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The Trend for Mannish Suits in the 1930s

Sara B. Marcketti and Emily Thomsen Angstman

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Abstract: During the 1930s, fashion and popular press periodicals published reports of women's suits and separates with the structure and styling of traditional menswear, replete with broad shoulders, notched lapels, deeply cuffed trousers, made in masculine fabrics of woolens, flannels and plaids. The trend, termed "mannish," opposed the feminine fashions of the previous decades. Analysis of *Women's Wear Daily*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Vogue* revealed factors that contributed to the trend and sartorial components that encompassed the look. The authors contend that the mannish trend begun as a sports style was promoted by Hollywood, couched in the aristocracy of English tailoring and fabrics, and was advocated for by the fashion and popular press.

During the 1930s, *Women's Wear Daily* published reports of women's suits and separates with the structure and styling of traditional menswear, replete with broad shoulders, notched lapels, deeply cuffed trousers, made in masculine fabrics of wools, flannels and plaids (Figure 1). The trend, termed "mannish," opposed the feminine fashions of the previous decades that favored soft-line silhouettes enhanced with embroidery, pleats, and beading (Figure 2).¹ Initially, fashion editors and writers pondered if women were "stuck at a crossroads" between mannish styles or feminine dresses for everyday looks.² Eventually, however, the mannish look would sweep all forms of women's apparel in the 1930s, including millinery (slouch hats covering one eye), flat-heeled shoes, and even the wearing of tailored pants (Figure 3).³ The mannish look became so prevalent that fashion writers cautioned their readers to approach long-haired "men" in suits with prudence, "since styles had reached the point where you slap your uncle on the shoulder and it turns out to be your aunt."⁴

The history of menswear-inspired fashions worn by women was not original to the twentieth century and not confined to trouser wearing. As early as the 1600s, some women wore masculine riding jackets cut like men's cassocks topped with broad-brimmed, mannish hats.⁵ In the 1840s and 1850s the appearance of bloomers was intertwined with women's rights, as Amelia Bloomer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony adopted loosely fitting trousers over which knee length skirts were worn. During the 1860s and 1870s, women began wearing tailored but skirted suits modeled after masculine styles.⁶ By the 1880s and 1890s, bifurcation was suggested as a design solution for modesty and appropriateness when riding the ubiquitous bicycle or participating in gymnastics.⁷ A more general borrowing for menswear during the 1890s was "tailor-mades," often fashioned by male tailors. Tailor-mades were paired with shirtwaists, patterned from men's shirts, and produced by both women's and menswear

companies. Women primarily wore tailor-mades and shirtwaists in pink-collar jobs of retail clerks, stenographers, and telephone operators.⁸

Before the First World War, actresses Lillian Russell and Adele Ritchie blazed the mannish trail by wearing man-tailored shirtwaists, ascot ties, and walking suits. In addition to actresses, working women in offices wore tailored styles. As stated by *The Woman's Home Companion* in 1908, "The correct business attire for the modern woman suggests the best tailoring worn by men and with just a touch of femininity which will save the woman from a certain hardness and harshness."⁹ In the same period, designer Paul Poiret created exotic harem pants inspired by Turkish women's dress. During World War I, women adopted trousers, overalls, and other mannish styles for jobs vacated by men. Trousers worn in factories offered practicality where long skirts posed a danger. As stated by Valerie Steele in *Men and Women*, it was easier for people to accept women wearing trousers at the factory than on the street.¹⁰

In the 1920s, designers Gabrielle Chanel and Madeleine Vionnet showcased pants for casual and sportswear. Tailored suits frequently paired matching jacket and skirt. There is also body of literature that suggests some lesbians, such as writer Radclyffe Hall, used masculine dress during the early twentieth century to express sexual identity.¹¹ Trousers and shorts for sports were mostly functional, however, remaining within the domain of leisurewear.¹²

During the Great Depression, many women worked in white-collar clerical settings, which necessitated professional dress. As poverty and unemployment levels rose, the number of men in the workforce declined while the number of women increased. Women improved their composition in the labor force particularly with the rise in record keeping and information reporting positions.¹³ Entering clerical and domestic positions, magazines advised women to choose "clothes that would appear neither offensively 'mannish' nor dangerously feminine" as a

way to “appear professional and avoid unwanted attention.”¹⁴ Women adopted tailored clothing to convey a message of ability and professionalism and as means of communicating the social change of women entering the workforce.¹⁵ In addition to working, women increasingly participated in the sports of cycling, hiking, and horseback riding. As such, mannish styles, particularly trousers, were worn with safety and comfort as the primary reasons for their adoption.¹⁶

Historians have pinpointed the 1940s as the decade in which women used pants as a “bridge to shift the hegemony of men holding greater economic power.”¹⁷ Buckland found that during World War II, pants in particular became a sign of cultural negotiations regarding gender and economic power. Government and garment trade organizations recommended women wear masculine-based attire for safety and patriotic reasons. Trousers were far from conventionally accepted by society, however. If worn, women frequently paired masculine slacks with womanly hairstyles, make-up, and ultra feminine underwear.¹⁸

Some authors hypothesize that women dressed mannishly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, specifically in the 1890s, 1940s, and even during the dress-for-success craze of the 1980s, to achieve increased economic status.¹⁹ If worn outside of the occasions of sports, leisure, or work, trousers were regarded with hostility signifying “a departure from or rejection of traditional definitions of femininity, in favor of more masculine behavior.”²⁰ Yet, during the 1930s, Hollywood fashions actively promoted mannish styles, including, but not limited to pants, for women. Analysis of *Women’s Wear Daily*, *The New York Times*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, and *Vogue* revealed factors that contributed to the trend and sartorial components that encompassed the look. The authors contend that the mannish trend begun as a sports style was promoted by Hollywood, couched in the aristocracy of English tailoring and fabrics, and was

advocated for by the fashion and popular press. Mannish styled garments, accessories, and fabrics provided functionality as the garments were well suited to active lifestyles, which included sports, family, and work. The mannish look enabled women to actively follow Hollywood fashion and English style and the clothes were easily mixed and matched, thus extending women's wardrobes and budgets.

The diffusion of innovation theory may help explain the wearing of mannish styles during the 1930s. First introduced in 1962, the diffusion of innovation is a theory that explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas spread through cultures. Diffusion is the process by which a new innovation is communicated over time among the members of a social system. Rogers stated there are four main elements that influence the spread of a new idea: the innovation, communication channels, time, and a social system. In this particular study, the innovation was mannish styles; the communication channel examined was the popular, trade, and fashion press; the time was the 1930s; and the social system was the United States popular culture.

Sportswear

In the 1930s, changes to the federal law creating the forty-hour workweek formally expanded leisure time for many middle-class Americans. As such, attire that was functional, comfortable, and allowed free movement for activities such as hiking, skiing, and beachwear was increasingly needed. Sports clothing was commonly referred to as "The California Style" as it emphasized an easy and fun lifestyle (Figure 4).²¹ California in particular was heralded as a place with warm weather practically all year round that promoted an outdoor and sports life. As such, the trend for trousers and other mannish styles were first seen in the West Coast. According to Elizabeth Wilson, "the elevation of sport, with its ethos of physical health and streamlined

efficiency...must have played a part, so that the trousers become one means whereby women express an aspiration towards an athlete's body."²²

Reports in *Women's Wear Daily* from 1933 suggested vacationers at Palm Springs pools were wearing masculine cut slacks paired with tailored shirtwaists and turtleneck sweaters. Single- and double-breasted flannel or jersey jackets worn with matching slacks were worn at the pool and for general daytime wear and traveling.²³ These garments in dark colors such as navy blue were contrasted to silk pajamas in light colors worn from the pool to luncheons and teas. The trouser suits and mannish looks were promoted for their comfort. According to M. Townley Marler, merchandiser of the men's shop in Bullock's Wilshire, Los Angeles, California, "outdoor life at the beaches, mountains, and resorts calls for a variety of sports, golf, tennis, swimming. Now the movie colony, Los Angeles and the suburbs have gone in for bicycling in a big way, for the exercise as well as the recreation it affords.... All this demands comfortable clothes. It explains why many California women have accepted trouser suits, and why the mannish sports trend is gaining ground."²⁴ The fashion press reported trousers originating in California "blown" into mainstream American fashion as if "by the swift fury of a whirlwind."²⁵

Hollywood

According to *Women's Wear Daily* in 1933, "Hollywood seems to have 'gone masculine' in a big way. While the mannish fashion is by no means limited to the film colony, it undoubtedly had its inception there and is growing steadily."²⁶ Consumers were advised to steal Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, and Katherine Hepburn's tailored looks by wearing suits in menswear fabrics such as tweeds and rough linen (Figure 5).²⁷ Styled by the industry's leading wardrobe designers, such as Adrian, Howard Greer, and Travis Banton, performers were seen in films and fan

magazines by millions of theatergoers. This increased exposure to the public was particularly important, as “women were encouraged to view movies as guides to fashion that could be assimilated into their own wardrobes.”²⁸

The importance of Hollywood to shape trends cannot be denied. By 1930, between 90 and 110 million Americans out of a total population of 117 million went to the movies every single week.²⁹ *Vogue* explained Hollywood’s influence: “The movies are capable of shaping the tastes and prejudices of large parts of the world as regards not only etiquette, enunciation, morals, decoration, and beauty, but in showing women how a new mode actually looks in movement.”³⁰ Even designer Adrian who styled the much-copied Letty Lynton dress stated in *Harper’s Bazaar*, “the movies are giving the American woman much more courage in her dress and a much more dramatic approach to the whole subject of clothes.”³¹

The heroine of the mannish look, Marlene Dietrich, was regularly reported shopping in L.A. stores or in Hollywood studios wearing low-heeled brogues, mannish felt hats, and monotone ties—even purchasing several boys’ suits for her daughter, Maria. While not every woman was as daring as Miss Deitrich, *Women’s Wear* noted in 1933 the increased use of pants in everyday wear by women: “While slacks have been popular at the beach clubs, on yachts, and to a limited extent for home wear for the past two years, they have only recently invaded the streets and become general for almost all types of informal wear.”³² In a slightly later article, *Women’s Wear* contended, “The majority of buyers [in Hollywood] express the belief that the mannish mode is not just a passing fad, but that it will be of far-reaching importance. While they do not expect women to turn out en masse in men’s suits, they do anticipate a very strong demand for the slacks and for lounge suits during the next season and feel that other apparel will be influenced by the popularity of men’s fashions for women.”³³ Indeed, the mannish trend did

catch on, in fabrics, accessories, and to some extent, even pants. In a trend report from 1935, New York department stores deemed trousers important enough to stock one pair of pants for every four or five suits of jacket and skirt.³⁴

Sections in department stores named Cinema Fashions, Cinema Modes, and Broadway-Hollywood and “Silver Screen Shops” sold garments and accessories worn by stars, making the adoption of Hollywood styles effortless.³⁵ Advertisements by department store Mandel and Brothers proclaimed, “Silver screen fashions...worn by Hollywood’s famous...created by prominent American designers.”³⁶ Even New York took notice of Hollywood’s influence. *Harper’s Bazaar* reported that a Fifth Avenue shop experienced triple the sales of “movie” clothing as compared to Parisian styles. New York manufacturer Hattie Carnegie sold her mannish styled clothes, modeled by actress Constance Bennett, in Hollywood.³⁷ Described at first as “a Hollywood publicity stunt,”³⁸ the trouser-suit was said to gain “weight and momentum.”³⁹

Vogue used the popularity of Hollywood-designed garments to applaud the US designer. Since the costumes for movies needed to be designed several months before the movie’s release, *Vogue* argued that Hollywood was precluded from using French models. *Vogue* stated that the Hollywood design season is not a “winter-summer-autumn spring affair. It is a month-in-and-month-out matter. Adrian has to design clothes whenever clothes have to be designed, not four times a year, but dozens of times a year. It was Adrian who designed the clothes for Garbo [not Paris].”⁴⁰ This awareness of American design as early as 1933 clearly pre-dates the much-discussed recognition of American designers during the World War II period.

The Mannish Look

The New York Times heralded that, “The year of grace 1930 will probably go down in fashion history as the year when the suit dress came back.” The writer continued that, “looking back over the last decade, we are inclined to wonder how we ever managed to get along without it. For the suit is truly all things to all women.” The “man-tailored suit” was worn “superlatively well” by American women especially since the look could be catered to working or society women. Businesswomen could dress smartly and suitably by paring the correct accessories with the tailored look. The woman of “social engagements” could wear the suit from “9 until 5 and eliminate several changes of costume.” Further, the suit was a “veritable godsend” to women on tight sartorial budgets as they could pair different blouses to one suit, thus extending their wallets and wardrobes.⁴¹ Fashion Editor Virginia Pope praised the versatility of the suit commenting that women could “be businesslike in the daytime and flowery at night. Chameleon-like, one changes exterior” simply by donning an evening gown built on sculptured lines worn with very tailored jackets or by wearing a masculine “mess-jacket⁴²” with full, feminine sleeves reminiscent of the Victorian era.⁴³ In an article entitled “A Complete Wardrobe,” *Vogue* stated “the indispensable suit” was both practical and chic. The author contended that eighty-five percent of women found mannish styled topcoats, suits, or jackets their most essential garments.⁴⁴ The notion that the suit provided greater flexibility to women’s wardrobes and budgets is interesting as this was an oft-stated reason for the adoption of the shirtwaist in the 1890s—another style borrowed from men.⁴⁵

Despite the 1930 enthusiasm for the suit, the transition from soft looks to mannish styles was uneven.⁴⁶ An article published in 1933 in the *New York Times* stated this ambivalence: “Unable for the moment to make up their minds whether to go on being men and roughnecks or go back to being ladies, women have apparently decided to make it spring 50-50, military and

swagger about town, feminine and clinging in the home.”⁴⁷ Another article from *Vogue* 1934 stated: “It’s fun to play two roles—mannish for sports and feminine for dancing.”⁴⁸

The mannish look included design features borrowed from menswear such as exaggerated shoulders with revers, padded coats and tailored suit jackets, all paired with skirts (and sometimes even pants).⁴⁹ Tailored suits, in particular, used broad shoulders to emphasize narrow waists and slender compact hips. As stated by Berry, the aesthetic achieved by the tailored suit became so popular; that by 1938 the transition from soft-shouldered menswear to blocky silhouettes was attributed to *women’s* fashions.⁵⁰ Both single and double-breasted styles were available. Topcoats in contrasting colors to the suit, ascot ties, low-heeled brogues, and caps and fedoras “set on the head like a man” completed the mannish look (Figure 6).⁵¹

Fabrics, especially those worn by Edward VIII, or the Prince of Wales, were rapidly copied in the mannish looks of women. Tweeds in checks and plaids, herringbones, gabardines, and flannels in gray, brown, navy blue, dark green, red, and black were the preferred suit colors paired with vivid colored blouses. In an example of the influence of the Prince of Wales, Fair Isle knitters off the northeast coast of Scotland stated depleted stocks following a visit from the Prince. Factory-made and homemade imitations of the sweaters and scarves were turned out in the millions for men, women, and children.⁵² As stated by Arnold, since the smart tweed suiting was originally designed and worn by English aristocracy, these mannish styles were seen through the “prism of class, taste, and status” and therefore were less problematic within conservative circles than the wearing of trousers.⁵³ American wearers of the mannish look were able to link themselves to English aristocratic sportswear; therefore they were both dressed in the latest vogue and respectful of social mores – even though they were “mannish.” Even American manufacturers of clothing sought to link themselves to England. In an advertisement for their

fabrics, Hamilton Woolens stated their flannels “reflect the stalwart masculinity of fine English fabrics. Their construction reveals the delightful femininity of authentic French styling. And their prices remind you that these are typical Hamilton values” (Figure 7).⁵⁴

The popularity of the mannish look—both in fabric details, accessories, and garments was so great that the trade press *Women’s Wear Daily* informed merchandising departments to pair tailored fashions together to create higher profits. The mannish style called for specially designed hats, bags, gloves, and footwear “all keyed to the same mannish type.”⁵⁵ The mannish trend became so prevalent that menswear styles were promoted for sportswear, daywear, eveningwear, and even lingerie, hosiery and neckwear (Figure 8).⁵⁶ Bags of medium size, “tough and firm,” in styles by Hermès and Patou, leather gloves, and jewelry of diamond clips, conventional pearls, wide gold bracelets, and even grandfather’s cuff links were recommended accessories.⁵⁷ *Women’s Wear* noted that in addition to promoting sales, corresponding accessories would provide the correct look—for the wearing of high heels with trousers produced an “incongruous effect.”⁵⁸ Ribbed knit sweaters and blouses with pleats, tucks, and jabot styles further complemented the mannish look.⁵⁹

In November 1936, resident buyers and stores stated a heavy percentage of the women’s apparel budgets would be given to suits with some buyers decreasing their appropriations for dresses in favor of the mannish styles suits in vogue.⁶⁰ By 1938, the *New York Times* reported the continued popularity of the mannish two-piece suit for women enabled retail stores to meet or exceed 1937 sales figures.⁶¹

The trade and popular press were less consistently enthusiastic for the adoption of pants as they were other mannish styles. In March 1933 *Harper’s Bazaar* informed women “as to pants, if they are worn for a purpose, yes and yes. But if they are little Dietrich numbers, made to

be stared at on the city streets—we rise up herewith and boo. Unless you are a girl taking a man’s part in a high school play....no and no and no.”⁶² Two and a half years later, after telling readers not to adopt Marlene Dietrich’s famously mannish wardrobe, the movie star was prominently featured in the September 1935 issue of the magazine sporting her signature pants.⁶³ When advertised, manufacturers and retailers often promoted trousers as part of a special price package that included skirts for the more conservative dresser.⁶⁴ Sharply creased and cuffed trousers were shown primarily with pullover sweaters in crew and turtleneck styles rather than shirts and ties, making them appear more feminine and less like direct copies of menswear.

Where to Produce the Mannish Styles?

The discussion of where to manufacture women’s mannish styles, suits in particular, were heavily debated in the trade press. The discussion focused on two questions: if men’s manufacturers could perfect the nuances of female tailoring and the potential competition between men’s and women’s firms (Figure 9). Samuel Klein, executive director of the Industrial Council of Cloak, Suit, and Skirt Manufacturers, stated, “The consumer may be interested in reading about the trend toward mannishness, and she may even accept certain fashion features adapted from men’s wear, but she demands fashion treatments that are essentially feminine and that can be interpreted only by producers with a real understanding of this form of creation and manufacturing.”⁶⁵ This opinion was contrasted by a *Vogue* article that contended: “If a woman can persuade her husband’s tailor to make for her (to give her the authentic line and finish), she is on sure lines of fashion, as well as perfect lines of tailoring.”⁶⁶ One menswear manufacturer made a point to advertise their goods as “the logical maker to interpret the present masculine tendency in women’s and misses’ coats.”⁶⁷

In March 1933, one large metropolitan department store was reported to launch a promotion of mannish women's suits manufactured by a men's clothing producer at "unusually low prices between \$7.50 and \$8.50."⁶⁸ The production of mannish suits in men's clothing factories was seen as problematic for the women's field since men's clothing factories operated on lower wage standards. A menswear manufacturer cited price as a factor for creating women's suits in men's shops. He stated, "When girls and women realize that they can buy a suit made in a man's shop at an unusually low price, they will prefer this to the dressmakers' type of suit, whose tailoring is less efficient and whose prices have been much higher, comparatively, than men's wear" (Figure 10).⁶⁹

The ability to inexpensively create mannish styles for women proved challenging for women's wear producers.⁷⁰ Several strikes occurred during the late 1930s when women's wear workers demanded the prohibition of sending mannish styled women's garments and other apparel to factories in allied needle trades operating on lower wage standards.⁷¹ The largest strike impacted 35,000 workers in more than 1,500 shops representing over \$30 million in wages. According to Isidore Nagler, general manager of the joint board of the Cloakmakers' Union, an affiliate of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union:

Our union has consistently fought against the overlapping evil, against the production of ladies' outerwear in the shops in any of the allied industries where work standards are much inferior to those prevailing in the cloak and suit industry. We propose to combat this evil...and we shall not permit our employees, who are themselves complaining of the overlapping practice, by sending out work to outside low-standard sources of production.⁷²

Ultimately, an agreement was reached between the union and employers on the production of "mannish suits" for women.⁷³ In the settlement overlapping was eliminated, with employers providing an increase of ten cents per hour and a work week of thirty-two and a half hours to employee members of the Cloakmakers' Union.⁷⁴

A related concern caused by the popularity of the mannish looks was where to secure the fabrics. By January 1936, the New York Wool Top Exchange Service reported the volume of men's fabrics going into women's wear production the largest in years with some buyers paying premiums for quick deliveries.⁷⁵ Sales of mannish fabrics for use in women's tailored suits helped offset the seasonal decline in the demand for cloth for use in men's clothing.⁷⁶

Mannish Styles with Feminine Styling

Although the mannish suits were popular, some designers and fashion experts warned consumers to avoid going to extremes and to maintain the aura of femininity. Elsa Schiaparelli counseled women that the tailored suit need not be "hateful and ugly...freaks that make it difficult to distinguish between a man and a woman."⁷⁷ The notion of mistaken identity was oft repeated in the popular press with embarrassing to catastrophic results. Embarrassing: Tapping a fellow on the back only to realize "he" is a lady.⁷⁸ Catastrophic: Sailors filling a lifeboat on a dark night letting trousered women drown.⁷⁹ Harkening *la garçonne* of the 1920s, Chanel said of her own suits, "they have a boyish air, which does not imply masculinity but which, on the contrary, harmonizes with the feminine note it is called upon to stress."⁸⁰ Members of the corset industry urged women, "that no matter how masculine fashions go, they will look attractive only on the figure that is entirely feminine...with natural curves always apparent."⁸¹ *Harper's Bazaar* warned, "Don't do this tailored thing too deliberately. If you can't feel as comfortable and inconspicuous as a well-dressed Englishman in your new tailored get-up, don't force yourself to it. Perhaps you just aren't a tailor made girl."⁸²

Throughout the 1930s, *Vogue*, *Women's Wear Daily*, and *Harper's Bazaar* featured articles that suggested an ideal type for wearing masculine fashions. In a somewhat vague

description, one women's wear designer stated, "The woman who attempts to wear man's clothes must have the figure for it." A fashion writer for the *New York Journal* asserted, "after all the more mannishly a girl dresses, the more feminine she appears."⁸³ While mannish fabrics, details, and garments were copied, feminine touches such as feminine sleeves, molded lapels, ornaments, and color were stated to help soften the look (Figure 11).⁸⁴ In an example of the ambiguity of mannish looks with feminine styling, the retail store Stern Brothers advocated for the "utterly new tailored suit that nips the waistline at a *certain* point, the coat is just a *certain* length, the skirt has just a *certain* flare" that borrowed mannish fabrics with unmistakable feminine tailoring.⁸⁵ Francis Perkins, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, commented the point of her inauguration day clothing was "to look like the Rock of Gibraltar, with a little feminine appeal and some sophistication."⁸⁶

In a more concrete example of how to create feminine, yet mannish styles, one of the largest producers of men's underwear stated that they would produce undergarments "that will have the masculine effect required by the trouser suit, but with the additional requirements necessary to meet feminine wishes."⁸⁷ These feminine wishes included the use of cotton rather than silk for undergarments. The chief objection to silk was that it would "creep" and leave the skin bare to the wool trousers causing irritation.⁸⁸

Designer Hattie Carnegie proclaimed that anything mannish was completely out of the picture by 1939, yet mannish looks were consistently published in *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* throughout 1939 and the early 1940s (Figure 12).⁸⁹ The mannish look made a powerful return during World War II, predicted by designer Elizabeth Hawes who quipped, "It took a world war to get women out of corsets. It will probably take another to get them into trousers."⁹⁰ Due to governmental limitations on fabric use and notions of patriotism and saving cloth for the war

effort, women quite literally donned their husband's suits; remade to fit feminine shapes.⁹¹

Further, women donned pants as part of their participation in the war effort through factory jobs in war industries.⁹²

Conclusions

The promotion of the mannish suit trend of the 1930s contradicted the social norm that women should not look mannish (especially wearing trousers) except for casual, lounge, or sportswear. The impact of Hollywood on popular culture created an environment where masculine clothing for women was accepted. The trade and popular press including *Women's Wear Daily*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Vogue* contributed to the trend. Sartorial components that encompassed the look included tailored jackets with sharply creased and cuffed trousers or skirts for more conservative wearers. Mannish details of ties, low-heeled shoes, and hats completed the style, as did elements of lingerie, hosiery, and even mannish accessories such as bags, gloves, and jewelry. The popularity of the look helped offset seasonal decline for men's wear cloth, and caused competition between menswear and women's wear producers.

In *Sex and Suits*, Anne Hollander contended that the elements of adult fashion that are the basis of modern clothing for women—the smooth fitted tailored jackets and skirts, the tailored slacks, the dress, soft sweaters, and flattering blouses ranging from tailored to draped were established in the 1920s and 1930s. Hollander stated this period acknowledged “realistic feminine proportions” and the “female clothed body was given its own dignified visual unity for the first time since antiquity.”⁹³ While editors and fashion designers of the 1930s warned against appearing too masculine, the styles appealed to American women. Indeed, the belief that women

themselves decide upon a fashion, was stated by Eunice Fuller Barnard, writing for the *New York Times* in 1929. She stated:

One school of thought holds that what an exclusive group of women who live in Paris decide to wear, in the main sets the fashion for the rest of the world....The other theory, which pins its proof to statistics, is that the shoppers themselves ultimately do the deciding. Mass acceptance of any style both here and abroad makes it a fashion. So after all...it is not primarily the couturier, the advertiser, the salesman, or the much maligned manufacturer, who cruelly forces the fashion, much as they may do to exploit it. As often as not, they, too are its victims. You who would know where fashion springs - *cherchez la femme* [find the woman].⁹⁴

While the mannish look of the 1930s was popular, as evidenced by buying reports, advertisements, and editorials, the wearing of trousers did not achieve mass adoption or critical mass. As stated by Rogers, innovations fail if the social norms and standards of acceptance into society outweigh the new idea, even at the sake of comfort.⁹⁵ As has been confirmed by other authors, pants would not gain widespread acceptance as appropriate wear for all occasions until the 1970s.⁹⁶ This study provides evidence, however, that the mannish look encompassed almost all aspects of appearance in the 1930s. Women, it seems, based on the attention in the popular and trade press, promotion in the sportswear industry, and by Hollywood, indeed decided that the mannish trend was acceptable. The 1930s helped pave the way to World War II's "great impetus to a mannish style of dressing."⁹⁷

¹ Patricia C. Warner, "The Americanization of Fashion: Sportswear, the Movies, and the 1930s," in *Twentieth Century American Fashion*, ed. Linda Welters and Patricia A. Cunningham (New York: Berg, 2005), 79–98.

² "Clothes Make the Sex," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1933, F1.

³ "Mannish Fashions," *Women's Wear Daily*, January 13, 1933, 3; "Mannish Millinery Shows Gains," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1933, 25; P. J. Philip, "Paris Says Farewell to *La Garçonne*," *The New York Times*, February 22, 1931, 68; "Silk Crepe Pajamas in Dark Mannish Colors," *The New York Times*, December 9, 1934, 14; "Still Aping the Men," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1934, 16; "Week's Orders Light as Buyers Here Drop," *The New York Times*, July 29, 1934, N15.

⁴ "Little Acorns," *Harper's Bazaar*, February 1934, 58.

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- ⁵ Sarah Cosbey, "Something Borrowed: Masculine Style in Women's Fashion," in *Men's Fashion Reader*, ed. Andrew Reilly and Sarah Cosbey (New York: Fairchild Books, 2008), 18–32.
- ⁶ Mary Edwards Walker (b.1832 – d.1919) a doctor, suffragist, and only woman awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for Meritorious Service was well known for wearing pants. Walker dedicated her book *Hit* (New York: The American News Company, 1871) to "the practical dress reformers who have been so consistent in your ideas of the equality of the sexes by dressing in a manner to fit you for the duties of a noble and useful life."
- ⁷ Sally Helvenston Gray and Mihaela C. Peteu, "'Invention, the Angel of the Nineteenth Century:' Patents for Women's Cycling," *Dress* 32 (2005): 27–42. For a discussion of sportswear during the late nineteenth century, see: Barbara Schreier, "Sporting Wear," in *Men and Women: Dressing the Part*, ed. Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele (Washington, DC: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1989), 82–123.
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- ⁹ *Woman's Home Companion*, August 1908, 33.
- ¹⁰ Valerie Steele, "Dressing for Work," In *Men and Women* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 64–91.
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