opportunity to gain capital. Rafferty explains that emotions are not merely abstract and borne out of the passing moment, but are "evaluative judgments" (p. 245). She also says that particular emotions, such as shame and pride, are experienced more or less frequently depending on the social status of the individual. Emotional

tendencies are shaped in the same way as the habitus, and indeed are part of the habitus. Rafferty argues that Bourdieu has overlooked an important dimension of the habitus and capital structure that would allow for a more nuanced understanding in his theory.

Schatzki (1997), as noted previously, critiques both Bourdieu and Giddens for their overly-complicated accounts of practice theory. Schatzki particularly notes of Bourdieu that, as Rafferty has said, he overlooks emotion as an important factor in his theory. He argues that emotional states drive the actor to actions not governed by (and most importantly, not explainable by) Bourdieu's theory. He suggests instead a theory including teleoaffectivity, or the understanding that emotions are displayed in order to achieve certain ends and with a focus on these ends, after Wittgenstein.

Directly related to this critique, Schatzki writes that Bourdieu's theory calls for the subject to have mastery of all situations, and knowledge of how to proceed in any situation, due to a mastery of the rules governing conduct. A common-sense observation will prove that this is not so. Anxiety and uncertainty are pervasive in the lives of every individual. This is another reason why an understanding of emotion is necessary for any theory of practice.

Rocamora (2002) presents a fashion-based critique of Bourdieu's work. She says that while Bourdieu argues for a homology of the different areas of high culture, his theory cannot account for the linkages between mass culture and high culture, and specifically how interrelated mass fashion and high fashion tend to be. One of the main problems with Bourdieu's analysis of fashion is also a problem throughout his work. While the theories he presents in *Distinction* may have been excellent accounts of the culture in France in the 1960's, in his later work he never revisited his earlier constructions to question if they still applied to modern, changing society.

Rocamora notes that Bourdieu favours transhistorical accounts of cultural models, and while his work may account for the period up to the publication of *Distinction*, the changes in fashion that came later cannot be accounted for in the same way. Mass fashion has become legitimized by high fashion at a rate that Bourdieu could not anticipate, though he does acknowledge that it is a fairly regular occurrence for mass culture to be legitimized into high culture (1984).

This failure in Bourdieu's theorizing has an impact of the data for this study, as most of the men interviewed are middle class and tend to consume a range of fashion goods, both high fashion and mass fashion. While this is a common practice for modern male consumers, Bourdieu's theory does not allow for a nuanced understanding of this. Instead, one can assume Bourdieu would simply say that the middle class consumer does not have the economic capital to consume all high fashion goods, and therefore his taste allows him to make a preference for necessity. In other words, the preferences for lower-cost fashion goods for the men in this study is an indication that they cover up their inability to purchase more expensive goods by saying that they prefer the lower cost goods. This explanation certainly lacks the nuance that Bourdieu shows in his understanding of high culture, and moreover, would probably be rejected as either too simple or plainly incorrect by the men interviewed.

The Case for a Combined Theory of Self-Identity

Bearing these important critiques in mind, it is still possible to assert that the combination of Giddens and Bourdieu's theories make for a compelling account of luxury consumption behaviour and the reason for the pattern of actions that produces it. As Giddens and Bourdieu's theories are both practice theories, concerned with the explanation of the systematized actions of

individual actors in the modern world (Schatzki, 1997), they lend themselves well to blending and can complement each other's deficiencies.

The first of these deficiencies, as noted previously, is that Giddens does not fully explain the role of class in the reflexive project of the self. While Giddens makes a nod to class as being a force of either advancing or limiting ones' choices and prospects in the reflexive project of the self (1991), he does not directly address how this is so, and what the individual might do to circumvent any class-based problems. Bourdieu, however, bases his entire argument on class. As previously explained, the habitus is structured by class, and the field that one operates in is class-based, dependent on the class of the individual in question. The accumulation of all types of capital is dependent on this class position, and finally, the learned, class-based behaviour will remain with the individual in the form of the habitus, regardless of any rise or fall in social status (1984). This understanding of class, which will be supported by the interview data, can be used to explain what Giddens neglects, or assumes is common sense: how class can limit or boost one's access to the means of self-actualization.

Next, Warde's (1994) critique that Giddens asserts individuals are not dependent on the affirmation of others for their self-confidence can be addressed by Bourdieu's account of practice. Bourdieu can answer for the place of "the other" on two points. First, social capital is accumulated through social networks and connections with others. The more one has the esteem of his fellows, the more social capital resources he can draw on (1984). Practices and actions undertaken must, therefore, uphold the narrative of the self and be amenable to oneself and others in their network, as Giddens asserts in his theory (1991). Secondly, Bourdieu's negative judgment of the taste of others, as a form of gatekeeping, ensures that individuals have the

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approval of their fellows in order to gain acceptance in their social group, or class. Anyone who attempts to adopt the tastes of another class, higher or lower, is subject to censure (1984).

Finally, Bourdieu can supplement Giddens' failure to fully explain his logic of practice though his concepts field and habitus. While Giddens' practice, as previously explained, is without an explanation for how its structures are upheld and how it continually reproduces itself (1991), Bourdieu explains that the field is the system of social positions that the individual operates in. Fields, which are class-based, interact with one another, and operating in the field necessarily means a struggle for dominance in terms of accumulating capital (1984). Bourdieu's account of the field and how the habitus structures and is structured by it represents a thorough account of practice in social space.

There are some areas where Bourdieu is less thorough, however. Bourdieu's account of practice can seem rigid and static, with little room for personal choice and agency. Though Bourdieu acknowledges agency in his account (1984), he does not take the time to explain how agency can produce differing or unexpected outcomes. Giddens' theory is much more flexible on this point, as he emphasizes the strategic nature of practice. While Bourdieu says that all individals possess a "feel for the game" (1984) without relating how this mastery is possible, Giddens instead posits that the "risk culture" (1991) forces everyone to consider their actions carefully in order to maximize positive outcomes.

One of the central critiques of Bourdieu's theory, as mentioned, is that he does not address emotion in his account. While Giddens does not directly discuss the variety of human emotion either, he does make allowances for the impact emotions can have on the decisions that develop the self, and certainly devotes much time to discussing anxiety (1991). An account of

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anxiety would strengthen Bourdieu's work considerably, and so this represents another reason why these theories are stronger in combination.

In summation, the reflexive project of the self is strengthened by adding a class-based dimension to the theory, which helps to account for the building of narrative identity when one is consuming luxury products, which by their nature, are a high cultural capital product. Self-identity is created by continually constructing and reconstructing the story of one's life, and the desire for the accumulation of status and cultural capital drives the consumption patterns of the individual. In order to achieve status and self-respect from one's peers and oneself, the consumption of luxury products is built into the narrative self. Through a careful reading of the interview data four concepts taken from this theory will illustrate that this assertion is correct. These concepts are: Giddens' reflexive project of the self and fateful moments, ad Bourdieu's cultural capital and negative judgments of taste.

Literature Review

Several topics have bearing on this research due to the nature of the interview participants. While consumption of clothing is the central theme, for the paper it has to be analyzed through the lens of identity, class and masculinities. Each of these themes will be important in the examination and explanation of the findings of this study. Furthermore, this introduction to the literature in these areas will support the choice of theoretical framework outlined above.

Identity and Consumption

Literature points to clothing being pivotal in identity formation during the teen years and young adulthood. The following studies of clothing and identity show how clothing is

foundational in developing the self and the maintenance of self-concept. Marion and Nairn's (2011) study of female teenagers in France found that, despite their youth, these girls were able to contrast a rich narrative of their clothing lives, "including past, present and future", and link their experimentation with clothing to their experimentation with different identities (p. 52). The researchers also uncovered a very interesting pattern of behaviour in the girl's story-telling. The girls all used the past and present in explaining their narrative of the self (as expected, and as echoed by the men in this study), but they additionally used a fictitious, desirable plot from their future (2011). Not only did these girls dress for the person they believed themselves to be at present, but they actively constructed their wardrobes, or envisioned the type of clothing they would buy, for the woman they hoped to become. This project of the future self was absent from the current study, possibly because the men had fulfilled their own teenage dreams of growing older and becoming independent.

Srigley's (2007) study of women recalling their clothing memories while they were living in Toronto during the Great Depression posits that clothing is foundational in the construction of self, and that clothing memories are equally important in telling the story of one's life as any other material objects. Srigley writes, "As the recollections of the women featured in this article make clear, clothing tells an important story about one's security and identity" (p. 97). The interviews with the men in this study also prove that money and economic security, both past and present, are an important part of clothing memories and narrative, and relate directly to the self-concept. The class position that money provides (or that lack of money denies) is a theme that will be discussed in the following section, as well as in the analysis of the interviews.

Money also plays an important role in Mile's (1996) study of teenage consumption. He illustrates how it is central to identity formation for young people by allowing them to gain the

esteem of their peers, being part of the group, but ironically striving for individuality at the same time. His study was conducted in a popular sports shop that sold sneakers, and short interviews were conducted with young people about their shoe choices, which were very revealing in terms of teenage culture and the development of self-concept. Miles writes, "Far from wanting to express their individuality through clothing, it appeared that teenagers were more concerned with constructing their individuality through subcultural parameters that were already well-established, and which therefore invited minimal risk on their part" (p. 148). Risk avoidance is, of course, central to Giddens' understanding of late modernity, and Miles also places it at the centre of his analysis of postmodern teenagers. He also found that price was definitely a consideration with his interview participants. The manager of the store was quoted: "I can guarantee if we had two pairs of trainers that were absolutely identical except the name and if one was Fila and one was Hi-Tec and the Hi-Tec ones were £10 cheaper, we'd sell the Fila far better. Easy." (p. 148). This status-based consumption seems to be a feature of youthful identity-formation, and most men reject is as they grow older. The men in this study, now adults, did sometimes recall their youth and the method of dressing they adopted according to the subcultural group they were a part of, however, they rarely established a direct link with the dress of their youth compared to their present clothing tastes, which may help to prove that youth identity is not a stable construct, as Miles and other researchers have argued (see Thornton, 1996).

Shankar, Elliott and Fitchett (2009) explored narrative identity through long interviews with participants about their record collection. These old records, kept long past the time when records have become obsolete, act as material markers of a former identity, and are embedded with meaning. Kept more as mementos than for their functional purpose, and exploration of a

participant's record collection allowed them to comment on their previous identity and link it to their current self-concept. The importance of the individual's material history is also a subject of consideration in this study. By asking participants about their current and past clothing as specific objects, the significance of these items to the narrative self becomes apparent.

Studies from marketing experts also focus on the identity of consumers as a means of establishing brand loyalty and gaining trust. He, Li and Harris' (2012) study advocates a social identity perspective in order to understand consumer's motives in using products to develop "self-expression, self-enhancement and self-esteem" (p. 648). They found that a strong brand identity was related to consumer trust and respect for that brand. Brand loyalty is integrated into the self-concept, as the brand ideals are often those that consumers identity with, and align with their personal ideals. Adding to this, Hosany and Martin's (2012) study posited that people consume brands and products not only for their functionality, but also for their symbolic meaning. They use products to bolster their self-image, and buy products that support "image congruence" (p. 685). However, the researchers found that there is a significant difference between actual self-image and ideal self-image, and the products and services that were bought were chosen in order to align with the ideal instead of the real. This relates to the reflexive project of the self and Bourdieu's assertion that the middle class often strives to better their position through consumption. Consuming for an idealized lifestyle is performed in an attempt to achieve that lifestyle. The following section will deal with middle class consumption in greater depth.

Class and Consumption

An understanding of class-based consumption is vital for this study. Holt's (1998) paper asks the question: "Is it true that social class is no longer produced through distinctive patterns of consumption?" (p. 1). He asserts that critics of Bourdieu have failed to understand Bourdieu's research, and so have misconstrued his meanings and failed to use his theories properly in conducting studies of consumption and class. Critics of Bourdieu have further stated that Bourdieu's work is not applicable outside of France/ in the United States, due to the assertion that the high arts play only a trivial role in the cultural life of elites in the United States, and these elites are more likely to be cultural omnivores than consumers of high culture (see Peterson & Kern, 1996; Khan, 2012). Holt conducted interviews with persons he deemed to have high cultural capital (HCCs) and low cultural capital (LCCs). He found that, as in Bourdieu's work, the LCCs had the 'taste for necessity' (p. 7). Unlike the HCCs, while Holt found to have extensive discursive practice in taste and culture, the LCCs "describe their taste in terms of traditions in which they have been raised, which makes their choices comfortable and reassuring" (p. 8). Indeed, Holt found that his HCC participants were willing to discuss their collections and their tastes *ad nauseam*, while the same questions about their reasons for their judgment of taste made his LCC participants very uncomfortable. Holt writes, "A primary attraction with many of these consumption objects is that they serve as resources for … conversations about the relative merits of different goods within a category" (p. 17). Holt found that the HCCs very much enjoyed the process of being interviewed and discussing their tastes, a result paralleled in the current study. In contrast, the LCCs in his interviews could not make the same evaluations. "The interview was uncomfortable for both parties because we both

understood that some of my questions encouraged her to express connoisseur tastes and that she was not able to respond as an HCC person might" (p. 17).

In terms of clothing, while both groups expressed in interest in comfortable, practical clothing, their reasons for these choices clearly demarcated their class differences. Functional clothing for HCCs was described as an aesthetic based on the unity of practical design and good construction (a definition mirrored in this study), and opposed to the whims of fashion. Functional clothing was deemed to be clothing of good taste. In contrast for the LCC participants, functional clothing was related to the place the clothing might be worn (work, church, etc.) and the necessities of practicality and comfort. Holt also found that the HCCs focus on authenticity, connoisseurship, and creating a discourse around the self-actualization process as related to the material world were all very important for HCC participants. These results will be explored further in the discussion section.

Rafferty's (2011) study on women's clothing consumption parallels these results. Speaking to women from lower-class and middle-class backgrounds, Rafferty found that their narratives surrounding their fashion consumption were markedly different. She found that women with less cultural capital were occupied with being fashionable and derived self-worth from keeping up with trends, while women of higher cultural capital were much more invested in cultivating personal style. She also found that these women were often attempting to transcend their class status through clothing consumption. The middle-middle and upper-middle class participants in her study congratulated themselves on their "smart shopping", meaning their ability to bargain hunt in department stores for sales on designer goods, and their superior taste in selecting "timeless" designer items (p. 249). The working class women in her study were more likely to overindulge in fashion consumption in an effort to be trendy. "Chasing an aspirant

habitus become all-consuming because the boosts to esteem that she experienced helped shelter her more fragile sense of self-worth" (p. 249). However, Rafferty notes that while the middle class women may have some limited success in achieving a higher status through consumption, the lower class women in her study were constantly under duress in terms of their economic reality, and eventually had to abstain from their indulgent consumption and accept their class position. Similarities in Rafferty's study and the current study will be discussed in a later section.

Katz-Gerro and Sullivan's (2010) study on voracious consumption is meant to supplement existing research on omnivorous consumption, mentioned above. Their study measures the amount of time spent in leisure activities outside the home by men vs. women. Noting that persons of higher social status are more likely to engage in a greater amount of leisure activity and consumption, the researchers found that men, and particularly high-status men, are the most likely to participate in a wide range and number of leisure activities. These findings relate to Holt's (1998) assertion that high cultural capital consumers enjoy the narrative of their consumption as much as the activity itself. These men are more likely to be focused on self-actualization, and so their activities of consumption are a strong part of their personal story.

On a different note, Wisman's study of the decline of the savings rate for American households in the past 30 years also lends colour to the current social ideology on spending and fashion consumption. In 2005 and 2006, the savings rates were actually in the negative, and Wisman advances that no economy theory could possibly account for this problem. He asserts that class status and conspicuous consumption hold the answers. Wisman states that due to the American Dream and the widespread belief that upward mobility is possible in the United States, most households are unwilling to worry about savings, and instead structure their consumption in order to strive for the status of the class above, believing that the day will soon come when they

actually achieve that class position. This is compounded by the fact that the economic division between the rich and the poor is steadily increasing – households must strive even more to emulate the consumption of the class above them. Evidence of this aspirant consumption will be explored in the results of the current study.

Masculinity and Consumption

Though few studies have been conducted solely on men's consumption habits, those that have represent a growing body of literature concerned with studying masculinity as a social construct, and evaluating how men respond to notions of ideal masculinity (see Lowrey, 2006). What it means to be male is undergoing extreme changes, and the study by Galilee (2002) illustrates how rapidly men's attitudes towards fashion have changed in contrast with the men in this study. Galilee, spurred on by the rhetoric of the "new man" and the "new lad" in men's magazines and other media at the time, conducted a series of interviews with middle class men in London and Lancashire. He found not only that the men were reluctant to admit a great deal of interest in their clothing, but that they sometimes responded aggressively to questioning on the topic. "Some people may automatically assume that a male researcher interested in masculinity is homosexual … this fear became obvious, as when I asked the respondent about where he would shop for clothes he snapped back, 'I do have a girlfriend, you know!'" (p. 43). Galilee also found that many of the respondents said that they had very little disposable income for spending on clothes, despite the entire sample being middle class, which is another contrast to my study, which will be discussed later. Overall these respondents displayed embarrassment and anxiety around discussing clothing, leading Galilee to conclude that men are not interested in clothing consumption and still classify it as a feminine activity.

A later study also examines portrayals of masculinity. Ricciardhelli, Clow and White's (2010) study focuses on men's magazines available in Canada, and how the norms of hegemonic masculinity that are present in these magazines are tempered by more feminine (but still destructive) instructions that the body and physical appearance should be manipulated in order to attain a desirable lifestyle. This is tied directly to the reflexive project of the self. They write, "transforming the body becomes about more than transforming how the body looks; it changes the way the body is lived" (p. 66). This focus on the phenomenological experience of the body is tied to the message that a properly controlled body, one that meets the elusive ideals of masculine beauty, will in turn lead to self-actualization. A discussion of the body will follow in the analysis of the interviews in this study.

A study in gender influences in garment purchasing found that in India, a developing market in terms of luxury brand expansion and the changing roles of men and women, there was no difference in the frequency of shopping trips. Further, men showed equal interest in shopping, but were more likely than women to regard it as a chore, and typically spent half the amount that a woman in the study would spend per trip. Interestingly, and a result which correlates with my study is that men are much more interested in quality in a garment than any other cue, such as brand or style of the garment, or the approval of shopping companions or sales associates. They placed great emphasis on the feel of the garment, which was also an important determinant for the men in this study (Sondhi & Singvhi, 2006).

Stokburger-Sauer and Teichmann's (2011) study also examines the role of gender in the consumption of luxury brands. They found that men are less dependent than women on the opinion of others in their luxury consumption, but are interested in using their consumption to highlight their success. While they found women exhibited more positive attitudes towards

luxury brands overall than did men, this is not to suggest that men do not value luxury goods for their uniqueness, status and hedonistic qualities, as the results of this study will echo. However, Lertwannawit and Mandhachitara's (2012) study found that men who are highly materialistic are more likely to be influenced by the opinion of others and engage in status consumption than men who are not materialistic.

Finally, Kates' (2002) study of gay consumers in Canada lends interesting insights into the similarities and differences that exist in shopping behaviours and the construction of gay vs. straight identity. He found that gay men often participated in more gatekeeping behaviour according to their personal interpretation of gay masculinity (especially around looking gay, but not "too gay", and some men in the study mocking referred to other men as "ghetto queens", those that they deemed to be too integrated into the lifestyle of the gay neighbourhood, and too focused on the outward display of their alternative identity" (p. 393). Others in the study also employed the terms "mainstream gay" and "subcultural gay" to describe their appearance and lifestyle, and delineate themselves in contrast to others (p. 392). Kates classifies all the men in his study as bricoleurs, piecing together their identity from the options available to them; trying to fit into their community while still maintaining individuality.

Methods

This study was conducted with 12 adult men who self-identified as luxury consumers. The interviews ranged in length from 25 minutes to an hour and 45 minutes, and consisted of a series of open-ended questions in a non-specific format, allowing for spontaneous questions and a free flow of conversation. This interview format was chosen because it was conducive to making the participants feel relaxed and open to sharing their experiences, as well as allowing

the researcher to interject comments and questions, and explore sub-topics as necessary (McCracken, 1988). Questions included asking the participant to remember a favourite piece of clothing, and remember when they first began to show interest in clothing and luxury goods to encourage a narrative format. Asking the participant about positive and negative shopping experiences also allowed them to express their connection with clothing as a narrative (see Appendix A).

Participants were recruited through word-of-mouth and snowball sampling techniques. It was important for this study that the participants all self-identified as luxury consumers as this was a study of identify and participant's reflections on their luxury spending and the reasons for it. The amount of spending on luxury goods or the number of luxury items a participant owned was not a necessary factor for inclusion in this study. Rather, it was that the participant *thought of himself* as a man who buys luxury goods, and would be willing to explain his thoughts and habits concerning luxury consumption.

Participants were asked to fill out a short demographic survey upon completed their interviews. This was necessary in order to show that participants came from a variety of ages and a variety of income levels (though participants all fell into the category of middle-class). Participants had an age range of 28 to 57 years. Income levels were not disclosed by all participants, but the range of those disclosed was $50,000 to $125,000. Of those who disclosed sexual orientation, six identified as straight, four as gay, and one as bisexual. The sample was chosen with an aim to attaining a broad range of experiences and perceptions about luxury goods and purchasing habits. Though the ability to generalize from this study is small due to the limited number of participants, the study is exploratory and therefore meant to lay the groundwork and suggest themes for larger studies in this area of research.

Interviews were audio recorded then transcribed for analysis. The transcriptions were them submitted to the participants for member checking (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Interviews were conducted over a four month period from October 2012 to March 2013. The researcher acknowledged the potential for the participants to be inhibited when speaking about their clothing and placing importance on as clothing and shopping are stereotypically seen as "feminine" pursuits (Galilee, 2002; Saad & Vongas, 2009; Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2011). The researcher also acknowledged her female social identity and explained to the participants that she was in a position of learning and strived to be open, positive and encouraging in all interactions with participants. Due to the nature of self-report interviews, it was especially important to be conscious of creating a warm and permissive environment during the interviews and allowing participants to voice their thoughts without interruption from the researcher. This also served as a check on the data by limiting researcher effects (1994).

When interviews were complete, the transcribed data was analysed and coded according to the methods recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), including data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions. The data was first categorized with descriptive labels, and then clustered into larger themes for analysis. The data was also checked for validity by coding for negative evidence (1994). Additionally, the data was coded by an independent researcher to minimize researcher effects.

Initial themes to test the theory of identity included a narrative about a favourite luxury item, or the memory of a particularly positive shopping experience. Next, the researcher looked for the participant to talk about their luxury spending and regard themselves as a large spender on luxury goods, and to demonstrate a sense of fulfillment in spending on luxury goods. Third, for the participant to intimate that he has a strong bond or emotional attachment to some or all of

his luxury goods. Fourth, the researcher looked for signs that the participants found that their luxury goods gave them a feeling or having status or being respected. From the analysis, four dominant themes were chosen to be the focus of this MRP. These themes are the reflexive project of the self, fateful moments, class-based consumption, and negative judgments of taste.

Results

The results were grouped into the four themes outlined above, based on the literature review and theoretical framework. To begin, evidence for a classed understanding of these interviews will be presented.

The fact that the interviews showed a strong class focus supports Bourdieu's assertion that class permeates habitus and taste judgments. To illustrate this assertion, the interviews with men from a lower or working class background all demonstrate knowledge of previous class disadvantage and a striving for class status, or an urge to distance oneself from their former status. In the interview with B.D. (age 37, language professor) he demonstrates an obvious awareness of his rise in class.

> This is what I tell people. It's a very easy, sort-of psychoanalytic
>
> thing. I grew up relatively poor, sort-of working class, and my
>
> mom made my clothes or we got it at BiWay. And I remember too
>
> that my mom would iron my jeans with a crease [laughs]. … All
>
> these kids I went to elementary school with suddenly realized they
>
> were rich because they lived in the Hills and their parents were

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professionals and that kind of thing. My dad works shift work.

So at that moment - that was kind of when brand awareness

happened. And I was very aware that I'm never going to be able

to afford these clothes, and I remember thinking like, "One day I

will be able to have some nice clothes." And that was kind of the

basis.

Later in the interview he explains in a very self-aware manner how he came to learn cultural capital and the correct habitus.

The other thing too is when I was in Grade 12 I had gone from the

Village to Spain, that's how I got into Spanish, is that I did that

Grade 12 exchange. And that changed my life, because I went from

living in the Village with a big backyard and everything to living in

a flat in downtown Valencia with a seriously upper-class family. And

so all of a sudden, I have access to a country club, I have access to a

sailboat, right? They treated me like a son. They taught me how to eat

properly. I learned all of these codes, all of these upper class codes I

learned through this family. How to drink, how to – all of that stuff.

So that was kind of – that was pretty formative as well.

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However, B.D. acknowledges his working class habitus, which as Bourdieu says, is still present as part of a person's character and self-identity, however much they may learn to put on the appearance of another class. When asked about whether he buys clothing for fashion or for function, he says:

> I guess I don't separate those two anymore. I rarely buy something
>
> if I think I'm only going to wear it once, or twice, or very rarely.
>
> Because… yeah, I still have that old gene that compels me. If it's
>
> going to be in rotation then fine. If it's only going to be sitting there
>
> then it either has to be a great deal or a gift. [laughs]

Working-class habitus also manifested itself in different ways with other men. While B.D. was very concerned about crafting a professional image that spoke to his idea of what a Spanish professor should look like, including an interest in quiet luxury instead of logos and branding, the interview with J.B. (31, pediatrician) revealed that an interest in brands and markers of status can be important for men who did not grow up with access to luxury goods. He says:

> Well, I don't know! I grew up poor. So buying these luxury items,
>
> to go back to… I didn't have a lot growing up, but now I'm doing
>
> pretty well and I'm happy, but this is all new to me.

J.B. acknowledges that he needed to learn upper class codes in order to correctly shop for luxury clothing and engage with this practice. He emphasized his love of certain brands

(Burberry, Moncler, Louis Vuitton, Bottega Venata) continually throughout the interview, and talked about how his favourite pieces were those that clearly showed their designer status.

> I got this beautiful – it's like a casualwear – You know that same
>
> shirt that I showed you? It's like that, but with the Haymarket print
>
> everywhere. So I was so excited to wear it because it was like, my
>
> first real piece of – because I don't normally like shirts like that,
>
> just because I find that I have to get them adjusted, and to me it's
>
> just not worth the money … So that's what got me hooked on
>
> Harry Rosen afterwards, because it's included… it looked
>
> phenomenal. It looked like it was made for me. And I wore it at the
>
> hospital. And I know a lot of people at the hospital. Every nurse
>
> stopped me and said – and everyone around me said, "That's a great
>
> shirt." And it was wonderful. And I think I think it brings me
>
> confidence, and it brings my patients confidence [laughs]. I mean,
>
> do you want like, a sloppy doctor?

J.B. further states that he enjoys the attention luxury consumption brings. "And I also like it when people who know the brand recognize that you're wearing. I'll be honest with you. When

people say, "Oh, that's Burberry." J.B. also concedes that luxury goods can be intimidating to many people because he believes that they are unaware of the actual cost of the products.

> So I think if more people knew how much these things actually were
>
> they would be less…
>
> RH: Intimidated?
>
> JB: Yeah, less intimidated by it – that's a really good word. That being
>
> said, I kind of like the fact that they think it costs a lot of money
>
> [laughs]. But little do they know… Like, I bought this jacket for half off.
>
> I mean, originally it was totally overpriced, but you know…

The participants from higher class backgrounds also showed their class habitus in their luxury goods preferences, particularly in their reasons for their purchases. G.L. (age 52, corporate lawyer) says, "I always had an understanding of it. From the start, I always knew that I preferred to get fewer but better pieces". G.L. had said that he prefers to buy his luxury clothing on sale or at outlets, which might point to an assumption that he views this clothing as being overpriced or only for status. However, later in the interview, when asked whether he would pay full price or a premium for his clothing, he says:

> Because I don't really view it as a premium. It's only a premium to the
>
> extent that you could be comfortable and function properly in something
>
> else. As silly as it sounds, I just wouldn't be comfortable and so…

34

Yeah, I consider it a price difference for sure, but I don't consider it a

premium because I just don't see myself buying the other because it

would just have no value to me.

Similarly, F.G. (34, management consultant) relates that his focus is on quality clothing.

RH: So would you say your parents made you more quality-conscious

than brand-conscious?

FG: Yes.

RH: And even through high school, when you were first starting to buy

your own clothing?

FG: Well, we were immigrants, so it was all about durability and multiple

use, and it's just carried on through my own life. And my parents dress

well. They're always very classy. They're very simple in the way that

they dress, but they're always dressed well for the occasion. They're not

seeking attention, but they're also not a distraction.

The interviews were also rife with taste judgments. Bourdieu's assertion that one's tastes are more easily described by negative judgment of the taste of others found great support in the course of the interviews. Nearly every man made an assertion about their taste versus others, or

what they deemed to be in poor taste. There were differences in how these judgments were framed and expressed, however. For example, Z.K. (31, fashion designer and student) said:

> Because a lot of people are like, "Oh, I'm going to go for the black
>
> Prada shoe!" I don't believe in that. I think for me, it doesn't bring in
>
> any special personality. There's really nothing other than the branding…
>
> perhaps the quality and the comfort are there, too, but there really isn't
>
> anything special – for me, at least.

In contrast, many men gave much harsher critiques of the taste of real or imagined others. For example, P.S. (37, television producer) was very animated in his critique of blindly adopting trendy clothing:

> There's a lot of ugly True Religion jeans! Why the fuck are they so
>
> much money? Like, the dudes that wear them with the thick – True Religion
>
> are the ones that, they have the style with the thick, embroidered hems on
>
> them, right? Who looks good in these? There was one bouncer in Edmonton!
>
> He had this slicked back, dyed blonde hair, and so I was like, "Ok, the thread
>
> in your jeans matches your peroxide blonde hair, and you're *really* big up here
>
> [chest and arm muscles] and you're wearing the tight, plain black tee, so you're
>
> kind of rocking the threading. But anyway, whenever I see them anywhere,

that style, I just want to vomit.

P.S. also critiqued trendy clothing at several other points in the interview. Similarly, many of the men also critiqued those whose taste in clothing was clearly for status display functions. Z.K. recounted how important status goods were in his early 20's in his native Mexico:

So I remember I showed up to the class and I can't remember what

I was wearing but I remember it was flashy. I've always been very flashy in

terms of colours in what I wear. And I remember one of the girls came up to

me and she was like, "Oh my God, what are you wearing? What brand is that?"

And she literally came from behind at my shirt and wanted to look at my tag!

I was so put off but it was so… Honestly, at the time it wasn't as striking. It's

very, very brand-oriented. Like in high school, all the girls would have their

LV bags and it's very status-driven.

B.D. is critical of those who do not conform to modern standards concerning trim fitting suits and well-tailored clothing. He said:

Like the American cut – they should charge double for the amount of

cloth they have to use. Same for the shirts! It drives me crazy when you're

watching American TV and you see these guys and their shirts go down to

37

here. It's like a sail. My wife and I went to see a TSO [Toronto Symphony

Orchestra] thing, and the guy who came out was wearing a suit that was

like, two sizes too big. And she was like, "I know what you're thinking!"

And I was like, "I didn't say anything!!" [laughs] Then I was like, "BUT!"

and she was like, "You're right!"

C.B. (34, menswear designer) is also quick to delineate bad from good taste:

But then there's other brands that have big, glaring logos everywhere.

And I mean, men don't like that. Men with taste… don't like that. It's not good.

So it's better to keep that on the inside of your clothes and let the fit, the colour,

the fabric, the construction shine.

Similarly, F.G. related his choice to purchase his first luxury car, an Audi. He said, "I

didn't like BMWs because everybody gets a BMW the minute they get a little bit of money, so I

found that annoying… and obnoxious".

An extreme example of taste judgment comes from J.B., who dictated the type of

handbag his sister ought to wear:

I bought my mom a Louis Vuitton bag, a little Speedy, and then we

were in Hawaii in October, and then I told my sister, "What kind of Louis

Vuitton bag do you want?" She wanted a [indistinct], and I said "That looks

ugly, just get a Neverfull." I said, "Please bring out a medium Neverfull in

the damier" because at least then that will look – you know the checker, right?

So I went to the salesperson and I said, "We'll take it."

In contrast to these displays, J.C. (57, writer and editor) notes that seeking status can take

a different, but equally problematic form.

> I do feel confident when I'm well-dressed. I think most me would
>
> acknowledge that. I think you'd have to be brimming-full of such
>
> confidence if you can feel good when you're sloppily-dressed. There's
>
> a level of people, especially in the arts, who take pride in looking like
>
> a wreck because it makes them look more important – they must be
>
> serious if they can look so bad [laughs].

In contrast to the judgments they made of others, the men spent much more time talking

about themselves and the development of their tastes and style. To begin this illustration of

Giddens' theories, the fateful moments related to clothing in the lives of the interview

participants will be highlighted. Many of these fateful moments occurred in the transition

between teenage years and adulthood, getting one's first "real" job on the way to building their

career, or the transition to a new career. In this way, fateful moments are connected with big life

changes. In the times when identity is in flux, or undergoing change, the way these men thought

about their clothing changed as well.

For both Z.K. and E.M. (30, surgery resident) a summer spent in Paris helped to focus their interest in fashion, and inspire them to embrace their clothing as a means of self-expression. For Z.K., it represented a huge shift, as he changed his career plans:

>Eventually when I left high school I went backpacking in 2000 and
>
>then I went to Paris. And I think it was really that trip. I actually
>
>remember having… I think at the time in high school I said that I'm
>
>going to go study economics; I'm going to get into financial whatever…
>
>And I was also thinking about international business because I speak
>
>Spanish, and I have a brother who has the connections, and anyway…
>
>So when I was in Paris, I was there for like, a good two or three
>
>months, and it was I think near the end of my trip. I was sitting on a
>
>bench, and I think it was at Les Tuileries. Something just sort of clicked
>
>about why I found Paris so attractive. And what it was that attracted
>
>me towards it, a big part of it was, the clothes. Not necessarily the fashion
>
>scene, but the variety of the forms of the way that they dressed. Even
>
>though a big chunk of them wear the classic black, everyone whom you
>
>would see was different. I remember an older lady with these bright
>
>purple tights, but very chic, you know? ... then I enrolled in fashion school.

For E.M., his experience in Paris encouraged him to experiment with clothing, and develop his latent interest in fashion.

> I think I got into it when I was in university, when I started to… you
>
> know when you learn who you are… and I started paying attention to
>
> what I was wearing and I went to… I went backpacking across
>
> Europe, and I went to Paris, and just seeing how people dressed,
>
> the nice stores, that's what really got my attention. But I wouldn't
>
> go into the stores [laughs], because I was nervous. So that's where it
>
> started. And then when I came back I started to look at magazines and
>
> all you saw… all the magazines that were available to me like *Details*,
>
> *GQ*, just what I could get going into the depanneur, all the articles never
>
> satisfied me. So I started going to the library to get the specialist
>
> magazines and the European magazines.

For A.I. (28, radio producer) both his transition into a full-time career and his move from a small city to a large urban centre allowed him to fully express his personal style. When asked at what point he became interested in luxury goods, he said:

> I'd say my mid-twenties. When I moved here to Toronto, for sure.
>
> I had – the reasons were I had access to better stores, because there

just wasn't anything in Newfoundland that would be… you know what

I'm talking about, right? A lot of it was for older dudes and I could not

afford any of it back then on freelance journalist pay. So yeah, access,

and I was also more comfortable in dressing the way I wanted to dress.

A lot of it is socialization, but I mean, as you know yourself [researcher

and participant attended same university], Newfoundland is a very…

There's a uniform in a certain way, right? And if you dress differently

you're already like, marked as something. Like, you're part of this

scene, or you're that kind of person, which is bullshit. Here, it's more

freeform and there's more access to good goods. And I started making

more money so then I could afford to… And I always believe I will buy

something that's expensive and built well versus something that's cheap,

cost-effective but flimsy. Because the built-well one will last longer.

Finally, a later-stage career change prompted other men in this study to change their

wardrobes and self-presentation, and this change had an impact on their self-identity. In contrast

to popular opinion, the ongoing project of identity (Giddens, 1991) means that identity shifts can

take place well into adulthood, not just in the early stages of life. J.C. recounts his experience

when he first became the editor of a men's fashion publication.

When I started working for [Harry Rosen] I was a really bad dresser.

I really didn't care about it much or know anything about it. So that's

been rather a steep learning curve. I thought it a really interesting

subject and especially an interesting subject to write about …

A quote from A.M. (director of marketing agency, age undisclosed) illustrates perfectly how fateful moments and the reflexive project of the self are interrelated. A career shift caused him to rethink his wardrobe in order to transition from a more formal to a more relaxed industry.

Around 2010, I started working in digital marketing. And in my

head I pictured that clothing I would wear would be grungy-cool.

And so that's where all he clothes from Muse came in, the pants

and the shirts that I wear for meetings with other digital agencies,

advertising agencies and all that. … My work before this, as I said,

was in high fashion, in Belgium, and I was working in Brussels…

I worked at the corporate office and we showed in Paris and Milan,

Barcelona and Tokyo, so I was travelling to all these places. But I

was in a fashion house. So as much as people think you dress up,

you dress in a different way. I was on the corporate team, so I would

wear Bikkembergs, but the suits Bikkembergs makes are very

militaristic, cut sort of… a particular look to it. Which would not go

with this environment. I would look like a military person. It would be

almost ridiculous walking in to an advertising agency looking like that.

So I kind of devised in my head… what would a digital agency –

management level – wear? So Green Shag and Muse are basically the

stores where I got them to make me some new… the shirts are fitted,

skinny, as it's called, and all different colours. The pants – I wish I was

wearing them today – the pants are also skinny and - not too skinny –

and then I have shoes and stuff, and then a few jackets. Tighter jackets…

that I'll wear now for anything, and it will go with it. So what I had is

now good only for openings, parties and that sort of thing, and not for

work – unless it was for another fashion deal. Then for sure, all of

those would come back. …

When asked if A.M. felt that his wardrobe was an extension of his previous personal

style, or if it constituted a major shift in his style, he replied:

Shifting and extension. Shifting, for sure. Shifting because what I have

are too design… too much design. I don't want to be too much noticed

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at the same time, you know? But at the same time I don't want to go

with a suit from like, Tip Top, or even Calvin Klein… it's just too

boring. So… grungy-cool. I thought I should have a grungy-cool look

for digital marketing, and that's what my wardrobe is for. Meetings,

board of trade meetings and all those things. Things where I can

wear neither banking nor fashion. So I told the designers that and

they came up with… amazing. So I have a new wardrobe for that.

Finally, there were several instances in the interviews to suggest that self-identity was an

on-going project that these men reflected on and were continually working towards a goal of an

ideal self. The development of personal style was a theme that several men commented on. P.M.

(48, corporate communications producer) told how he found a style that he liked as a teenager,

and has learned to wear what he enjoys, despite what others may say.

So I was a kid in the 70's, and I remember clearly feeling like

nothing looked good on me. Even if I would get what was popular

at the time often it was never… and it just felt awful because it was

all polyester. And the hairstyles never looked good on me. And I

distinctly remember in 1980 the movie *Ordinary People* came out and it

was set in a very upper middle class suburb in Chicago, and I was just

mesmerized by the clothing that they wore. I guess you would call it

preppy. Just very traditional clothing and I think soon after I went

and got my hair cut, and I remember people teasing me saying, "Did you

get in a fight with a lawnmower?" [laughs] And so people judged me

for how short my hair was, though it was longer than I have it now, but

within a year the preppy phase had hit and everyone was doing that.

…that really started making me realize the difference between

fashion and style because I got into it before it was trendy because it

worked on me and then when the trendy was knocked out of it I didn't

leave it because it really worked for me. …It's the worst when someone

will see me wearing a certain kind of suit or a bowtie or something and

they'll say, "Oh yeah! I hear that's coming back in!" and I think, "You're

completely missing the point!" I couldn't give a shit whether this is popular

or not! I'm wearing it for myself! But the people who say, "Hey, that looks

good on you!" they get it, instead of saying "Hey, you're following that trend."

E.M. also spoke about how he learned to embrace his personal style and ignore any

negative outside reactions, but most importantly, stop his own anxiety and self-judgment.

Because I wear a lot of colour, and I'm stared at a lot [laughs], and

in a way I'm kind of… at first I was annoyed, I was like… but at some

point I'm like, "Well, that's their problem". So at first, kind of being

stared at was a problem but now… Because I'm comfortable with who

I am, they can think whatever they want. I own myself. For example,

I've had these yellow pants for a while, and at first they were kind of…

But now it's like, "I'm wearing my yellow pants and I love it!"

Similarly, F.G., who works in a corporate environment, tries to stand out as much as he can in his workwear and his casualwear. He said, "I think clothing is a representation of you and how you feel in it, and confidence is… it portrays more of the style, if you will, than necessarily the clothes. So often I buy clothes that will show that there's more to me than what meets the eye".

A.I., J.C., and P.S. also talked about their anxiety around making style choices, or anxiety about their body, relating to Giddens' assertion that anxiety is a common feature of life in late modernity. For A.I., not only does he worry about finding clothing that will work for his body and height, but he also notes that:

I really think a lot of us are in this moment where we have an anxiety about

physical objects and whether they're things we really need vs. a lot of the

ephemeral, immaterial things we have online. There's something very

comforting – It may be a generational thing, I don't know – about holding

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things with your hand. And it some instances there were handcrafted,

or at the very least each one was unique and each had a human eye. So

playing… or using it – maybe playing is the right word. It's very

performative, it's very theatrical. It's kind of like this human theatre we're

part of. So buying something that I know someone else individually

considered and determined to be of use. Or that this was a hand-stitched

pocket square. There's something about… and maybe it's entirely artifice,

because if I thought it was made in China I might be like, "Oh, I still like it".

But… something about that very tangible aspect, because I think in our

daily lives we interact with so much that isn't tangible.

P.S. worries about his presentation of self, and being judged by others, while at the same time acknowledging that this fear is likely irrational, and that he rarely judges others. He said:

But I can tell you right now, on the flip side, when I'm not feeling

good about what's in my closet, or I'm not feeling good about – I

really want to wear this shirt, but I wore it last weekend, or something

like that, and so I think about that crap. And so sometimes, a) I wish I

had more [clothes] and in addition to that, b) negative: How come I

somehow feel less than a human right now because I don't… because

I'm not comfortable with what I do want to wear today, or I'm not

liking… I really need some new jeans, say, and so it's like, "Dammit!"

You know, it's funny how it comes with the other way, too. So that's a

bit of a… I don't know if it's an insecurity, but it certainly feels like

that every now and then. Now, I'm not stupid enough to think, "If only

I had five grand, I could go on a shopping spree right now and I'd feel

a whole lot better about my life!" But there's something to be said for,

if I did have more items right now that I really liked a lot, I think that

I would… and perhaps it's all surface, but I still would feel good about

how I present myself in society, or how I present myself day-to-day,

even simply, you know? And having said that, I don't judge – I generally

don't assess or judge anybody for looking like… they don't. Looking like

they're not bespoke, or anything like that.

Finally, a quote from J.C. illustrates that the body is a concern for men, regardless of age or sexual orientation. He said:

I end up buying a lot of Hugo Boss because it's in my price range and

for some reason it suits me. I always get compliments when I'm wearing

a Hugo Boss jacket – it seems to be my shape. I have a Canali suit that

I like, and in the weeks when I'm feeling very fat I would put that on

[laughs]. My whole dressing life is based upon body image and my

weight balloons and then I can force it down slowly and then it creeps

back, so it's all about that for me. In the times when I'm feeling

not-too-fat I tend to choose different clothes than when I'm feeling fat.

Discussion

The necessity for research examining men's interaction with fashion motivated this

paper. For this study, the emphasis has been on the following questions: Do men consume luxury

fashion to bolster their identity? Can a combined theory from Bourdieu and Giddens be used to

test this assumption? To what extent can the self be understood as a narrative? To what extent

does class play a role in identity construction? Each of these four questions will be answered in

turn.

To begin, each man in this study acknowledged that their clothing gave them confidence.

Some saw clothing in a more functional light, saying that their clothing allows them to dress

appropriately for a given role (in their career, for example) while many others noted that the

mere act of dressing in a favourite article of clothing strengthened their self-confidence. The

ability of clothing to help construct the story of one's life was evident not only for the researcher,

but for the men themselves, as well. In stark contrast to the evidence from Galilee's interviews in

the UK in 2002, the men in this study were all very interested in their fashion consumption and

did not consider it feminine or trivial. Bakewell, Mitchell and Rothwell's (2006) study shows

that this attitude is starting to be true of young men in Generation Y, but this paper suggests that it is true of many older men as well.

The combination theory used in this study appears to be successful and useful in studying identity and consumption. There was much support in the data for the four themes highlighted, and for other parts of Bourdieu and Giddens' theories as well. They all conceived of their lives as a narrative, and easily wove in their clothing, past and present. Moreover, whether conscious of it or not, they all showed that their taste was at least partly based on their class position and upbringing, providing more support for the theory.

Fashion consumption is indeed an important part of the lives of these men, and they can all trace a narrative link from the time in their lives when they first began to consume fashion, up to their current circumstances. Their stories about favourite clothing and the clothing they wore as teenagers and young adults were essential to their self-narrative, and most men could identify the arc of their story related to clothing. Their anxieties about their clothing, combined with later-life shifts in career and identity, help to prove that the self is an ongoing process, and not a static construction (Giddens, 1991).

Giddens says,

> In the reflexive project of the self, the narrative of self-identity is
>
> inherently fragile. The task of forging a distinct identity may be
>
> able to deliver distinct psychological gains, but it is clearly also a
>
> burden. A self-identity has to be created and more or less continually
>
> reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day

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life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions. Moreover

the sustaining of such a narrative directly affects, and in some degree

helps construct, the body as well as the self (p. 185-186).

The construction of the body (both the manipulation of the physical, fleshy body, and the

ways of thinking about it) was important for several men in this study. The body is very much a

part of the narrative of the self, as Giddens says, and it seems to be even more a conscious part of

the narrative construction when there is something abnormal about it, in terms of height or

weight, for example. In contrast to the common-sense opinion that men are not bothered by the

physical appearance of their body, this study suggests that it is very much a part of the self-

identity. The continual creation and reordering of the self-identity was also evident in the

interviews, and the quotes about participants' fateful moments illustrate how change is inevitable

to the self-narrative, both affected by and affecting clothing and personal style.

The strong class basis for taste and style may be a surprising finding of the interviews for

some, but the inclusion of class as part of the theoretical framework was entirely a prediction that

it would be important for many of the men. It proved to be a point of serious reflection for those

men who had risen in class status from the youth, and the myriad ways of adjusting to the rise in

class status that the interviews demonstrate is an interesting and novel finding. Bourdieu (1984)

says,

Economic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic

necessity at arm's length. This is why it universally asserts itself

by the destruction of riches, conspicuous consumption, squandering,

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and every form of *gratuitous* luxury… As the objective distance

from necessity grows, life-style increasingly becomes the product of

what Weber calls a 'stylization of life' … This affirmation of power

over a dominated necessity always implies a claim to a legitimate

superiority over those who, because they cannot assert the same

contempt for contingencies in gratuitous luxury and conspicuous

consumption, remain dominated by ordinary interests and

urgencies (p. 55-56, emphasis in original)

"Squandering money" was a matter of opinion for men in this study. Most claimed that the clothing they bought was of superior quality, and the same quality could not be had for a cheaper price. However, the questions pertaining to how much income was spent on luxury clothing did give some of the men pause, and caused them to note that they ought to reflect more on their consumption. The "stylization of life" was also apparent, as many participants noted that they bought their clothes to achieve an aspirational lifestyle (part of their ideal self in the reflexive project), and that aspiration was a theme of their consumption more generally. Personal style was important for these men, and consuming according to their lifestyle narrative was critical. Finally, a demonstration of superiority through negative judgments of taste was evident throughout the interviews. The interview participants clearly considered their consumption a mastery of the field, and the poor taste of others to be a lack of mastery.

Implications and Directions for Future Research

One of the main points that this research proves is that men, regardless of age, ethnicity or sexual orientation, enjoy engaging with fashion and do not find it embarrassing or shameful, but rather a source of confidence and empowerment. Future researchers should conduct their studies on men's fashion bearing this is mind, and helping to find more proof that this is so.

Contrary to Lertwannawit and Mandhacitara (2012), who recommend building men's fashion consciousness in order to better market men's fashion products, this study suggests that many men already have a great deal of knowledge about and interest in fashion, and it is the marketers and retail stores who are the laggards in giving these men the unique products and services that they enjoy. The men in this study all spoke at length about their retail experiences, both positive and negative, and these findings will be used in a future paper on marketing to the "new male consumer".

In this vein, marketing to men in Canada should focus on uniqueness, building personal relationships and promoting quality and durability as a key product feature. These were mentioned by many men in the study as important reasons why they chose to shop at their favourite stores, and the lack of these benefits often caused them to quit shopping at a particular store. These findings suggest that the successful menswear store in the future must support the man's self-narrative, both appealing to his class position and creating a positive and friendly space where he enjoys spending time.

For future identity research, the theoretical framework used for this study may be regarded as a useful model for studying consumption and identity. Contrary to assertions that Canada is a "classless society", these interviews show that class-based judgments of taste still

inform consumption behaviour, and class is a part of the narrative of the self. This framework is not only useful for studying fashion consumption, but may also prove to be helpful for studying any type of consumption, particularly food, automobiles, and technology.

Due to the exploratory nature and limited time frame of this study, there are a number of limitations. The first is the small sample size of 12 participants, and because the subject of the study is quite new, the findings are suggestive rather than conclusive. However, it may be difficult for future replication of the study to find a representative sample of men who self-identity as luxury consumers. Furthermore, this study was limited to Canadian men living in the largest urban centre (all but one participant resided in Toronto). The findings cannot necessarily represent men across Canada, in other countries, or even men in large cities in Canada.

In spite of these limitations, this study represents a new research area that may prove to be fruitful and will benefit the areas of fashion, masculinities, marketing, consumption and identity. There are many possibilities for studies that could expand on this small exploration of men's luxury consumption. Both the theoretical and conceptual framework provided may prove useful for future research.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. What percentage of your income would you estimate that you spend on luxury goods?
2. What sort of luxury items do you buy?
3. What are some reasons that you buy luxury goods?
4. What motivates you to buy luxury fashion?
5. Do you buy for functional or aesthetic purposes?
6. Do you believe your clothing gives you confidence?
7. Where do you shop and why?
8. What do you look for in a shopping experience?
9. Types of sales associate approaches you favour?
10. Brands you favour? What about these brands appear to you?
11. Tell me about a positive shopping experience that you've had.
12. Tell me about a time when you felt your clothing gave you confidence.
13. Tell me about a favourite piece of clothing.
14. Do you buy luxury clothing online?
15. Did/do you find that the recession has impacted your spending?
16. At what stage in your life did you begin to consume luxury goods?
17. When did you make your first luxury purchase?
18. When did you become interested in luxury goods?

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