

2

OUTFITTING THE GENT

The Emergence of the Male Consumer and the Commodification of the Male Body

Men are properly said to be clothed with Authority, clothed with Beauty, with Curses, and the like. Nay, if you consider it, what is Man himself, and his whole terrestrial Life, but an Emblem; a Clothing or visible Garment for that divine ME of his, cast hither, like a light-particle, down from Heaven? Thus is he said also to be clothed with a Body.

—Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*

That your dress is approved by a man is nothing;—you cannot enjoy the high satisfaction of being perfectly *comme il faut*, until your performance has received the seal of a woman's approbation.

—*Etiquette for Gentlemen* (1838)

IN 1890, THE TAILORING TRADE JOURNAL *Gentleman's Magazine of Fashion* positioned reporter T. H. Holding on St. James's Street to take an informal eyewitness survey of what London's men were wearing. Holding reports disappointedly on the sartorial uniformity of Clubland. "There is a remarkable sameness at all times, and perhaps in all centres, between the dress of one of these stylish young gentlemen and another," he writes; "Whatever is the run and the rage, that they all go for; no matter whether it be a black vicuna frock, the double-breasted reefer, or the short waist and long-tailed morning coat of half a generation ago—they must all dress alike" (Holding, "Men's," 7). While the Great Masculine Renunciation may still have been the reigning ideology regarding masculinity and dress, many late-Victorian sources voiced a restlessness with these confining prescriptions of male sartorial reserve and conformity. *Our Miss Gibbs*, Adrian Ross and Percy Greenbank's 1909 musical satire of Harrods, similarly satirizes the mindless submission to "correct" dress practiced by a "Chorus of Dudes":

A fashionable band of brothers
 Are we,
 You see!
 Whatever one has done the others
 Must do,
 It, too!
 Our clothes and hats are made to match,
 They show it,
 We have one bill for all the batch,
 And owe it!
 For we're correct
 In every respect,
 And you note the effect!
 In daytime or in night-time,
 The right thing at the right time,
 We mayn't be great in intellect,
 But we are so correct! (15)

The *London Tailor* lamented in 1899, “There never was a time in history when everybody was dressed so alike” (305). In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the cry was heard more and more that the sartorial standards of understatement and reserve that had defined the proper dress of the business-minded middle-class Englishman had rendered male costume bland and predictable. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Oscar Wilde has Lord Henry Wotton complain, “The costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so sombre, so depressing. Sin is the only real colour-element left in modern life” (28).

And indeed, to conservative social critics, sin came in the form of the growing diversions from the reserved dictates of the Great Masculine Renunciation. Anne Hollander contends that fashion changes are meant to create a “disequilibrium”—to upset a sartorial (and social) status quo that has become “too easy to take. Contrary to folklore, most changes are not rebellions against unbearable modes, but against all too bearable ones. Tedium in fashion is much more unbearable than any sort of physical discomfort” (49). The widespread protests against the tedious uniformity of male dress cited above suggest that the Great Masculine Renunciation was not the only sartorial masculine ideal of the late Victorian age and that some men had grown restless under its confines. For many middle-class

Englishmen of the second half of the nineteenth century, fashion became a highly visual means by which to subvert the rigid and confining dictates that defined proper masculine behavior generally, as the growing sartorial options expanded the landscape of acceptable masculinities as well, a phenomenon I explore in the following chapters.

The transformations in retailing and consumer practices during the half century between 1860 and 1914 were nothing less than a revolution. The emergence of the large-scale department store in the 1860s and '70s, the massive expansion of the popular press in the form of inexpensive newspapers, magazines, and books, and the rapid development of increasingly sophisticated advertising techniques brought about an awareness, availability, and affordability of clothing and an ever-growing variety of other goods. Merchants aggressively sought to pleurably engage male Britons in the world of goods to the same extent as female consumers. They fueled an atmosphere of conspicuous consumption and pleasurable materialism that was made attractive and socially acceptable for large numbers of men in the middle and working classes. With the introduction of the department store and its mass-produced goods came the birth of a large-scale fashion "industry" and an acceleration of mass-marketed fashion trends that expanded the options of acceptable masculinity that mainstream middle-class males could perform.

Yet the burgeoning commodity culture and fashion industry operated against, and alongside, the more conservative discursive ideals of the Great Masculine Renunciation. Male-directed marketing, the department store's expansion into male goods and its cultivation of male-friendly spaces, and the heightened commercial and public attention directed toward male display all suggest that proper middle-class masculinity had become a highly contested area whose rules and parameters were not always as restrictive and reserved as the conventional image of Victorian masculinity conveys. The forces of commodity culture and its young male adherents were engaged in a tug-of-war with the Great Masculine Renunciation over representations of men's bodies. With growing frequency, force, and finesse, marketers actively appealed to men, making their interest in fashion and shopping "safe," without violating existing taboos and norms of masculinity. The growing acceptance of male consumption and display created cracks in those taboos and norms and changed late-Victorian definitions of normative manhood in fundamental ways. Not only were men allowed access into formally exclusively female spaces and activities, but they were also encouraged to have a visual, physical, erotic self to be appraised by the public.

Discerning what many of Britain's middle-class men really wore from the popular rhetoric of periodicals, advertising, and conduct manuals is admittedly problematic at best. At the same time, determining what men consumed or proving that their consumption increased through hard numbers is virtually impossible. Market research on men's consumer habits was nonexistent, and few financial records from the period have survived. What does remain of department store sales records is rarely broken down by department. For these reasons, I have turned my attention to other indicators of increased interest in, discussion of, and promotion of men's consumption of fashionable goods between 1860 and 1914. The promotional strategies and advertising of the men's clothing market and popular and professional literature pertaining to men's consumption and overt sartorial display reveal an overall rise in men's public participation in consumer culture—or at the very least a growing recognition of the male market. To be sure, one must be skeptical of laments by tailoring journals against conformity in men's dress, such as the ones with which I began this chapter, as the trade has an obvious investment in condemning predictable dress and promoting constant sartorial change. Yet even if men's real consumption of clothing and grooming products did not increase at all, the dramatic growth in male-directed advertising, in available male-related items, and in spaces designed specifically for the purchase of those goods by men all point to a dramatic cultivation of the male consumer—one that transformed late-Victorian notions of masculinity and paved the way for the explosive growth in male and youth markets throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

Creating Male Markets and Appealing to Male Consumers

In November 1893, the *Cutter's Gazette of Fashion*, a prominent trade periodical for tailors, published the comments of a T. Patterson in a paper delivered before the Sheffield Society. In his address, Mr. Patterson celebrated the robust state of London's men's tailoring and extolled the modern advances that had effected its proliferation throughout the provinces and the continent:

Fashions for gentlemen do not now originate across the channel, but in London, the great centre of the world's life in so many things, she also becomes mistress in what relates to style and fashion in gentlemen's dress. Nor are the provinces lagging behind so much as they used to. It

is no unusual occurrence for a customer to ask for a certain garment or a special shade of color, that has just become the “go” in London. . . . Cheap travelling, and the display of the newest and latest fashions by the purveyors of dress, soon educates the public taste and informs the individual as to what is being worn. (165)

Patterson’s comments reveal much about the striking changes both in the popularity of fashionable dress and in English masculinity wrought by the nineteenth-century development of modern consumer culture. No longer was fashion regarded by the middle classes as the domain solely of women, the elite, and the inhabitants of sophisticated capital cities; rather, it was available to and desired by all male Britons. More significantly, Patterson’s speech also suggests the eagerness with which the consumer industry pursued and created these growing markets. The tailoring trade was more than happy to expand its customer base by “educating” middle-class men about the consumable tools of the fashionable life of the consumer culture.

To accomplish this, Britain’s rapidly emerging consumer culture assisted in middle-class male consumers’ reappropriation and transformation of what had previously been considered effeminate or deviant male consumption and self-display through clothing and accessories into publicly acceptable masculine behavior in the later decades of the nineteenth century. Advertisers and merchants worked aggressively to recast shopping and consumption as attractive activities for men, and the first step was to distance their consumer habits from women’s. The notion of a man delegating the responsibility of his consumption to his wife, which I discuss in chapter 1, was no longer portrayed as an attractive arrangement by the popular press. Historically, gender distinctions have been an instrumental and ever-present tool for merchants’ depiction of goods, and late-Victorian male-directed advertising and product display followed a system of rules and strategies that were consciously distinct from those designed to attract women customers. In shopping, as in everything else, masculinity and femininity were culturally represented in terms of a boundless system of opposites: while men liked the neat and simple display of a few spotlighted items, women preferred tables cluttered with bargains; while men focused on finding and purchasing a specific item as quickly as possible, women enjoyed lingering over options.¹ All this suggests that for consumption to be recast as an appealing and acceptable activity for men, it had to be clearly distinguished from women’s consumption. As a means of mak-

ing shopping attractive, “safe,” and masculine, both male consumers and merchants went out of their way to insist that it was not like what women did.

To underscore this distinction, women were regularly portrayed not merely as the primary consumers, but as voracious, compulsive shoppers who overwhelmed and oppressed both shop workers and their husbands with their insatiable desire for goods.² “When is a lady not a lady?” went one of the most popular jokes circulating among drapery and department store staff. “Answer: When she attends a sale” (*Draper*, 992). *Our Miss Gibbs* recites another familiar joke by depicting women customers and overzealous shoppers who nonetheless fail to purchase anything: “We’ll take a look at all the lot, / All the lot, all the lot, / But we will not / Attempt to buy, / We’ll look and try, But never buy!” (5). The reputed female obsession with shopping was pathologized, quite literally, when widely publicized accounts of female shoplifters, many from the privileged classes, popularized kleptomania as a newly recognized medical disorder and elicited growing fears of an “epidemic” rooted in the deviant desires engendered by the department store’s seductive spectacle of goods. By the 1890s, the female shoplifter had become a stock character type, endlessly satirized in magazine articles, songs, and plays (Abelson, 8).³

If the familiar figure of the female kleptomaniac symbolized the extremes of aggressive female consumption, her foil in the popular imagination was often the figure of the comically passive husband who surrendered complete control over his purchases to his overbearing wife. Magazine articles and cartoons increasingly took great pleasure in depicting men as “the Submerged Sex,” led about by domineering women shoppers (Hosgood, 104). In 1897, *Punch* offered tongue-in-cheek advice to a woman seeking an “ideal husband,” urging that she choose “a man who likes to go Shopping.” “You will find him very useful if managed judiciously,” the writer sardonically concluded (“Ideal,” 285). Three years later, the trade journal *Master Tailor and Cutter’s Gazette* offered what it believed its readership would recognize as a familiar portrait of the maddeningly weak-kneed male customer sent to purchase a suit for himself according to his wife’s specifications: “After a particularly fervid demonstration of affability with all the members of the staff, the busy business man explains that he really did not know he wanted a suit, but his wife assured him that he did. This remark gives the game away entirely, and the cutter, who has been hanging on each little utterance, doubles round the corner, says an ‘Ave maria,’ and resigns himself to his fate” (“Queer,” 46). The *Master Tailor’s* male customer is entirely emasculated by his wife’s control

of his consumption. He appears impotent and incapable of developing any opinions of his own regarding style or fit: "When asked whether he requires the coat loose or fairly close fitting he replies, 'Any way; whichever you think best.' Interrogated as to the style of pockets required on the breast, he repeats in an audible whisper, 'Any way, any way.' He seems, indeed, to have reached the acme of resignation." The tailor eventually manages to guide the customer to a selection, but he returns again and again, presumably because his wife is dissatisfied with the tailor's work (46).

Through this system of negative gender-coded stereotypes, men were increasingly urged to take control of their consumption rather than leave it to women. Women were prone to abuse their role as primary consumers, either through compulsive shopping or by bullying their husbands and dictating men's purchases. Female kleptomaniacs and harridan wives were convenient (and clearly misogynistic) devices employed by male commentators to exaggerate all the negative connotations of shopping and relegate them to the female sex. Ridiculing passive, hen-pecked "Molly husbands" and "squaw men" who handed over their consumption to their domineering wives promoted male consumer agency. To foster male consumption, advertisers and marketers attempted to turn the gender-commerce bond on its ear—not so much rejecting or replacing it as redirecting it to encourage men to shop. The old equation of women as consumers/men as producers was shifted to one of women as bad consumers/men as good consumers. Men had to rise out from under the tyranny of their wives' irrational, directionless, and even deviant shopping practices and assert a kind of consumption that was logical, focused, and masculine.

Therefore, merchants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries developed distinctly different advertising approaches considered more compatible with, and attractive to, the male mindset. Convinced that men would not waste time reading the florid descriptions and hyperbolic promises seemingly indispensable to most text-heavy Victorian advertisements, merchants courted male consumers with advertising copy that was clear, brisk, and direct. Advertisers believed that men responded best to a "modern," "strenuous and masculine" "business style" that conveyed an attractive image of manly vigor and productivity (Garvey, 178, 181). They strove to masculinize goods and to make the consumption of those goods appear safe and attractive through direct association with strong, robust male figures whose masculinity was seemingly self-evident. The most masculine—and therefore most popular—male figures were athletes and soldiers, and their

presence was used to make even ostensibly gender-neutral products masculine and appealing to male buyers. Cadbury's Cocoa, for example, featured illustrations of energetic young sportsmen in their advertisements for decades. An advertisement from 1885 promises "'STRENGTH AND STAYING POWER'—To ATHLETES", while another from 1901 portrays a rugby player taking a moment during the game to enjoy a cup of cocoa (fig. 2.1). Similarly rugged, eager young men were regularly shown playing tennis, boating, and participating in other forms of vigorous outdoor recreation. The craze for bicycling in the 1880s and '90s made it perhaps the most popular subject of these sporting advertisements

that idealized the "robust masculinity" of the age. An 1890 advertisement for E. L. Liman's Universal Embrocation, an all-purpose patent medicine, depicts a group of boys racing on bicycles and pennyfarthings and features the slogan "BOYS RACE FOR IT!" (fig. 2.2). Like Cadbury's Cocoa, Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa was marketed as a high-energy sports drink—a turn-of-the-century Gatorade, if you will. Evidence of its efficacy was offered in the form of the written testimonial of "Mr. J.H. Jefferson, 11 Wincott-street, Kensington, London S.E.," who praised its vitalizing properties: "Just a line in praise of the excellent Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa. I have been a cyclist for the last six or seven years, and I go in for racing a great deal. I started using Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa some three months ago, and I find a great difference in my riding. I am now able to stay and endure greater fatigue than I did before using Dr. Tibbles' Vi-Cocoa. All I can say is, all you claim for it is quite true. I shall not use any other preparation but yours whilst training this season" (Dr. Tibbles, 8).

An even more decidedly masculine image to the late-nineteenth-century British male mind, perhaps, was the soldier, who acted out the real life-or-death struggles on the battlefield that the athlete symbolically played at on the sporting

field. The beef-extract beverage Bovril, for example, adopted the soldier image for an extensive series of military-themed advertisements at the turn of the century. One representative advertisement with the slogan “BOVRIL IS LIQUID LIFE” depicts two soldiers on the front line, one serving his wounded comrade a warm cup of Bovril (fig. 2.3). Advertisers relied heavily on the “conqueror image” in the figures of the soldier and the quasimilitary adventurer because it was a familiar Victorian icon that instantly summoned up powerful jingoistic associations of British imperial might, high adventure in exotic far-off lands, and a bold, rugged, unchallenged masculinity. The images of famous adventurers and explorers of Britain’s empire, in particular Henry Morton Stanley, were exploited repeatedly in advertising (Loeb, 80). The middle-class British male, these advertisements implied, could share vicariously in the enterprises of the British empire by shopping for goods related to its exploration. In 1904, for example, Harrods department store took out an enormous front-page advertisement in the *Daily Mail*, explicitly addressed to male readers, claiming that while “Madame may be securing a ball-dress in one department, . . . you in another can be emulating the example of past customers and be fitting out an Arctic Expedition, just as readily as you can secure a summer holiday tent outfit for but a few of you” (“Harrods Limited,” 1).⁴ Here the adventurer image is used both to bolster the masculinity of shopping and to distinguish men’s shopping from women’s, as the man’s consumption is deliberately related to high adventure and exotic excursions rather than feminine domestic concerns or the frivolity of female glamour.

At the turn of the century, the widespread patriotic fervor over the highly publicized Boer War (1899–1902) provided the perfect opportunity with which to further the masculinization of shopping for men. Popular enthusiasm for Britain’s military engagement inspired clothiers and sellers to use the conflict to connect goods to the war effort and to market civilian versions of war-related merchandise. Window displays in city shops and department stores featured ever more elaborate military and patriotic themes that vied for the male shopper’s attention. “National events can generally be appropriately illustrated, and public sentiment expressed, in window dressing designs,” declared the trade journal the *Outfitter* in 1900. “The widespread interest taken in the Boer War has been mirrored in the windows of retailers in every part of the country” (“Up-to-Date,” 17–18). The *Outfitter* regularly reviewed shop displays throughout the Boer War (fig. 2.4), as if judging a competition. The journal reported, for example, that J. H. Willcox, “outfitter, hatter, hosier, and tailor,” of Farnham, Surrey, “had thousands to see

the novelty" of his elaborate window display featuring red, white, and blue bunting, pictures of war heroes and celebrities, mannequins dressed as Red Cross nurses and the war's famous generals and field marshals (including Colonel R. S. Baden-Powell and Lord Roberts), and artifacts brought home from the front ("War," 11). While patriotic zeal affected everyone, men were recognized as the most responsive audience, and many of the more militaristic displays—featuring plaster figurines

of "12 little khaki-clad Imperials, who carry rifles in their hands, ready to do and dare at duty's call" and signs reading "Great Slaughter of Prices" or "4,000 Boers Captured by these Startling Prices"—beckoned from tailors' windows ("Up-to-Date," 17–19).

Perhaps the most enduring fashion to come out of the Boer War was the adoption of khaki material and colors in civilian fashions.⁵ Inspired by the new rugged material, which evoked both British military might and the exotic locales of its empire, Britain's civilian population rapidly turned khaki into a seemingly inexhaustible commercial phenomenon by 1900. Khaki fabrics and shades found their way onto neckties, handkerchiefs, hats, handbags, and even fine silks. "The 'Gentleman in Khaki' is responsible for a great revolution in man's attire, and khaki bids fair to be the only wear during the coming season," observed the *Outfitter* in February 1900. "Some people think that the thing has been overdone, and that the craze is dying out; but there are, on the contrary, indications that it is increasing in volume and vehemence" ("Memo," 11). Like the empire that inspired it, khaki's

dominance in men's attire spanned the globe, and the journal claimed that it had swiftly spread to Belfast, New York, and New Zealand (11). Khaki became especially popular for men's athletic clothing, in particular golf and cycling outfits ("London," 5). The *Master Tailor and Cutters' Gazette* noted that tailors faced difficulties in keeping up with the demands of their male customers for khaki cycling costumes:

In my last "Notes" I made some reference to khaki for mufti wear. It will be very largely worn this year, but not in the ordinary tweed suit. The "field" it has captured—we speak in military terms now—is the cyclists'. No colour could be better; and the various makes of cloth and the slight patterns—faint red, orange or green (yes, without doubt, green) over checks—which I have seen, and some of which I have had from a leading woollen house, cause me no wonder when I am told that within a few days from submitting their patterns in the West End the first pieces of the entire range were "sold out." ("Early," 92)

Khaki mania seemed custom-made for the male market. The fabric's associations with the spartan, heroic life of the soldier and its marriage to athletic clothing created a virtually inexhaustible variety of highly masculinized goods marketed to an increasingly receptive male consumer base. Military-inspired fashion trends had emerged in Britain before—notably during the Napoleonic era—but what made the khaki craze different was the rise of the technologies of the mass-consumer industry. With the development of large-scale industrial mobilization and modern advertising hype, new consumer trends could be publicized, proliferated, and sold not just to a handful of wealthy, in-the-know elite urbanites but to Britain's male populace as a whole.

The Department Store's Influence on the Growth of Male Consumption

The nineteenth-century development of the large-scale High Street department store,⁶ which began in full force in the 1860s and '70s, was particularly instrumental in this (re)construction of males as consumers. Indeed, khaki achieved its widespread success among male consumers in part because of the capabilities of the department store to mass produce⁷ and mass market it to the middle classes. However, the department store's integral role in the cultivation of the male market has been historically obscured by Victorian commentators and advertisers, who

frequently portrayed the department store as a uniquely feminine space. Moreover, as I mention briefly in the previous chapter, men's consumption is further obscured, albeit inadvertently, by the many important recent studies that have emphasized the department store's significant contribution to the feminization of urban centers.⁸ Most prominently, Erika Diane Rappaport's invaluable work has traced how the development of London's West End as a revitalized and booming shopping district in the decades surrounding the turn of the century was depicted by department store entrepreneurs, advertisers, and journalists as an exclusively female space for consumption. The crowded, public metropolis, formerly off-limits to the domestic Angel in the House, came to be portrayed as "a sphere for female autonomy, pleasure, and creativity," as the retail revolution converted what was once the all-male domain of bankers, barristers, and businessmen into the center of female fashion, pleasure, and recreation (*Shopping*, 3). With the addition of restrooms, cafés, reading rooms, tea rooms, and libraries, department stores broadened their attractions as comfortable, inviting social rendezvous for women of the middle classes. Women consumers were soon indistinguishably linked to the department store in the public imagination: Emile Zola, for example, named both his novel and the fictional department store that is its subject "the paradise of ladies" (*Au bonheur des dames*, 1883), while Harrods' sixtieth-anniversary souvenir booklet (1909) was entitled *The House That Every Woman Knows*.

Such social rhetoric served to reinforce gender distinctions and institutionalize gender stereotypes regarding women and consumption. However, this reimagining of the city not solely as a locus of business (not to mention of crime, poverty, and prostitution) but also as a modern commercial and social center—this promotion of shopping as "the core of a new publicly oriented social life"—undoubtedly transformed the cultural lives and consumer habits of turn-of-the-century British men as well (Rappaport, "New," 137). Rappaport acknowledges that Victorian commentators seemed to insist on representing the new urban shopping centers as uniquely female spaces "despite the fact that men often shopped" and "despite a considerable masculine presence on the streets" (148). Since at least the eighteenth century, much of the West End had been—and continued to remain—devoted to hotels, apartments, tailors, and hatters (not to mention prostitutes) patronized by London's fashionable males. Many of the emerging department stores also catered to a mostly male crowd; at John Lewis and Co., for example, three-fourths of the staff and much of the customer base remained male throughout the period (Ferry, 245).

What remains to be acknowledged are the ways in which the department store created a new urban social center for men as well as women and how it actively invited men to participate in Britain's new consumer culture. The department store's widely acknowledged role in generating consumer desires and legitimizing self-gratification for women worked on men as well. The emergence of the department store and the opening of other fashionable public places for the middle classes provided a means through which, a reason for which, and an arena in which men could be interested in consumption, fashion, and self-display. Department stores aggressively strove to whet middle-class men's appetites for consumption and to transform them into active, public consumers by making available and affordable an ever-increasing variety of male-directed goods.

The dramatic growth in men's items offered in Harrods' turn-of-the-century catalogues provides a useful example. In its 1895 catalogue,⁹ Harrods' "Gent's Outfitting" comprises twenty-three pages (*Victorian Shopping*, 962–84). The items listed are mostly simple ready-made goods such as collars and articles of clothing that do not require a custom fit, such as pajamas. The few illustrations of the clothing offerings are mainly limited to cuffs, collars, and shirtfronts. Eight years later, Harrods' 1903 catalogue, although smaller overall, devoted nearly twice the space to gentlemen's clothing, offering an impressive array of men's articles: coats, hats, socks, neckties, gloves, collars, pajamas, robes, and "travelling rugs" (*Harrods General Catalogue*, 1903, 907–43). The ready-made items include frock coats, morning coats, dinner suits, dress suits, reefer suits, lounge suits, Norfolk suits, shooting suits, motor clothing, and yacht crew uniforms. There are thirty-three hats (including several varieties of pith helmets), fifty-five kinds of gloves, and three pages devoted to underwear (923–24, 933, 926–28). Collar clips, cufflinks, umbrellas, walking sticks, cigar cutters, and cigarette cases are located elsewhere in the catalogue. Other sections with a decidedly masculine appeal would have been "Bag, Trunk, and Portmanteau Department"; "Motor Department"; "Gun and Ammunition Department"; "Barrack Furniture and Camp Equipment Department," featuring army chests, portable washstands, towel horses, folding bookshelves, folding chairs, lanterns, canteens, and tents; and the "Sports and Games Department," featuring rowboats and canoes, exercise equipment and "developers," boxing gloves, Indian clubs, and supplies for football, cricket, lawn tennis, croquet, archery, and billiards (682–700, 1064–76). Of particular interest in the 1903 catalogue is a special perforated tear-out self-measurement form, with instructions, to be filled out and sent to the store—suggesting another way in which males were invited to take an active role in consumption.

Department store catalogues also reveal the increase in clothing accessories and other personal decorative items adopted by men at the turn of the century. Conduct manuals may have uniformly insisted that the true gentleman renounced jewelry, limiting himself only to a watch placed in a waistcoat pocket, perhaps connected to a gold Albert chain draped across the chest through a chain-hole in the vest. However, the ever-increasing variety of tie pins, cufflinks, rings, gold locket, umbrellas, and walking sticks offered in Harrods and other catalogues demonstrates the department store's efforts to cultivate and supply a growing market of men eager to decorate their persons with expensive and eye-catching accessories. Further, in September 1898, the men's monthly *Fashion* noted that "pearls are worn by nearly all our smartest men," and it subsequently reported on the wide popularity of tie pins, bracelets, and amber matchboxes and cigarette cases (Brummel, *Dress News*, September 1898, 21; *London Expert*, August 1899, 10; Brummel, *From Head*, May 1900, 18; Brummel, *From Head*, April 1902, 12). Not only did the variety of clothing options for men grow exponentially, but those clothes required their own accessories for proper care. The popular conduct manual *Clothes and the Man* (1900) recommended purchasing hangers for jackets, straighteners for trousers, and a trouser press to maintain their shape—and spends a total of ten pages detailing the proper use of these appliances (42–43, 91–93, 93–97). The rubberized cotton of the Mackintosh coat was infamous for giving off an unpleasant smell and inspired the creation of several products purporting to eliminate it (Walkley and Foster, 137–38). In 1898, *Fashion* had recommended several varieties of wardrobes "exclusively for men" (fig. 2.5) and reminded readers that "the care of clothes is of more importance than the purchase of them" (Brummel, "Care," 15). Department store stock, advertisements, and advice such as this suggest that for the fashionable middle-class bachelor (who lacked the valets employed by the upper classes), the purchase and care of clothing had become a time-consuming task.

As the variety of available goods increased, department stores found the ready-made clothing market to be an attractive and profitable lure for male shoppers. Ready-made clothing had been available since the eighteenth century but had been worn mainly by the military and the lower classes.¹⁰ Wider acceptance was slow at first, but the advent of the department store, along with the invention of the sewing machine in the 1850s, accelerated both the production and the popularity of ready-mades among the middle classes in the second half of the nineteenth century. An 1860 promotional pamphlet distributed by the prominent Victorian clothier E. Moses and Son made the (probably accurate) claim that 80 percent of

Britain's population had purchased ready-made clothing. Ready-made clothing items played a vital role in the success of the department stores, being perfectly suited to the large-scale stores' philosophy of moving goods quickly and in large quantities. Department stores began producing and selling their own ready-to-wear items, as well as partially made clothing to be completed at home or by a dressmaker, and "entire battalions of affluent customers deserted to the ready-

made camp, calling on a tailor only for dress or fitted wear” (Chenoune, 69). Ready-made suits were widely available beginning in the 1860s, and at the turn of the century, most department stores offered a wide range of ready-to-wear men’s and boys’ outfitting (Breward, *Culture*, 172–74; Jefferys, 312).

The success of ready-made clothing struck a major blow to the tailoring industry by making affordable and stylish menswear available to a much larger number of British males. A combination of cheap competition from East End sweatshops, advancements in mass production technologies, a decline in conventional tailoring craftsmanship, and a series of labor strikes in the 1890s severely disabled traditional tailoring and provided a wide-open opportunity for the department stores to pick up new business.¹¹ Many department stores seized an even greater share of the market by opening their own bespoke departments. By 1900, Harrods had opened a tailoring department headed by an “Expert Cutter always on Premises to take Measures,” and its catalogue boasted, “Every care taken with detail and a Perfect Fit absolutely guaranteed in every Order” (*Harrods General Catalogue*, 1900, 1313). The 1903 catalogue reports that the “Gentlemen’s Tailoring” department had been “extensively enlarged and consists of commodious Show Rooms” to provide military uniforms from regulation patterns and a “new and varied assortment of Coatings, Trouserings, Homespuns, Tweeds, Serges and West of England Suitings to select from, patterns of which, together with self-measurement forms, can be sent by return post when requested” (*Harrods General Catalogue*, 1903, 907).

Not every department store offered tailor-made articles, but by 1900 nearly all had moved into creating environments devoted to cultivating and catering to the male market. While both William Leach and Bill Lancaster claim that “Men’s Shops” did not really take off until the 1920s and ’30s (Leach, “Transformations,” 331) and James Bavington Jefferys contends that “the stores as a whole were not very successful in attracting men shoppers,” most menswear departments had been established decades earlier and had—if not flourished—at least expanded in both size and number during the decades surrounding the turn of the century (313). Some department stores, such as Lewis’s, sprang from the men’s clothing business, and several other major stores, including Whiteley’s, Debenham and Freebody’s, and Barker’s, had expanded into menswear by the 1870s (Adburgham, *Shops*, 153, 145, 163). Harrods did not open its own “Gentleman’s Outfitting” department until 1894, with the store’s expansion along Hans Crescent, but then pursued the men’s market vigorously. By the early 1900s, its ready-made lines and

personal tailoring services offered a full range of men's items from military uniforms to motoring topcoats. A 1911 promotional brochure outlined the attractions of "Harrods as a Man's Store": "Harrods have devoted very careful attention to the development of the Men's Departments. They have a high-class Tailoring Department, employing expert cutters and workers; a Ready-made Department which sells ready-made clothing of the best standard, most of which is made in Harrods own workrooms by their regular tailors, and which is stocked in such a great variety of sizes that almost any man can be satisfactorily fitted in a few minutes" (fig. 2.6; *Wonderful*, 11).

Tailoring shops had always existed as hermetically masculine domains. However, the department store was a decidedly more heterosocial environment and perhaps more immediately associated, to the Victorian male mind, with feminine pursuits. While department stores were well-known sites of female employment and activity and attracted a variety of eager and flirtatious male voyeurs, flaneurs, mashers, and suitors, the belief persisted among merchants that men avoided patronizing the large shops. Department stores therefore worked aggressively to attract middle-class male patrons by affirming their masculinity at every turn. Harrods insisted it was "very popular with gentlemen" and strove to increase that popularity by providing posh smoking and club rooms—spaces that were designed to replicate other familiar masculine environments. Harrods' "Gents' Club Room" was modeled after the exclusive gentlemen's clubs of the West End, "furnished," according to its own publicity, "in the style of the Georgian period carried out in richly carved and moulded mahogany" with a large fireplace and plenty of thick chairs that invited male patrons to linger (fig. 2.7; *Wonderful*, 11; quoted in Adburgham, *Shops*, 273).

Debenhams similarly featured a men's smoking room and gentlemen's cloak room, and its men's department declared, "The distinctive features of our tailor-made costumes are the smart cut and the perfect tailoring given by the men tailors" (Corina, 67, 68). William Whiteley's, the self-proclaimed "Universal Provider," attempted to lure male customers by offering a daily shave with an annual subscription to its hairdressing department, and the *Draper's Record* reported that a department store in Blackpool advertised a private men's room with newspapers and free cigars and coffee (Lambert, *Universal*, 181; Lancaster, 182). Selfridges was perhaps most aggressive of all in targeting the male consumer and devoted much of

its advertising to luring the men into the reputedly feminine department store. Much of the advertising rhetoric and promotional techniques employed by department stores to attract male customers nevertheless continued to marginalize and mute their consumption by emphasizing the ease with which men could purchase items and leave the store as soon as possible. Most men's departments tended to be located near side entrances of stores, in the belief that men wished to minimize the duration and public nature of their shopping. Harrods' "Gent's Hosiery," "Gent's Hats," "Tailoring," and "Gent's Boots" departments were clustered in small asymmetrical rooms at Hans Crescent Entrance No. 5 on the ground floor rather than the more public main entrances along Brompton Road (figs. 2.8 and 2.9; *Harrods General Catalogue*, 1909, 4). However, while the store's "Trunks," "Sad-

dlery," and "Indiarubber Goods" departments—what Harrods' 1911 promotional brochure *The Wonderful Development of Harrods in Twenty-One Years* calls a "magnificent centre" for men—were also located near an entrance, they were situated at Entrance No. 2 on Basil Street on the east side (*Wonderful*, 11). The gentlemen's club was also located on the ground floor, next to the tobacco department, but near the southwest corner on Hans Road (*Harrods General Catalogue*, 1909, 4). That Harrods' departments and facilities for men were located in three different areas in completely different corners of the first floor¹² was perhaps the result of the incremental and haphazard evolution of Harrods and many other department stores that grew in fits and starts by expanding into adjacent buildings. However,

such an arrangement would have required many male customers to pass through the full length of the store to complete their shopping errands. While it can be argued that the separate access doors, along with the rugged and masculine décor of the men's shops, only reinforced the gendered distinctions between men's and women's consumption, the department stores nevertheless succeeded in inviting middle-class men to venture fully into the physical and psychological spaces of modern consumption.

In March 1909—the same month Selfridges opened on Oxford Street—*Punch* printed a cartoon by C. Wallis Mills depicting a dismayed male shopper being greeted at the entrance of a department store by its overeager and officious staff (fig. 2.10). As uniformed doormen take his hat and cane, frock-coated shop assistants bow deferentially, and a shoeshine boy enthusiastically attends to his shoes. One sign posted at the entrance offers “Free breakfast, luncheon, tea, and dinner to all our customers,” while another declares, “We are doing this because we love you so.” The cartoon's caption reads, “COMFORT IN SHOPPING IS ALL VERY WELL, BUT THIS SORT OF THING IS A BIT EMBARRASSING WHEN ONE HAS ONLY COME TO BUY A COLLAR-STUD.” Perhaps Mills's portrait was a slight exaggeration, and it implies a possible backlash against the aggressive enticements employed by department stores to court male customers; after all, the poor shopper seems to express some *discomfort* at the lavish attention he is receiving. In any case, what is significant is that the men's market was recognized and actively cultivated by department stores. The modern large-scale stores were particularly instrumental in the construction of males as consumers in the way they moved the site of male consumption—for men outside of the upper classes, anyway—from the private and intimate small tailoring shop to the large and very public and heterosocial arena of the middle-class urban department store.

The Marketing of the Male Body and Male Self-Display

Writing of the symbiotic commercial relationship that had emerged between masculinity and goods in Britain during the 1980s and '90s, Frank Mort observes that male sexuality is produced through commodities: “Whether jeans, hair-gel, aftershave or whatever. . . . It was the display of the body *through the product* that was sexy.” Modern television and print ads that linger on compartmentalized images of denim hugging thighs, the perfect fit of a finely tailored suit, or the curve of a watch on a French-cuffed wrist evoke “fetishized and narcissistic display—a visual

erotica. These are bodies to be looked at (by oneself and other men?) through fashion codes and the culture of style" ("Boy's," 201). Jon Stratton argues that until very recently, advertising avoided presentations of the male body as much as possible, keeping it "hidden, invisible," and that the goods most popularly accepted by men—such as cars, tools, cigarettes, and alcohol—have been those associated not with body image but rather with more vaguely defined masculine self-image (185). He contends that the display of the male body in advertising began only in the late 1960s, pointing out that the first male nude used in an advertisement appeared in 1967 (187). Mort, Sean Nixon, and Tim Edwards all cite the famous 1986 Levi's 501 "bath" and "launderette" television ads featuring model Nick Kamen¹³ as the symbolic start of the popular commercial sexualization (and fetishization) of men's bodies and their relationship to consumer goods in ways that only women's bodies had been subject to previously.

Yet, as we have seen, fully a century before, advertisers and marketers actively strove to masculinize goods, to create intimate connections between products and male consumers, between goods and male bodies. An 1885 Cadbury advertisement

from *Punch* magazine depicts a privileged gentleman in recreational dress (white trousers, short-sleeved shirt, boater hat, sweater cast over his shoulders) enjoying cocoa, while he and his seated female companion watch a boat race taking place just out of the frame (fig. 2.11). The man stands in the foreground, his all-white sporting outfit set against a background of mostly blacks and grays, emphasizing his physical prominence. While his companion reclines languidly, he is all straight lines and right angles. His pose is clearly one of confident, even aggressive, male sexuality: one leg propped up on a chair, prominent buttocks, chest thrust forward, bare muscular arms (which appear tightly flexed even as he holds his cup of cocoa), long sideburns, and a whiskbroom mustache. In ways strikingly familiar to a modern audience raised on advertising, the advertisement conflates consumer and sexual desires—appealing to female viewers who want the man, appealing to male viewers who want to look like the man, and inducing both to want cocoa.

The commercial relationship between “sexuality and goods” operates in two directions: advertisers employ sexual imagery to make products appealing to men, and men use goods to make themselves sexually appealing, as an extension of their sexuality. In other words, bodies make products sexy, and products make bodies sexy. Advertisements such as this one for Cadbury’s Cocoa demonstrate how nineteenth-century audiences were invited to gaze upon the spectacle of the male body—to acknowledge the physical, sexual presence of the male form. Late-Victorian advertisers, as well as department stores and the other tools of the consumer industry, served to create a culture increasingly focused on goods and visual display. Between 1860 and 1914, the commercial discourse of merchants sought to expand middle-class men’s variety of sartorial choices as well as their interest in self-display in ways not always openly recognized within the strict confines of the Great Masculine Renunciation. Advertisers and social commentators promoted a more open, publicly acceptable relationship between men and goods and particularly between men’s bodies and the clothes that covered them. As the period marked a growing public awareness and cultivation of the male body, men were presented as both subjects and objects, as both viewers and displayers of visible, sexual bodies.

The growing variety and affordability of fashion for the middle classes enabled men in greater numbers to use clothing to decorate and call attention to their bodies. While the popular and widespread adoption of the three-piece suit (which I discuss at length in chapter 5) made middle-class men’s basic dress more uniform in one way, this is not to say that it made men’s clothing necessarily more

drab or bland, as earlier critics have claimed. In fact, the late Victorian age marked a significant return to ornamentation and fashionable extremes in men's costume. For example, the *Gentleman's Magazine of Fashion* noted in 1888 that embroidery on men's dress suits and waistcoats was becoming fashionable ("Observations," 3). Waistcoats became a particularly popular canvas on which to express one's personal style in the 1890s, and the cut of men's jackets was altered to reveal as much as

possible of the waistcoat underneath. "It is the waistcoat in which a man can express his individuality, nowadays, whereas it used to be the tie alone," Mrs. C. E. Humphry writes in *Etiquette for Every Day* (1902). "Some very surprising waistcoats are to be seen, even on well-dressed men" (290). In 1890 the *Tailor's Review* declared that "there is a reactionary return in the direction of the mode of the distant 'Days of the Dandies,' when the waistcoat afforded a field for display of taste and fancy which has since been denied it" ("In Praise of Waistcoats," 88). Above the waistcoat, the thick neckcloths and high upturned collars that had been the height of fashion earlier in the century were echoed in the soaring starched collar at the turn of the century. More form-revealing, body-hugging lines became popular in the last decade of the nineteenth century as well, provoking many fashion writers to hail the return to the "panache" and rococo tastes of the styles of the eighteenth-century aristocracy (Breward, *Hidden*, 36–37).

"Perhaps one of the most difficult things for us to do is to choose a notable and joyous dress for men," Oscar Wilde observed in a lecture during his 1882 American tour. "There would be more joy in life if we were to accustom ourselves to use all the beautiful colours we can in fashioning our own clothes" ("House," 162). Though he was hardly a spokesman for normative Victorian male sartorial display, Wilde's recommendations were nevertheless increasingly adopted in the years that followed. As department stores and clothiers expanded their stock in the decades surrounding the turn of the century, the variety of socially acceptable colors, patterns, and fabrics for men expanded in turn. Large checks were popular for informal suits in the 1890s, and striped flannels were long regarded as stylish on both trousers and lounge suits (Foster, 129; *Clothes*, 191; *Cutter's*, 48). Karen Baclawski notes that "crazy patchwork using scraps of rich fabrics enjoyed a vogue at the end of the nineteenth century" (194), and pale pinks and mauves were the mode in the early years of the twentieth century (Laver, *Dandies*, 14). Along with the eye-catching waistcoats emerged colored shirts in pale blues, yellows, and pinks. "You can get them in almost every colour under the sun," declares *Clothes and the Man* (164); worn with a detachable white collar, they were a perfectly acceptable complement to the modern city lounge suit (Humphry, *Etiquette*, 283). Banded socks were popular during the late nineteenth century, and brightly colored ones were commonly worn from 1900 until the First World War (Baclawski, 195).

What had once been the sole domain of the dandy became permissible, even socially desirable, for the "average" middle-class Englishman at the turn of the

century. And the popular literature of the period reflects the growing public attention paid to men's fashionable consumption. *Clothes and the Man* reveals that social attitudes regarding men's public interest in fashion had undergone a dramatic shift. This book's author, the men's fashion editor of the newspaper *To-Day*, known as the "Major," asserts in the introduction, "Some dozens of readers of *To-Day* write to me every week to ask questions about men's clothes" (2). In response, *Clothes and the Man* served as an invaluable guidebook aimed squarely at middle-class men. Its advice is conversational and good-natured and always conscious of cost, offering excruciatingly detailed and methodical instruction on what articles of clothing to buy, how to have them fitted and made, when and where to wear them, and how to care for them. Of its 196 pages, the book devotes 46 pages to coats and another 42 to trousers.¹⁴ The proper purchase and wearing of tie pins merits 8 full pages of discussion. This was quite a change from the markedly vague advice offered by earlier etiquette manuals and their repeated assertions that the true gentleman was never to think of fashion. While, of course, men's interest in clothing and personal display had never really vanished, what was new was the widespread public acknowledgment and social acceptability of masculine fashionable desire. *Clothes and the Man* reveals a new rhetorical arena—the flip side of the Great Masculine Renunciation—in which men's open interest in fashion was affirmed. "It is . . . a mistake to suppose that a well-dressed man is a fop," declares the "Major" (*Clothes*, 16). At the turn of the century, dressing well and cultivating one's appearance could be the prerogative of every respectable man.

Display appealed profoundly to late-Victorian men, the fashion press insisted, and the qualities that had once defined the dandy's problematic class and gender status were becoming more and more acceptable and mainstream to middle-class men. "Men of good form are blossoming forth like butterflies," declares *Fashion*. "The chrysalis has been shed, and the gorgeous creature has emerged" (Brummel, *Dress News*, June 1898, 20). *Fashion's* choice of metaphor is particularly revealing, as it demonstrates how the visual spectacle of dandies, once pejoratively referred to as "butterflies," had been absorbed into mainstream masculinity (Chenoune, 32). These instructive texts imagined a fashionable middle-class man who increasingly fulfilled the essayist Thomas Carlyle's summary of the dandy's sole object: "that you would recognise his existence; would admit him to be a living object; or even failing this, a visual object, or thing that will reflect rays of light. Your silver or your gold . . . he solicits not; simply the glance of your eyes. Understand his

mystic significance, or altogether miss and misinterpret it; do but look at him, and he is contented" (198).

In the 1900 novel *Kipps*, H. G. Wells's working-class protagonist exhibits an interest in cultivating and exhibiting publicly his physical appearance. The good-natured albeit simple-minded Arthur Kipps was raised—not insignificantly—in his uncle's general merchandise store and takes a job in a draper's shop. In weighted language that makes explicit the young man's growing awareness of his public physical self, Wells describes his hero's indoctrination into life as an object of display. In Kipps's late teens,

his costume . . . began to interest him more; he began to realise himself as a visible object, to find an interest in the costume-room mirrors and the eyes of the girl-apprentices.

In this he was helped by counsel and example. Pearce, his immediate senior, was by way of being what was called a Masher, and preached his cult. During slack times grave discussions about collars, ties, the cut of trouser-legs, and the proper shape of a boot-tow, were held in the Manchester department. In due course Kipps went to a tailor, and his short jacket was replaced by a morning coat with tails. Stirred by this, he purchased at his own expense three stand-up collars to replace his former turn-down ones. They were nearly three inches high, higher than those Pearce wore, and they made his neck quite sore and left a red mark under his ears. . . . So equipped, he found himself fit company even for this fashionable apprentice, who had now succeeded Minton in his seniority. (47–48)

Here Wells depicts what might be described as a sartorial "mirror phase," in which the young Kipps experiences a sudden recognition of himself as a "visible object," subject to the scrutiny of the opposite sex and capable of being adorned and made more sexually attractive through fashionable goods. Realizing that his social identity and sexual success will be greatly defined by "the eyes of the girl-apprentices," he immediately seeks to transform himself through fashionable clothes and grooming supplies into a visually appealing image. Further, Kipps illustrates J. C. Flugel's assertion that "it is comparatively easy for the commercial influences to exploit Narcissism in the interests of fashion" (145). According to Robert Boccock, "Consumption built around the human body—its attractiveness

to the self as much as to others; its sexual and erotic appeal; its use as a means of expressing a sense of identity—has become a process in which desire is embedded, in which major meanings are located” (102–03). The experiences of growing up—literally—among goods and working in a department store have endowed Kipps with a heightened awareness of appearance and materialism, for they have put him into constant, direct contact with both consumable goods and consumers. While Wells’s depiction of Kipps was intended as a critique of the working class, his protagonist represents—in only slightly exaggerated form—the condition of most of England’s urban population at the turn of the twentieth century: he has been born and raised within a technologically sophisticated culture of mass consumption and has merged his body with the consumable good, rendering his very body an object to be desired and consumed by others.

In the increasingly visual culture of late-nineteenth-century Britain, men were publicly acknowledged to possess a physical, visible self in ways that had formerly been suppressed. This public visibility often manifested itself in a more open acknowledgment of the sexuality and sexualization of men’s clothing and appearance through women’s eyes. In 1830 William Cobbett’s *Advice to Young Men* had criticized male display, arguing that women “are much too penetrating to draw their conclusions solely from the outside show of a man” and urging men to cultivate their inner qualities, which women would perceive regardless of one’s outer façade. “Female eyes are, in such cases, very sharp; they can discover beauty though half hidden by beard, and even by dirt, and surrounded by rags; and, take this as a secret worth half a fortune to you, that women, however personally vain they may be themselves, despise personal vanity in men” (14–15). Cobbett’s counsel reflects the conventional sexual dichotomy, implying that women are preoccupied with finery—and can be judged accurately, at least in part, by their attire—while men’s desire to be looked at and admired for their physical appearance is vain and immoral and will be punished by women who reject their foppish show. To be sure, such advice was advocated by etiquette literature throughout the Victorian era, and certainly many men had always failed to heed such admonitions, but by the turn of the century, advice in many conduct manuals had radically shifted in tone, offering open acknowledgments of and apologies for men’s desire to attract the opposite sex through physical appearance. “It is the female ‘appreciation’ we men all make for” is the confession in *Best Dressed Man* (1892), “not such as the male unwillingly accords. What reasoning man gives thought to the value, sometimes quite fictitious, put upon him by his own kind? The best of us never gets

full value from his fellows. The least worthy not seldom gets more than this from woman. Therefore it is that men of intelligence always play for the better stake” (32). In February 1905, *Fashion* contributor Bessie O’Connor declared,

Some men are vain enough to imagine that neither men nor woman [*sic*] pay any attention to the clothes of a man. There never was a greater mistake than this. Surely women, who are constantly studying the cut, the lines and the fashions of their own clothes, necessarily observe the cut and the fashions of men’s habiliments. . . . Every woman notices whether a man is well dressed or not, and whether he is careful of his personal appearance. . . . I have a critical eye for the garb of the male sex, and I can assure my readers I am not by any means alone in this respect. (5–7)

Turn-of-the-century men cultivated the attentions of the opposite sex through a growing freedom in, and variety of, socially acceptable sartorial choices that accentuated the male body and celebrated masculine sexuality. In particular, men of the later decades of the nineteenth century had moved toward decidedly form-fitting, body-revealing styles. The *Cutters’ Gazette of Fashion* announced in 1893 that “the tendency is certainly towards close fitting garments” (48), and *Fashion* noted in 1898 “a decided tendency to shapeliness” (“What,” April 1898, 6). Fitted frock coats, fitted jackets, fitted pants, and “neck-brace type collars” were the mode among all classes, and suits emphasized longer and more muscular torsos, padded shoulders, and tight waists (Chenoune, 92). The English-French *Journal des tailleurs* complained in 1879, “The absurd fashion for tight clothes now in vogue has reached the point where you no longer know where to put your wallet and handkerchief” (quoted in Chenoune, 89). The *Tailor’s Review* went even further, suggesting that form-fitting men’s trousers left little to the (female) imagination:

Women are beginning to object to and discuss the garments of men. They say it is time there was a reform in men’s wearing apparel; that pantaloons form a fashion which should be subjected to immediate consideration; that the spectacle of males attired in a garment so closely approximating the exact shape of the legs is not at all relished by females of high moral character; that the wearing of trousers, as now designed, is neither aesthetic in principle nor *en rapport* with the proprieties that should dominate civilized society. . . . If men are shocked by the

sight of a lady in tights, or *au naturel*, is it not to be conjectured that women regard with loathing the current habit of mankind of clothing the legs in an envelope that reveals only too acutely outlines that might be left to the imagination? If it is improper for women to apparel themselves so as to afford a correct idea of the proportions and contours of their nether extremities, is it not in equally bad taste for masculines to indulge in that exposure? (108)

Interestingly, the “Major” suggests similar disapproval of extremes in male display by women who guard old standards of male sartorial reserve when describing the body-slimming illusions performed by the strategically placed rows of buttons on a double-breasted waistcoat:

Some double-breasted waistcoats are made with the two rows of buttons set wide apart across the chest and gradually getting closer, till they nearly meet at the bottom of the waistcoat. There are advantages to be derived from wearing such a waistcoat. They tend to make your chest appear larger than it really is, and the two rows of buttons meeting at the bottom of the waistcoat make your waist appear a trifle smaller than it really is. If your wife tells you that a man has no business to think about having a waist, you can retort that primitive man had a waist considerably smaller than the waist of primitive woman. She won't like that. (*Clothes*, 64)

This dramatic shift in conduct manual rhetoric suggests that the overarching Victorian societal mores no longer depended on a strict gender dichotomy that distinguished women's vain preoccupation with finery and physical beauty from men's more substantial and cerebral pursuits. Men's and women's vanity in personal appearance is implicitly equated in their mutual desire for a slimmer waistline. Yet both texts represent it as a conflict in which women disapprove of male sexual display. One wonders, however, if the *Tailor's Review* accurately represents women's response to men's tight-fitting trousers. Male legs were widely regarded as “the chief male erogenous zone for nineteenth-century women,” and many men paid particular attention to the development and showcasing of their legs (McDowell, 76). In George Meredith's *Egoist* (1879), for example, Mrs. Mountstuart spends a great deal of time relishing Willoughby's legs, concluding, “In

spite of men's hateful modern costume, you see he has a leg" (13). The author's lengthy description of the ladies' regard for Willoughby's lower appendages makes palpable the sexual power that a well-shaped pair of male legs could have over a female heart:

The leg of the born cavalier is before you; and obscure it as you will, dress degenerately, there it is for ladies who have eyes. You *see* it; or, you see *he* has it. . . . Many, with a good show of reason, throw the accent upon *leg*. And the ladies knew for a fact that Willoughby's leg was exquisite; he had a cavalier court-suit in his wardrobe. Mrs. Mountstuart signified that the leg was to be seen because it was a burning leg. There it is, and it *will* shine through. He has the leg of Rochester, Buckingham, Dorset, Suckling; the leg that smiles, that winks, is obsequious to you, yet perforce of beauty self-satisfied; that twinkles to a tender midway between imperiousness and seductiveness, audacity and discretion; between "you shall worship me" and "I am devoted to you"; is your lord, your slave, alternately and in one. It is a leg of ebb and flow and high-tide ripples. Such a leg, when it has done with pretending to retire, will walk straight into the hearts of women. Nothing so fatal to them. (13)

In 1850, Adam Blenkinsop's *Shilling's-Worth of Advice on Manners, Behaviour and Dress* had warned, "Never wear anything tight," because "[b]y tight dressing you reveal the reality" (22). It is doubtful that fashionable youth with a preference for tight-fitting trousers sought to achieve any closer semblance of reality; certainly the man with the narrowing waistcoat buttons did not. Indeed, the decades surrounding the turn of the century also saw an increased use—or at the very least a more publicized use—of cosmetic and body-shaping products by men that served, in Hollander's words, to "fictionalize" the male body (32). If the evidence of tailoring commentators and advertisers is to be believed, these items were no longer solely the affectations of effeminate dandies but had come to be worn by a large number of middle-class professional men. Corsets seem to have been particularly popular. The *Tailor and Cutter* reported in 1884 that "a large number of our fashionable men are going in for stays or corsets" and ten years later that "the corset is worn by thousands of men" (quoted in Cunnington and Cunnington, 284, 344). In 1880, renowned English dressmaker Charles Frederick Worth frequently ran an advertisement in *Punch*, announcing that his company had "added

a department for Gentlemen, and every class of Corset, surgical, spinal, for corpulency, and riding, made to measure" (fig. 2.12). Twenty-five years later, another advertisement for Worth's Corsets was directed to "Officers and Gentlemen" (fig. 2.13). Both advertisements depict an erect, broad-chested, mustachioed man modeling the product—a figure of overt masculinity clearly intended to reassure male customers by dispelling any connotations of effeminacy in the wearing of a corset.

Advertising and department stores also made available and affordable an enormous variety of soaps, colognes, hair dyes, powders, and other articles marketed to men as a means of achieving and maintaining an attractive, youthful gender and class performance. The ever-expanding size of gentlemen's leather dressing cases—depicted in Harrods catalogues filled with a host of combs, brushes, scissors, files, and bottles—suggests that more and more toiletries and other accessories were required (figs. 2.14 and 2.15; *Victorian*, 1061, 1245). In 1859, *Habits of Good Society* had discouraged the use of "violet-powder" after shaving, "now very

common among well-dressed men," because "it is almost always visible, and gives an unnatural look to the face" (114).¹⁵ But advertisers worked rigorously to counter associations with femininity through strategically worded advertising copy that appropriated women's beauty concerns and masculinized them. A Williams' Shaving Soap advertisement of 1895, featuring an illustration of a man at a dressing mirror scrutinizing his skin through a magnifying glass, declares,

"Pores—! Do you realize what they are—how *numerous*, how very *hungry* and thirsty? Little mouths of the skin—constantly drinking—drinking—eating—eating—everything within reach" (fig. 2.16). The ad's subject matter and tone seem to depict conventionally female beauty concerns—skin, complexion, the delicate minutiae of pores. But the text turns decidedly masculine and aggressive: "Nothing comes nearer the skin than your SHAVING SOAP—! You apply it with the brush—and, as it were, *force it* into those willing little mouths." While the actual persuasiveness of advertisements such as these is unclear—and precise sales figures do not exist—men's soaps, shaving supplies, and toilet powders had become big business by the turn of the century. At the same time, beards were becoming unfashionable, meaning that more men needed to shave more often, yet this is a chicken-and-egg relationship, and determining whether marketers drove this change or merely responded to it seems impossible. Either way, the purchase and use of all these consumer goods transformed the late-Victorian middle-class man into an object on public display. This was a dramatic and significant reversal of the notions of male sartorial invisibility that had dominated Victorian rhetoric on masculinity only decades before. The commercial cultivation of male display helped bring about the public re-emergence of the male body as aesthetically pleasing and sexually desirable. It also transformed the male body into an object to be modified, enhanced, and decorated through consumer goods.

By the end of the period, the consumer desires that Lydgate attempted to disguise by foisting them onto his wife had come to be presented as much more publicly acceptable, exercised in the public arena of the grand urban department store. The celebratory promotions exhorted by producers, merchants, and advertisers all clearly point to the cultivation of a growing awareness of men's visible, physical, sartorial selves that had emerged in England, becoming more socially accepted, more mainstream, more public, and more middle class by the turn of the century. This acceptance of male consumption and display, fueled by the emerging consumer culture industry, changed late-Victorian definitions of normative manhood in fundamental ways. Whether advertisers continued to insist on the distinctions between male and female purchasing habits or attempted to blur or obliterate those distinctions, the result was that men were beginning to consume to the same extent as women. Men were allowed access into formerly exclusively female spaces and activities, as their consumption moved out of the conventional, old-fashioned, small-scale, homosocial world of the tailor's shop into the modern, large-scale, heterosocial world of the department store. They were permitted to have a visual, physical, erotic self to be appraised by the public. All this marks significant shifts in both socioeconomics and constructions of masculinity. But it also suggests the tremendous cultural influence and reach of the new capitalist consumer machine that underpinned late-Victorian and early-twentieth-century Britain—a force so powerful that it could blur long-held and fiercely defended gender differences. Writing about late-twentieth-century male-directed commercial campaigns that were transforming the traditional macho man into a cosmetics counter-lurking clotheshorse, Antony Shugaar observes, "Sharp gender distinctions have floated away on a wave of cash, and cash trumps gender every time" (70). But such changes had begun well over a century ago, when the foundations of modern commodity culture helped overturn the Great Masculine Renunciation and transformed Britain's middle-class male into an eager consumer and the male body into a object of public display that could be altered, decorated, and even made into spectacle through goods purchased at the department store or tailor's shop.