

THE AUSTRALIAN

ARTS | CULTURE

FEEL THE TIMES

It's Saturday afternoon, and a pretty typical scene is taking place inside the pub. A group of guys have spotted one of their own wearing something out of the ordinary — a pair of shorts deemed slightly too short — and they're not letting him live it down.

"Mate, what are those?" laughs one of the men, loudly enough for other revelers to hear, as he points at the shorts. "Do they make them for men?" morts another.

The friend in the short shorts laughs along: it's just a bit of harmless banter between mates, nothing malicious — but the following weekend he heads out wearing something more subdued. Sometimes it's easier not to draw attention to yourself.

Anecdotes like this pervade Australian society, and male friendships in particular.

It's a peculiar cultural attitude that's captured in a new memoir by Sydney Swans player-turned writer and musician Brandon Jack.

Not standing out is a big thing at a footy club. We were very much the prime example of Tall Poppy Syndrome, writes Jack. "If you wore a new item of clothing it wouldn't go unnoticed. Some guys had a photographic memory of the kits everyone owned and wore, and having the same outfit as someone else would lead to a photo and the 'Sammy same kits' nickname."

But why does this culture of ridicule exist in relation to men and fashion? And could it be that as our understanding of manliness evolves, so will the attitude of Australian men to fashion?

My job as a street-style photographer in Sydney is a lot easier than it was when I started a decade ago, says Giuseppe Santamaria, who runs the popular style blog and Instagram account, Men in This Town. He says that in the past two to three years especially, he's observed Australian men growing more "brave" with their choice of clothing. This progress is captured in his forthcoming coffee table book, *Men In This Town: A History of Men's Street Style*, to be published in September.

I'll go into the CBD with my camera once a week now, and get a good 20 to 30 photos of guys who are wearing something fun. That's compared to the maybe one or two photos I got when I started off.

In 2010, when Santamaria first took to the streets of Sydney with his camera, men's fashion in Australia was a very different scene.

The #MeToo movement was still seven years away and in Australia, traditional images of masculinity — "strong, white men such as convicts, bushrangers, legends and explorers", as sociologist Raewyn Connell wrote in a 2003 book titled *Male Trouble: Looking at Australian Masculinities* — tended to inform and influence the way men presented themselves.

I don't think the white Anglo-Saxon male is as predominant as before, says Connell, whose seminal 1993 text, *Masculinities*, has just been published in Farsi — the Lith translation it's received.

The older model of the married breadwinner is less relevant to younger men today, and most of the population is urban. There's a wider range of ethnic communities and gay men's masculinities have become more visible — that's an important change.

"Yet white, heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon males still dominate in parliament, at the levels of the corporate world and in the affluent professions," she adds.

It might seem like a big stretch — to say these men are influencing the way we dress ourselves. But by virtue of being in very visible positions of power, the influence is inevitable.

While Connell's research hasn't delved too deeply into men's style, she notes that Australian men do care about what they wear and are mostly influenced by global trends.

"Fifty years ago Australia didn't have the hoodie, now you see it



THE BRAVE NEW WAVE

Australian men are overcoming cultural obstacles to embrace fashion and banish a fear of 'standing out'

AMY CAMPBELL

everywhere. I think a major influence on Australian men's clothing styles is [inside] the container ships."

Rosie Findlay, a digital fashion media scholar who grew up in south Sydney and is now based in London, where she is the course leader of MA Fashion Cultures at the prestigious London College of Fashion, also disputes the idea Australian men don't care about their appearance.

The desire to look good just manifests differently to how it does in her adopted city, she contends, where a history of Savile Row tailoring and youth subcultures bleed into the way men dress.

"I think Australian men have always found ways to display their bodies, even if it's not classed as 'fashion'," Findlay says.

"Like, having a fit, strong body and wearing something simple that calls attention to your physique."

She points out that some areas are more accepting of things like colour and pattern than others. "Swimwear is an area where it's more appropriate for men to get dressed in flamboyant colour, while showing their bodies off," she says.

"Australian men do care about how they dress. But maybe in the mainstream, it's about trying to find areas that are comfortable and permitted, so you're not going out on such a limb."

In order for progress to occur, of course, some form of going out on a limb is necessary.

This is something Sean Venturi learned when he launched Venny, an Australian "resort wear" brand that's popular with men (and women) who enjoy looking good, not at the mercy of feeling comfortable in a social and a functional sense. It took a few years of trade and a complete business restructuring but, since starting his brand in



GIUSEPPE SANTAMARIA, GETTY IMAGES
More Aussie men adopt the modern street style

2011, Venturi has realised and acted upon something that's eluded many of his contemporaries.

"I think it's about giving guys confidence. People just want permission," says the designer, who recently opened his brand's first Melbourne outpost in the suburb of Armadale.

"Because there's this attitude, I think it's universal but especially strong in Australia, where guys just don't want to look like dickheads. They want the security of a uniform. They don't really want to call attention to themselves."

Plenty of hang-ups behind a friendly dressing down

AMY CAMPBELL COMMENT

I have long been conscious of the ambivalence many Australian men feel towards "fashion". I grew up in regional Victoria, where weekends were reserved for local footy and cricket, and where matches were forged in beer-soaked clubrooms afterwards, mostly while wearing sweatpants and a grass-stained guernsey. There, the boys who were brave enough to change into something even moderately trendy after games were "rousted" for it. Usually, said rousing was delivered with a side of bonhomie. But at times it struck me as being plain mean. Yet still, paying out a male for committing a fashion faux pas remains a distinct display of Australian masculinity. Like chugging a VB or preferring not to talk about your feelings.

Connell, the sociologist, says she's "sceptical" to attribute this to tall poppy syndrome, as it "implies Australians have a homogeneous set of attitudes".

Regardless, standing out can also be burdensome. Like our idiosyncratic friend at the beginning of this story, you're opening yourself up to being cut down.

As Santamaria and Venturi have observed, the fearmongering effect of that cutting-down culture seems to be subsiding, however slowly. Yet preconcived notions die hard and, in some pockets of so-

When I started my job at GQ magazine, Australia's leading men's style publication, my awareness of this attitude became more acute. Over time, I realised our publication — and any brand or individual operating in the local menswear arena — was competing against something far more deeply ingrained than ambivalence, or even indifference we were selling style to a nation of men raised to associate fashion and dress with femininity and, by extension, weakness.

When it comes to the role of men in Australian society, we uphold the expectation that they must be seen as strong and stoic, which doesn't leave much room for permission to play with appearance.

Some of the people I spoke to for this story believe that the cultural obligations that have prevented men from experimenting with fashion are softening. It does seem that as our understanding of what makes a man a man changes, attitudes that conflate fashion with femininity are too.

It's about giving guys confidence. People just want permission — there's this attitude, it's especially strong in Australia, where guys just don't want to look like dickheads

SEAN VENTURI
FOUNDER, VENNY

ciety, traditional displays of hegemonic masculinity continue to rule. "I think the stigma that's always been there with fashion is: you're into fashion, so you're gay," says Santamaria.

It's not necessarily intentional, it just kind of seeps into the Australian subconscious. But it's always been the way that if you had style, you'd have a term

created for you — like metrosexual. And that's obviously associated with homosexuality," the photographer adds.

Santamaria believes this has been an elephant in the room, and that many men working in fashion and adjacent industries have been hesitant to address it. "It's because people don't want to sound wrong by saying it. But I think it's definitely been a barrier. Right now, that insult is less powerful, so fashion is being played with a bit more," says Santamaria, nodding to celebrities such as Harry Styles and Australian pop star Troye Sivan, pictured left — one straight, the other gay — who have been lauded for ushering in a new era of masculine self-expression as it pertains to style.

"It's very much the case right now where male celebrities are expressing themselves through fashion the way they want. But that's not entirely new. David Bowie did it, so did Mick Jagger. So it gets to this point where it's like 'OK, it's going to last this time'."

But I don't know. History says otherwise. A significant contribution to the style and masculinity debate in recent years has come from Nathaniel Wiener, a London-based fashion academic and the Cultural Studies, BA Fashion Textile and Jewellery Programs stage leader

stars re-emerge, they're clearly looking to make up for lost time on media outlets from Vogue to Vulture to GQ, which proclaimed "Spike Lee's All-Vuitton Cannes Wardrobe Set a New Standard for Exuberance". The pandemic has perhaps supercharged these stars' eagerness to make a splash. In recent months, both Usher and actor Regé-Jean Page have conspicuously worn shapely pink suits by Dazigden, a menswear brand based in Singapore and New York and owned by Chelsea Scott-Blackhall.

Ms Scott-Blackhall noted that with events on pause throughout last year, breakout style moments that generated media coverage were extremely limited. As the

At another hallowed British fashion school, Central Saint Martins, like Santamaria, Wiener expresses a sense of cautious optimism.

"Gen Z does seem to be a lot more open to different ways of performing gender and sexuality," observes the academic. "But I also think the visibility of this on social media can obscure the continued appeal of traditional masculinity, which tends to influence the vast majority of young men."

Maybe, as Wiener infers, we could be marketing fashion and clothing to men more effectively, if we simply used different words. A recent study of his found that men respond more positively to the word "style", which is seen as individual and enduring, rather than "fashion", which is viewed as ephemeral and trend-driven. The same can be said for images.

There is a disjuncture between how men actually wear clothing and the commercially orientated representations of men's clothing found in magazines, on the catwalk, and in stores," concludes Wiener, in a paper titled *Fashion vs style: The repudiation of fashion in online menswear communities*.

Maybe, as Wiener infers, we could be marketing fashion and clothing to men more effectively, if we simply used different words. A recent study of his found that men respond more positively to the word "style", which is seen as individual and enduring, rather than "fashion", which is viewed as ephemeral and trend-driven. The same can be said for images.

There is a disjuncture between how men actually wear clothing and the commercially orientated representations of men's clothing found in magazines, on the catwalk, and in stores," concludes Wiener, in a paper titled *Fashion vs style: The repudiation of fashion in online menswear communities*.

Maybe, as Wiener infers, we could be marketing fashion and clothing to men more effectively, if we simply used different words. A recent study of his found that men respond more positively to the word "style", which is seen as individual and enduring, rather than "fashion", which is viewed as ephemeral and trend-driven. The same can be said for images.

There is a disjuncture between how men actually wear clothing and the commercially orientated representations of men's clothing found in magazines, on the catwalk, and in stores," concludes Wiener, in a paper titled *Fashion vs style: The repudiation of fashion in online menswear communities*.

Maybe, as Wiener infers, we could be marketing fashion and clothing to men more effectively, if we simply used different words. A recent study of his found that men respond more positively to the word "style", which is seen as individual and enduring, rather than "fashion", which is viewed as ephemeral and trend-driven. The same can be said for images.

There is a disjuncture between how men actually wear clothing and the commercially orientated representations of men's clothing found in magazines, on the catwalk, and in stores," concludes Wiener, in a paper titled *Fashion vs style: The repudiation of fashion in online menswear communities*.

Maybe, as Wiener infers, we could be marketing fashion and clothing to men more effectively, if we simply used different words. A recent study of his found that men respond more positively to the word "style", which is seen as individual and enduring, rather than "fashion", which is viewed as ephemeral and trend-driven. The same can be said for images.

There is a disjuncture between how men actually wear clothing and the commercially orientated representations of men's clothing found in magazines, on the catwalk, and in stores," concludes Wiener, in a paper titled *Fashion vs style: The repudiation of fashion in online menswear communities*.

Maybe, as Wiener infers, we could be marketing fashion and clothing to men more effectively, if we simply used different words. A recent study of his found that men respond more positively to the word "style", which is seen as individual and enduring, rather than "fashion", which is viewed as ephemeral and trend-driven. The same can be said for images.

From the NBA Draft to Cannes, the flashy coloured suit is everywhere

JACOB GALLAGHER

In March 2020, as Americans woke up to the reality of Covid-19's spread, I wrote a cringingly ill-timed story about coloured suiting for men.

Tailoring in strong colours once reserved for grooms and T-shirts makes a full-throated declaration that this is not your father's grey flannel suit. I wrote, noting that readers could buy a tonal-red suit from Berluti or a lime-green one by Jacquemus.

In my defence, few of us knew how catastrophic the pandemic would be when I pitched the story but, by the time it was published on March 18, many readers were iso-

lating at home in sweats. The article is now a relic of an untimely moment. At the last minute, my editors and I attempted to make it relevant with the headline: "Spike Brilliantly in These Optimistically Hued Suits." This was before Zoom would supplant Skype as Americans' go-to for lockdown video-calls.

Suffice to say, most of us did not log onto our 2020 video meetings in resplendently colourful suits. Formal-leaning fashion trends took a back seat to comforting sweats and routine Zoom suits as slog through WFH routines. But as something resembling normal life has resumed for some — and even as the Delta variant of the virus is reversing positive

trends in portions of the country — vivid suits are re-entering the public eye, an expression of over a year's worth of pent-up desire to dress more, especially outdoors. Musk noted that each time cases dropped and the world seemed to be crawling back to "normal", he'd see a surge in clients coming in for pick-me-up suits in spring colours. For them, it's not just a suit, it's a wearable mood enhancer.

Consider as well the kaleidoscopic suits celebrities have worn in the past month or so. In early July, Colonel Domingo took to the red carpet at the premiere of Zola in a shiny Big Bird-yellow Dolce & Gabbana suit. At the Cannes Film Festival, The Crown star Josh O'Connor wore a flamingo-pink, double-breasted suit by Loewe,

though he was one-upped by jury president Spike Lee, who not only wore a blaring pink Louis Vuitton suit (with matching sunglasses) but also a rainbow-coloured, cloud-printed suit to close the festival. At last week's NBA Draft, fresh-faced first-round pick Jonathan Kuminga, Evan Mobley and Alperen Sengun pulled out suits in pumpkin, teal and emerald, respectively.

For celebrities and athletes, attracting press attention is certainly one motivation for going beyond navy or grey. By wearing a primary-coloured suit, they're creating a mini media moment for themselves. Last week, those budding NBA stars were covered not only on ESPN, but — thanks to their prismatic tailoring — on Q&A's web-

site, too. Mr Lee's experimental suits earned him glowing notices on media outlets from Vogue to Vulture to GQ, which proclaimed "Spike Lee's All-Vuitton Cannes Wardrobe Set a New Standard for Exuberance". The pandemic has perhaps supercharged these stars' eagerness to make a splash. In recent months, both Usher and actor Regé-Jean Page have conspicuously worn shapely pink suits by Dazigden, a menswear brand based in Singapore and New York and owned by Chelsea Scott-Blackhall.

Ms Scott-Blackhall noted that with events on pause throughout last year, breakout style moments that generated media coverage were extremely limited. As the

stars re-emerge, they're clearly looking to make up for lost time on media outlets from Vogue to Vulture to GQ, which proclaimed "Spike Lee's All-Vuitton Cannes Wardrobe Set a New Standard for Exuberance". The pandemic has perhaps supercharged these stars' eagerness to make a splash. In recent months, both Usher and actor Regé-Jean Page have conspicuously worn shapely pink suits by Dazigden, a menswear brand based in Singapore and New York and owned by Chelsea Scott-Blackhall.

Ms Scott-Blackhall noted that with events on pause throughout last year, breakout style moments that generated media coverage were extremely limited. As the

stars re-emerge, they're clearly looking to make up for lost time on media outlets from Vogue to Vulture to GQ, which proclaimed "Spike Lee's All-Vuitton Cannes Wardrobe Set a New Standard for Exuberance". The pandemic has perhaps supercharged these stars' eagerness to make a splash. In recent months, both Usher and actor Regé-Jean Page have conspicuously worn shapely pink suits by Dazigden, a menswear brand based in Singapore and New York and owned by Chelsea Scott-Blackhall.

Ms Scott-Blackhall noted that with events on pause throughout last year, breakout style moments that generated media coverage were extremely limited. As the

stars re-emerge, they're clearly looking to make up for lost time on media outlets from Vogue to Vulture to GQ, which proclaimed "Spike Lee's All-Vuitton Cannes Wardrobe Set a New Standard for Exuberance". The pandemic has perhaps supercharged these stars' eagerness to make a splash. In recent months, both Usher and actor Regé-Jean Page have conspicuously worn shapely pink suits by Dazigden, a menswear brand based in Singapore and New York and owned by Chelsea Scott-Blackhall.

Ms Scott-Blackhall noted that with events on pause throughout last year, breakout style moments that generated media coverage were extremely limited. As the

stars re-emerge, they're clearly looking to make up for lost time on media outlets from Vogue to Vulture to GQ, which proclaimed "Spike Lee's All-Vuitton Cannes Wardrobe Set a New Standard for Exuberance". The pandemic has perhaps supercharged these stars' eagerness to make a splash. In recent months, both Usher and actor Regé-Jean Page have conspicuously worn shapely pink suits by Dazigden, a menswear brand based in Singapore and New York and owned by Chelsea Scott-Blackhall.



Spike Lee at Cannes