

Dressed to Thrill: Male prostitution and Fashion

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Abstract:

*The murders of silent film actor Ramon Novarro; film director Pier Paolo Pasolini; and fashion designers Gianni Versace and Rudolph Moshhammer by their male hustler companions had cemented the association of male prostitution with violence and sordidness. Although those real-life crimes had made headlines at the time, few can recall the names of the men who committed them, let alone what they looked like. And yet, in reality, brothers Paul and Tom Ferguson, Giuseppe Pelosi, Andrew Cunanan and Herisch Ali Abdullah all somehow conform to the rough-trade, gay-for-pay stereotype perpetuated in modern popular culture since the late 1940s with the publication of Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* and Jean Genet's *Querelle de Brest*. Since then, the representation of male prostitution in the arts mainly focused on the negative aspects of this type, portraying the ultra-masculine, streetwise male prostitute as a desperate, violent and cunning figure, for whom – just like the 'Little Joe' character in Lou Reed's song *Walk On The Wild Side* – one has to pay, or pay.*

This chapter will consider the visual representation of the male hustler as a gay fantasy figure, aiming to examine the ways in which myth and reality feed off each other by comparing the real-life representation of male prostitutes with fictitious male hustler characters in literature, cinema, and photography. In recent times, social media with its marketing opportunities dramatically changed the exposure of sex workers and also increased the access to them, and the research aims to establish how the image of the Stud-for-Hire is communicated online, compared with the character's fictional incarnations. It also considers the relationship between male prostitution and fashion, and how particular streetwear clothing styles became identifiable with the hustler's look as opposed to the more sophisticated style of the paid escort and gigolo catering to women.

Keywords:

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fashion

spectatorship

1. Introduction

It is established that when we dress ourselves, we construct appearances out of our own body image or body shape – character façades that appear to be distilled versions of how we wish to communicate ourselves to others. This external self-manifestation form in our mind, but also in the minds of others, how we express ourselves, how we feel, who we say we are and what we are about. This understanding stems from the growing interaction between the discourse on gender and identity and research on fashion and clothing as vehicles for self-definition and self-expression. With this in mind it is only relatively recently that we noticed a shifting research focus moving from womenswear to menswear, and towards a consideration of the performative qualities of menswear, where the evolution of menswear and the effect of men's style have begun to be evaluated.

In this chapter I will explore how sexual desire is communicated through the possibilities and potentialities of menswear, and will specifically discuss it in the context of the figure of the male sex worker – arguably one of the most significant archetypes occupying the discussion on masculinity in style. This chapter will consider how the heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual male prostitute appears to embody eroticism and sexual fantasy through the use of fashion and styling – alternating between classical but also more playful variations on masculine identity. It will highlight how on the one hand, the self-identified heterosexual gigolo catering to women often seems to adopt – in real life and work of fiction – a sophisticated, suited and booted look (referencing their refined and aspirational self by nodding to class, style and taste). And, on the other hand how the real and fictional gay hustler fashions himself into an ornately clothed toy, championing a particular style which appears to be more concerned with adornment, suggesting either a fashion-conscious lifestyle or working-class realness. This chapter will look at the various incarnations of male prostitution in real life and the artist's imagination, and the role of fashion in shaping the fascination with this character for clients and cultural audiences alike. Research has come to recognize various types of male sex work, for example street hustlers (including the sub-category of trade hustlers), escorts, callboys and masseurs (Caukins & Coombs 1976; Waldorf and Murphy 1989; Pruitt 2005). This research will mainly focus on street/trade hustlers and both gay and straight Internet escorts (ibid. 2005).

2. Body-Suit

The attention given to the qualities of the clothed male body and the focusing of a spectator's gaze upon particular regions of this body could be traced back to the fifth century BC and throughout the history of performance art, to contemporary cinema. In his research on the male body as spectacle in Attic drama (1998), Richard Hawley highlights that in Greek tragedies the attention given to the body of male mortals as the object of the gaze was based on social class, so the ones that generally received most attention were the characters of aristocratic nobles, rather than the chorus. Some tragic characters, such as Oidipous lend themselves to becoming desirable objects of the gaze of other characters, so much so that in Hippolytus Hawley finds a very early example of a male as the object of the erotic gaze. In *From Savage to Citizen: The Invention of the Peasant in the French Enlightenment* Amy S. Wyngaard further investigates the focus given to the working-class body and the impact of social class and aspirations on representations of male bodies through the performative qualities of fashion. Wyngaard writes on the work of Dancourt, Regnard, and other eighteenth-century French novelists and dramatists in which '[...] servants change clothing and social roles at the request of their masters [...]' for comic effect, and as a subversive plot device in the amorous storylines. In the case of French novelist Pierre de Marivaux's plays, Wyngaard evokes 'The liberated atmosphere of the Comédie-Italienne, where aristocrats, bourgeois, and members of the lower classes literally rubbed elbows, provided a tangible, if ephemeral realization of the social mixing and mingling being played out on stage.' In the context of this research, it is interesting to note the relationship between sartorial performativity, masculinity and a specific social milieu foreshadowing the connections made throughout this chapter. As Wyngaard writes, 'Subverting the traditional correspondence between rank and appearance, the clothing and role changes [...] provide a forceful visual demonstration that clothing can reflect desired, rather than actual, status.' Marivaux's proposition that style and social status can be acquired through an engagement with fashion and the study of social mannerism, etiquettes, and poise is most relevant for this research (2004, 41-43).

As opposed to the impressive elegance of male and female nudity as it appears in in Classical Greek and Roman art, it has been common in modern times to assume that, in public, the less clothing we wear the more sexually available or promiscuous we are. In more recent times, American historian Anne Hollander highlights the link between sexual identities, social standards, and clothes, maintaining that a personal fashion style has the ability to reflect particular choices associated with a sexual lifestyle. Hollander charts the evolution of classic menswear to include:

[...] sportswear, and country leisure wear that shared the scene with men's formal city wear for work or play. Work-clothes, the jackets of lumbermen and the jeans of cattlemen, were also part of the general scheme [...] Arms, legs and trunk are visibly indicated but not tightly fitted, so that large movements of the trunk or limbs don't put

awkward strain on seams or fastenings, and the lumps and bumps of the individual body's surface are harmoniously glossed over [...] It is universally flattering, because it does not insist on specific bodily detail (2016, 4-5).

Hollander's study highlights wardrobe staples for working-class and middle-class men, drawing lines between what is functional rather than purely aesthetic, and giving special emphasis to the modern men's suit by highlighting how it exudes sensuality (by accentuating the legs, shoulders, and waist) – calling it '[...] a costume of perfect nudity' (Hollander 1994). She considers the suit a sartorial extension and elaboration on the nude male in archaic and classical Greek art and the masculine ideal of classical antiquity, with its well considered and carefully constructed cut revealing as much as concealing, and, as such, becoming a meditation on a new ideal for men and masculine perfection. As an item of clothing it suggests a combination of power and pleasure, obscuring what needs to be kept private but at the same time suggesting that what's underneath is a well proportioned, beautiful, and symmetrical body – articulating and highlighting the body's masculine stature. It seems to say of the wearer – here's one that is self-composed and possesses a harmoniously developed personality and well-balanced mind, which can be considered very attractive, sexy – sexually expressive even. Hollander's research draws attention to a particular time in history when gendered identity seemed to be further focused and emphasized by changing styles in fashion – the invention of the men's suits by the English at the end of the eighteenth century. This was the same period also when it became accepted for males to wear simple, abstract shapes, giving up the fancy, over-decorated and adorned style which was popular before – a style which was embraced and taken over by the opposite sex. Fashion and dress studies have established that after this turning point, and within the domain of style and clothing, women were historically trusted with the role of expressing eroticism, sexual fantasy and the unconscious elements through fashioning appearances, while masculine attire became associated with implicit function or formality. Bearing in mind this inherited dichotomy and the inevitable social context of fashion, the aim here will be to establish a definition of male sexuality through the lens of male prostitution and fashion and its influence on how male sex workers communicate themselves to their potential clients.

3. Expose and Conceal (The Italian Connection)

In the FX Networks' television series *The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story* (2018) – a dramatization of the events leading up to the murder of Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace, particular emphasis is placed on how clothes become an extension of the main male lead personas – the murderer and his victim, especially the in-and-out-of-job outfits of Andrew Cunanan – the man who killed Versace. A prep school yearbook photograph of a beaming Andrew Cunanan captures how clothing can denote sexual availability in a marriage of fashion and pose. In the 1987 photograph Cunanan is seen wearing a pair of belted, pleated trousers and a white, button-down, dress shirt – unbuttoned and untucked, revealing his nipples and nicely built torso. A wide, striped tie, hanging like a loose noose around his neck, metaphorically slashes Cunanan's fully exposed upper body. The words 'nice bod' are scribbled across Cunanan's naked chest, as if his whole personality is summed up in two words, telling the world his commodity status and physical and sexual offering. Anyone who has ever seen an all-male strip show will instantly recognize the male stripper/sex worker look, the faux sophistication of an apparently respectable young man accustomed to take off all his clothes for the means of earning a living. As this photograph can be seen to showcase Cunanan's lewdness and self-indulgence it became one of the more popular images used by the press when it tells the Cunanan-Versace story, generally accompanied by the description of Cunanan being a 'high-class male prostitute' – an "accolade" which was apparently already bestowed on him by his mother (Bull 1997, 40). As a moderately successful gay male prostitute Cunanan's style and personal preference was towards a more refined look, which this chapter aims to demonstrate as a style that is more closely linked to the image of the heterosexual male prostitute.

It is now established that Cunanan was a "Boy Toy" – a kept companion of "Sugar Daddies" – wealthy, older and sometimes closeted homosexuals. As a result it has been necessary for him to maintain an elegant and sophisticated look, wearing clothes that in the gender-defined nineties were perhaps not fully revealing his sexual orientation. Ten years after the yearbook photograph was taken, and following his shooting of Versace, Andrew Cunanan was dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, after days of being on the run from the police. Carlos Noriega, the homicide cop who found his body in a houseboat by the end of the manhunt recalled: 'I walked up to the second floor and saw Cunanan on his back. He was wearing boxer shorts, no shirt, no shoes' (Woodfield 2018). It is ironic that in death as in life, clothes – or the lack of them, came to define Andrew Cunanan and his image, for his clients' and the public mind.

In the dramatized version of Cunanan's life as a male prostitute his character is seen alternating between smart-casual wear when he is with or around clients or lovers – sporting effortlessly rolled up shirt-sleeves, a single-breasted blazer swung over a shoulder; and scruffy sportswear when he is on his own. A number of scenes showing him assembling outfits from his wardrobe before meeting the five men who became his victims are reminiscent of those of Richard Gere playing a Los Angeles playboy named Julian Kay, in writer-director Paul Schrader's film *American Gigolo* (1980). Nearly forty years after its first release it is difficult to ignore the film's underlying homophobia (Julian is a straight male prostitute who refuses to take "fag jobs"; the real killer happens to be a gay male prostitute who's been trying to incriminate Julian – the innocent heterosexual); and the challenging treatment of sex work as a legitimate and valid occupation. In *Representations of Male Sex Work in Film* (2014) Russell Sheaffer highlights Julian's fictional history and his "rise" from hustler (a term associated with gay male prostitution) to gigolo – a supposedly higher-ranking male prostitute catering for women – implying a kind of sex work hierarchy. However, *American Gigolo* is arguably the first

mainstream film to handle this subject while placing particular emphasis on how fashion and appearance come to be utilized by male prostitutes and, as such significant for this research. An iconic scene showing the shirtless Kay laying out an assortment of fancy *Giorgio Armani*¹ linen, silk, and wool crêpe outfits on his bed (while doing a line of coke), then carefully matching his shirts and ties before getting himself kitted out properly, offered audiences a glimpse into the fictional life of a successful male escort (for wealthy women) as opposed to the less flashy existence of the street-walking male prostitute or bar hustler catering to gay male clients, that became more visible especially in North America since the early 1960s (Parsons, Bimbi and Halkitis 2001). Being a male prostitute is what ‘allows’ Julian Kay in *American Gigolo* to expose or conceal his well maintained and virile body through a selection of ultra-masculine, but also somewhat feminine wardrobe choices. Kay seduces a female client he visits in her room at the Beverly Hills Hotel by wearing a smart, expensive-looking suit and tie and projecting a professional, highly sophisticated and cultured masculinity. But then, in another scene he fascinates another female client by showing off in an unbuttoned white linen shirt and minuscule shorts as he is tanning by the pool of the less grandiose Westwood Apartment Hotel – projecting a sensual, flirtatious – almost slutty and a little bit cheap kind of masculinity. Those other, less refined menswear outfits/fashion statements that *American Gigolo* promoted, such as a baggy cotton shirt unbuttoned to the navel or extremely short denim cut-offs and running shorts, have become less salient over the years, and more associated with and driven by the film's lead character's knowing but nonchalant attitude towards dressing up, sex, and sexuality, than modern fashion trends for the man on the street. To a certain extent such fashion items are now more associated with late 1970s and 1980s gay fashion trends – mainly influenced by the type of hedonism associated with gay club culture and disco music.

American Gigolo is marked by a number of scenes that highlight (through Schrader's use of tracking shots set up from behind Richard Gere) the strategic importance of Gere/Kay's well-shaped buttocks, encased in a variety of perfectly fitted trousers. The protagonist's status as a sexual object and the focus on his backside is present pretty much from the film's very first scene, and regardless of Kay's occupation as prostitute this focus on the male derrière alone could be perceived as highlighting a more feminine take on sexuality, let alone a homosexual gaze. Paul Burston writes on the fetishization of Gere's body: ‘[...] the film's reconstruction of a purportedly heterosexual man as a source of erotic spectacle borrows extensively from a catalogue of textual codes which have their roots in gay male culture’ (2005, 124). There have been other critics, such as Peter Lehman (2007), who equates Kay's profession as a prostitute and fondness for fashion and fine clothes with stereotypical feminine traits (therefore he must be gay), but in the context of contemporary discourses on male prostitution and our current appreciation and respect to menswear his analysis comes across as quaint and dated.² Lehman relies on a frame-by-frame analysis that appears oblivious to the role, function and effective use of clothing to provoke and seduce, let alone enhance self-promotion – perhaps best illustrated by the film's second scene. In this scene Kay is shown doing dumbbells exercise at home as he is hanging from a pull-up bar, wearing ankle grips and the smallest, tightest pair of anthracite gym shorts and is otherwise naked – a vision which at the time of the film's release and still today marks an explicit objectification of carnal masculinity and establishes ways of approaching dress and dressing (rather than nudity and the gesture of undressing) as provoking desire. Lehman discusses the scene in his book *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (2007) drawing attention to the background sound of Gere/Kay's heavy breathing alternating with the sound of language-learning tape (Kay is practicing his Swedish as he exercises) and adding to the scene's autoerotic sexual overtone. This complex use of sound, in addition to the particular clothing choice (for a supposedly heterosexual character), and Gere's fine-looking and almost fully naked body have come together to create a vision of the male body as commodity and as a fetish, with a particular focus on the erotics of the male body-sex/machine. We can find traces of this scene in countless social media accounts of male fitness and bodybuilding enthusiasts who are posting workout segments that focus on particular body parts such as abs, arms, chest, back and butt. A number of websites that promote male sex work feature similar clips that draw attention to the masculine prostitute's body, providing a more realistic experience than profile pictures (some go even further and show the escort in action) in order to grab the attention of their prospective clients.³

Richard Gere's performance was key for the success of *American Gigolo*. Gere was already used to rely on his attractiveness (and the display of his naked torso) to his advantage, as throughout the early part of his acting career he (and the directors he worked with) came to count on his body as the key signifier of his ambiguous sex appeal (*Bloodbrothers*, 1978; *Breathless*, 1983). One of Gere's most iconic images as a young actor was taken by American Photographer Herb Ritts⁴, showing him in a gas station, posing with his hands behind his neck, a

¹ Armani's *American Gigolo* wardrobe – with its fabric palette of grey, beige, greige, anthracite, taupe and brown, had not only catapulted the designer to international fashion stardom, but have also redefined menswear and became part of the vocabulary of menswear tailoring, referenced to this day in the menswear collections of contemporary brands such as *Bottega Veneta* and *Rag + Bone*.

² “Julian is identified with the traditional feminine position constructed by Hollywood and is frequently called “Julie.” “Julie” is a prostitute, practicing a profession identified almost exclusively with women.” (Lehman 2007, 19)

³ For example, there is plenty of uncensored video blogging (vlogging) on gay and straight escort pages on *Twitter*.

⁴ *Richard Gere, San Bernardino* (1978).

cigarette dangling nonchalantly from the corner of his mouth. Gere is wearing a sleeveless undershirt, cowboy boots, and a pair of belted denim. While Gere is by no means a male prostitute, it is important to include Ritts's picture here as a relatively early example of an invitation to stare in unashamed admiration at contemporary, sexy and confident male beauty. In addition, the clothes Gere wears play a pivotal role in the construction of meaning from the photograph.⁵ The image and what it seems to suggest recall American documentary and street photographer William Gedney's 1969 short sequence of pictures showing what appears to be a male hustler standing on a street corner.⁶ Hanging out by a theater entrance, next to a poster for the *Curley Mcdimple* musical (a spoof on Shirley Temple's high-camp, Depression-era musicals), Gedney's hustler is projecting nonchalant sexual availability – hands stuck in his back pockets, his open shirt revealing his torso, an outline of his penis can be seen though the light colored fabric of his trousers, looking like he's ready to be picked-up. Gedney's May 2, 1969 notebook entry quotes Henry Miller: 'I know exactly how one stands with hand in pocket and coat collar turned up – a sort of glorious feeling of disreputability.'⁷ The overtly masculine, assertive pose in the Gedney and Ritts images, alongside the display of a fashion style associated with Stanley Kowalski-esque, blue-collar workers, form a good example of the influence of masculine culture on gay male identities, and the interplay between straight and gay fashion styles in the 1960s and 1970s, which I will further discuss in the next section.⁸

Comparing the theme of *American Gigolo* ("the inability to express love") with the life of a gigolo, Schrader labels the male escort type 'a character of surfaces.' Influenced by the notion and resonance of Italian taste and fashion, Schrader then placed his protagonist in a world of '[...] high style [...]' which was directly inspired by the production aesthetics of Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970). When Schrader discusses "high style" his reference point is the Hollywood films of the 1930s and '40s with their high production value and use of stylized visuals, which *The Conformist* came to emulate – going against the prevailing realist tendency in post-WWII European cinema (Kouvaros 2008, 37-8). But it can also be seen as a general reference to the *Italian Way* – epitomized by the *fare bella figura* saying. *Fare bella figura* (literally – to make a beautiful figure) has come to identify the acknowledgement of style as an integral part of everyday life – '[...] showing oneself off to one's best advantage' (Nardini 1999, 5). It refers to a preoccupation with looking good, appearance and reputation, social status and the cultivation of a stylish self, with fashion being naturally an important element in that context. *Bella figura* is an acquired social convention that is ultimately attributed to '[...] self presentation and identity, performance and display' (Nardini 1999, 7). Further defined by 1980s consumer culture, *American Gigolo*'s considers style an expression of fashion, with Julian Kay's personal style denoting the distinctive sexual and intellectual aesthetic experience that he offers to his clients. To borrow from literary theory 'A very common view of style is that it is a matter of the careful choice of exactly the right word or phrase, le mot juste' (Haynes 2006, 2) and so Julian carefully chooses the exact shirt that is precisely matched with a pair of well-fitting trousers and a colour-coordinated blazer in order to compose a fully coherent and distinctive, superficial, but nevertheless fully convincing social reality of himself. This fabricated self-presentation is then what he sells his clients. Schrader here highlights stylistic analysis as a form of psychoanalysis, and the act of clothing oneself in garments as an act of self-constituting. In *Fashion Theory: An Introduction*, Malcolm Barnard outlines the evolution of understanding fashion in the context of Psychology and the concept of Eros. Sigmund Freud first applied the concept of Eros to psychoanalysis in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). For Freud Eros is the wide domain of the life instinct, our will to live, our desire and passion, directly opposed to Thanatos – our destructive death instinct. Desire, alongside and in parallel to identification, is considered in psychoanalysis as:

[...] one of the two psychic processes by which the self is constituted [...] Identification and desire are for Freud, processes that are differentiated from one another in terms of their relation to the object [...] the operation of identification is the wish to be the object, while the operation of desire is the wish to have the object (Bancroft 2012, 23).

Both of these processes, I believe, continue to be important in our understanding of the role of fashion in constructing the principle of attraction as part of the client-male prostitute relationship. Examining Schrader's portrayal of the figure of the male prostitute we can recognize the use of fashion as a device that highlights the character's visual representation and metaphorical transformation. Julian Kay communicates his (aspirational) social class position through fashion and style as an internal and external processes of identification, and at the same time his appeal and availability as an object of desire

⁵ 'We didn't have a sense that it was significant. We were just shooting, having fun. But it's actually a complex photo with the juxtaposition of hard and soft and different angles (Gere 2012).

⁶ Duke University's Digital Repository library staff notes: 'In addition to strip club storefronts, there seem to be photographs of male prostitutes or hustlers.'

⁷ In post-WWII Paris, and, later, New York in the 1950s and 1960s much attention was given to the streets and urban life by writers and artists as well as documentary photographers. Street hustlers became by default the subject of documentary photography.

⁸ See pp. 5-6 in Doron, Itai. "Queering Foreign Bodies: Discourse and Identity in Visual Representations of Straight Migrant Men." In *Ways of Queering, Ways of Seeing*, edited by Jillian E. Cox, 115-147. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, UK, 2015.

for his clients. In addition, Schrader's evocation of the *Italianness* of Italian commodities (mainly through the use of Italian menswear clothing style) ensures Kay's status as a Latin lover and a vehicle of rampant eroticism. In her discussion of the Latin lover image, Jacqueline Reich notes that 'Italian men have never avoided fashioning themselves as objects of the gaze, by embracing male sexuality and eroticism in both their attitude and the clothes they wear' (2004, 46). Reich elaborates on the definition of the Latin lover as a bi-product of Italian masculinity and stereotypical, foreign perceptions of Italy by highlighting that '[...] the Latin lover has become the "imagined" embodiment of the primitive whose unrestrained and exotic passion contrasts sharply with the more civilized and restrained Northern European or American society.' Reich suggests that clothing play a key role in the Latin lover's projection of a casual but elegant, refined manner and in the process of turning this character into a commodified object of desire. Reich charts Italy's remarkable post-World War II growth and its positioning as '[...] an international style maker and trend setter [...]' with the Italian Fashion Industry being highly responsible for the power of the "Made in Italy" label, making Italian products highly desirable, and branding them with a certificate of good taste and excellent craftsmanship that is still relevant today. The growing prominence of Italian design has also proposed new directions, and specifically for menswear, the Italian attitude became synonymous with a more relaxed fit, proposing a sensuous outlook on life, which for the international male consumer mostly translated as an "alternative masculine style" (2004, 26-33). Influenced by post-war Italian economic growth and a rise in 1950s consumer culture and advertising, Rome became the center of a hedonistic fashion and culture scene and the destination for the international jet set, as much as London did about a decade later. Naturally the city also provided the backdrop to fictional tales and narratives about social relationships, and social aspirations by both local and international artists. Rome also provided opportunities for many of its gay expatriates (such as American writers Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal and James Merrill, and American painters Bernard Perlin, Paul Cadmus, and Jared French), and other gay nonnatives who resided or semi-resided in Rome at this time, to engage in a lively scene of Italian men for hire. Even though [...] postwar conditions had left many Italians desperate for currency [...] American biologist and sexologist Alfred Kinsey speculated that by the 1950s the large majority of Italian men who exchanged sex for money did so not because of a low socioeconomic status, but as a good way to keep maintaining heteronormative expectations. Getting paid for sex was a good enough excuse for straight heterosexual males voluntarily engaging in homosexual sex, especially when considering tourists as clients (Spring 2010, 152).⁹

In Tennessee Williams' *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950) Paolo di Leo is a young and greedy Roman gigolo who is financially supported by Karen Stone – a former actress and a wealthy American widow, who is thirty years his senior. Williams captures the romantic allure of Rome and of Roman masculinity and emphasizes Paolo's narcissism and understanding of the relationship between clothing and identity, capturing him as he:

[...] rushed toward the mirror as if it were water and his clothes were on fire. Without a glance in Mrs. Stone's direction, he gazed and preened in the glass, and finding it somewhat crowded by their two reflections, he murmured Excuse me and gave her a slight push to one side. Then he turned his back to the long mirror and, looking over his shoulder, he lifted the jacket over his hips so that they both, she and he, could admire the way that the flannel adhered to the classic callipygian shape of his firm young behind (2013, 88).

Paolo enhances the sense of his body through fashion confidence while engaging in the act of narcissistic adulation. He is at the same time a spectator and a spectacle, he sees and he is being seen – watching women watching him as he offers them the gift of his potential companionship, his body and lovemaking skills. Paolo exudes elegance at every turn. We are told that he brushes his hair with cologne (2013: 102), and when he twists his head Mrs. Stone [...] retained her hold on the polished and perfumed wings of black hair at his temples' (ibid.: 98). He epitomizes an unapologetically peacocky masculinity, performed as an act of self-fashioning, and paraded for public consumption. Like the figure of the English dandy, Paolo represents an Italian masculinity seen through the lens of the cultural custom of the *bella figura* – conveying his masculinity, his aspirational identity, and his outlook on life through his clothes, turning his performing male body into an object of spectacle in an urban environment. There is a fundamental aspect of narcissism attached to this form of masculinity that attempts to cover up insecurities '[...] through the outward manifestation of grandiosity and excessive self worth [...]' (Reich 2004, 9).

4. Expose and Conceal (Take a Walk On the Wild Side)

The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone also presents us with the unnamed figure of a "young man," standing at the other end of the men-as-sexual-objects spectrum. In his conception as a spectacle this character still has to climb the social ladder to reach Paolo's level of stylistic sophistication, as at the beginning of the story and by the end of it beauty is the young man's only visual asset:

His beauty was notable even in a province where the lack of it is more exceptional in a young man. It was the sort of beauty that is celebrated by the heroic male sculptures in the fountains of Rome. Two things disguised it a little, the

⁹ This type of reasoning still exists today in gay sex tourism to destinations such as Morocco or Brazil where the figure of the male macho still persists. See, for example Gregory Mitchell's *Tourist Attractions: Performing Race and Masculinity in Brazil's Sexual Economy* (2015).

dreadful poverty of his clothes and his stealth of manner. The only decent garment he wore was a black overcoat which was too small for his body. Its collar exposed a triangle of bare ivory flesh; no evidence of a shirt. The trouser-cuffs were coming to pieces. Naked feet showed through enormous gaps in his shoe leather. He seemed to want to escape the attention which his beauty invited, for whenever he caught a glance he turned aside from it. He kept his head lowered and his body hunched slightly forward (2013, 4).

The young man represents here the '[...] cultural symbol of the Italian as other [...] the 'imagined' embodiment of the primitive, whose unrestrained and exotic passion directly affronts the more civilized and restrained Northern European or American society' (Reich 2004: 26). Williams then describes an exchange of glances between the mysterious, poor looking young man, who '[...] had descended from the shell of a town among the hills south of Rome [...]' and an affluent American male tourist at the Piazza Trinita di Monte, illustrating the basic street hustler-client cruising decorum:

[...] he observed without looking at it the figure of an American tourist who had stopped a little space away from him, under the Egyptian obelisk whose cryptic pagan engravings the man was appearing to study. But the young man knew that the hand in the pocket was about to produce a package of cigarettes and that he would offer him one. If accepted, that offer would have a sequence of others, dispelling hunger and every other discomfort for days to come. Still without returning the stranger's glances, his eyes assessed the value of the camera hung by a leather strap from his shoulder and the gold band at his wrist and even the approximate size of his shirt and shoes. But when the American tourist did exactly as he had expected, he shook his head curtly and moved a few feet away and then resumed his steadfast gaze upon the height of the ancient palazzo: for when a man has an appointment with grandeur, he dares not stoop to comfort... (2013, 5-6).

The young man's "acquisition" and probably, even more so – his transformation into another, equally impeccable "Paolo" (the archetypal street hustler as social climber) – happens beyond the last page of the story and in the reader's (and Williams's) imagination. But his presence adds another, darker dimension to the story. As he follows Mrs. Stone in the streets we are introduced to an aspect that Williams borrows directly from his life as a single gay man – the element of danger associated with cruising for "rough trade" male prostitution. Williams's preference for "rough trade" sex is fully documented in his autobiography (*Memoirs*, 1975), as him and some of his contemporaries used to frequent the intersection of Broadway, Seventh Avenue, and Forty-second Street and Times Square in midtown Manhattan in the Early 1940s, looking for sailors on shore leave – heterosexually-identified "real men" who doubled up as hustlers. Samuel Steward – an important 20th-century gay literary figure, tattoo artist, academic and sexual renegade had meticulously documented his encounters with "rough trade" hustlers in his infamous *Stud File*. Steward gave special mention to the sailor's uniform:

Most uniforms make the bodies beneath them more exciting [...] the sailor's uniform top[s] the list. [...] The uniform surrounds him with the shimmering glitter of an illusion, and we are frozen into our positions of adoration and desire. The uniform is the psychic link – the gazing-glass through which we look into another world (Spring 2010, 82).

Throughout his life Steward was a consumer of sexual services and developed an expanded list of homosexual and heterosexual male prostitutes as a client.¹⁰ In the introduction to *Understanding the Male Hustler* (1991, 2012) – one of Steward's books, John P. De Cecco defines the age group of hustlers to be between 15 and 25, and splits them into different types, as they existed at the time of Steward's engagement with them:

The younger ones are the street hustlers; the older hustlers sometimes avoid the streets altogether and confine their hunting and affairs to the gay bars that are known and recognized as hustler bars [...] Some of the particular handsome men are known as "call boys," often older and more experienced than the street hustlers; they present themselves through newspaper ads, gay strip shows, houses of prostitution, and modeling or escort services. Some of them are former models and performers who have appeared in the gay media and porn film. A few, the "kept boys," find rich "sugar daddies," older men who dazzle them with money, cars, clothes, swimming pools, travel, and more money (2012, Introduction, para. 7).

Steward's preoccupation with prostitution was made with the assumption that, as far as his obsession for "rough trade" hustlers, the monetary transaction facilitated an optimum solution for both parties. By allowing the client to only perform oral sex on him, the primarily heterosexual hustler:

[...] retained his heterosexual identity, asserted physical and emotional dominance over the homosexual client, and at the same time profited financially from what was to him an inconsequential (and basically pleasurable) sensation.

¹⁰ Steward's polemic against America's "double standard" with respect to homosexuality and prostitution (*The Bull Market in America*, Der Kreis, June 1961, pp. 28-31) traces male prostitution and mercantile liberalism back to circa 79 AD, and a shuttered painting found in the Roman townhouse of the Vetti brothers (A. Vettius Restitutus and A. Vettius Conviva were brothers and former slaves who had been able to buy their freedom), located within the ruined ancient city of Pompeii, Italy: 'It is of a stalwart young man, exposed, standing next to a pair of scales, and resting part of himself on one of the balances, whilst in the other-outweighed-stands a pot of gold' (Spring 2010, 300).

[...] particularly since the male hustler, unlike his female counterpart, was basically invisible within the general population and, provided he was not exposed, suffered little or no lasting social stigmatization from his work (Spring 2010, 299).

About half a decade earlier Thomas Painter – a cultured and progressive homosexual with a highly developed social identity in the extremely conservative time in which he lived, and an avid customer of “rough trade” prostitutes, conducted observational research of the Times Square and Forty-second Street hustler scene between the fall of 1934–43. Painter describe his ideal young, heterosexual white male hustler as someone who denoted insubordination and rebelliousness through dress sense and conduct:

[...] slightly coarse, even slightly brutal [...] A casual defiance of convention as to wearing of clothing is intensely exciting – i.e., wearing too few, too light, or too much en dishabille.¹¹ clothing to suit the place or occasion is most erotic. A very “tough” youth in dress and manner [...] (2001, 129).

Painter’s research elaborates on the presentation and display of the street hustler’s body as object of desire in New York in the 1930s. According to Barry Reay, Painter gave an account of the character’s fashion style, dividing it into two types. The first was the style of his favored ‘roughly dressed’ delinquents, laborers, sailors, and working class drifters – ‘This was the masculine garb of dungarees, blue jeans, short-sleeved summer polo shirts, caps, studded belts, and boots.’ And the second was the style of the ‘smooth’ – street-hustlers who looked at sharply dressed gangsters and their rough and tough masculine identities for fashion inspiration. Painter highlighted that this second style could appear ‘cheap and flashy’ – an indication of the social and economic conditions of the wearer, drawing special attention to the hustler’s footwear as a reflection of this. Any items of apparel that were not falling in one of these two categories such as frayed shirts or suede boots were considered gifts from former clients. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that Painter’s pre-WWII observation and evaluation form the base of our understanding of the street hustler’s fashion choices decades later (2010, 206–209).

I have written extensively about the figure the working-class, heterosexual white men as an object of artistic and cultural fascination and same-sex desire, and specifically the “rough trade” category, which is sometimes associated with prostitution.¹² In the context of this study it is worth noting the trade’s uniform appeal to gay men, and its key role in the link between client and prostitute. Fashion items associated with “rough trade” erotica were crucial in defining gay masculinity, and include Levis trousers and denim jackets, tight white T-shirts and a white wifebeater tank tops, plaid work shirts, work boots, and leather jackets – items of ‘macho’ style clothing which were adopted by the gay community (alongside other hetero-signifiers such as a focus on facial hair and the muscled body) in the process of eroticizing masculinity. These items were worn as a form of a self-conscious parody of the tough-guy look (gay clones) – challenging the notion that gay men are “feminine.” Rather than finding fashion inspiration in peacocky upper class men, which gay middle class men considered to be too effeminate, clones tried to emulate the look of rough, white working-class men whose manliness seemed so rampant as to be almost unquestionable and who traditionally projected a hyper-masculine silhouette through the utilitarian work clothes or uniforms that they were wearing. Martin P. Levine lists nine major butch clone looks and their associated fashions: Western; Leather; Military; Laborer; Hood; Athlete; Woodsman; Sleaze; Uniforms: ‘The men favored the hood, athlete, and woodsman looks for everyday leisure attire. They wore the Western, leather, military, laborer, and uniform looks for going out or partying. Lastly, they favored the sleaze look for cruising’ (1998, 60). These tight-fitting garments were worn in a way that accentuated the body and specific body parts, such as the genital area; the chest area; the buttock and arms, and came to define sexual prowess – which gay men would consider “hot” and very attractive:

They often highlighted these features by not wearing underwear, wallets, or shirts. Some men even left the top or bottom button of their Levis undone, in part to signal sexual availability [...] Clones wore waist-length down or leather jackets over Levis. The shortness of these jackets exposed the bulge of their genitals and buttocks (ibid., 65).

Although Levine’s theory of fashion appropriation and articulation of a masculine style mainly relates to 1970s and 1980s gay subcultures, in a certain sense there has been a revival of butch gay clones in recent years, which I believe had shaped the way gay male prostitutes re-imagine themselves through clothing. Gary Lee Boas’ picture *In Front of Badlands at the corner of Christopher and West Street*, part of his collection of photographs that brings to light the adult entertainment scene of downtown Manhattan between 1979–1985, features the various fashions worn by the bar’s gay clientele. The photograph looks like it was taken recently – showing a mix of casual classics styles including Levis jeans and Doc

¹¹ ‘the state of being dressed in a casual or careless style’ (Merriam-Webster).

¹² Doron, Itai. “Queering Foreign Bodies: Discourse and Identity in Visual Representations of Straight Migrant Men.” In *Ways of Queering, Ways of Seeing*, edited by Jillian E. Cox, 115–147. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, UK, 2015; Doron, Itai. “Tinker, soldier, sailor, thief: The visual representations and appropriations of the male sexual outlaw as a gay fantasy figure in the Arts and in fashion imagery.” *Critical Studies in Men’s Fashion*, volume 3, issue 2 (2016): 79–93.

Martens, hoodies, windbreakers and trainers. Boas' *Hustler*, taken around the same period, is showing a fit, preppy-looking young man hanging around by a phone booth on a street corner, wearing a tight white T-shirt, white striped sports socks and white men's plimsolls and a pair of very short shorts. This image sums up how hot pants for men, traditionally considered an item of clothing associated with gay clones, project an image of sexual frivolity and sexual availability. The outfit seems to fall under Levine's Athlete category (*Butch Sign-Vehicles in Clone Fashion* table 1998) with gym shorts, tank tops, sweatpants, jock straps, white crew socks and running shoes considered to be must-haves to complete the look. The guy depicted in Boas' *Hustler* is successfully "passing" as a virile, manly athlete based on him achieving performative realness (by the union of clothes and pose) within the category of the sportsman as an erotic gay fantasy, pretty much in the same way that '[...] drag queen realness is an authenticity based on a collective gay male fantasy of a real woman [...]' (Han 2015, 147). Figure 20. in Hal Fischer's *Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Visual Coding Among Homosexual Men* (1977, 2015), is depicting similar features, accompanied by the header "STREET FASHION JOCK." The images shows a bearded man wearing a sleeveless undershirt, Adidas trainers, white striped sports socks, and a pair of tight-fitting satin gym shorts (very much in the style of those worn by Gere/Kay in *American Gigolo*'s dumbbells exercise scene) that leave very little to the imagination. This photograph is part of a collection of images that were captured by Fischer in San Francisco's Castro and Haight Ashbury districts in the late 1970s – a significant pre-AIDS period in the city. The photographs focus on the codes of sexual orientation and identification within the gay community at the time, '[...] ranging from such sexual signifiers as handkerchiefs and keys, to depictions of the gay fashion 'types' of that era—from 'basic gay' to 'hippie' and 'jock.''¹³

In *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* (1991) Cuban-born American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres placed a gay male go-go dancer on top of a square wooden platform encased in light bulbs, and invited the diverse gallery audience, through a dance performance, to explicitly engage with a sneak peek into gay bars and clubs culture, where the sexual identity of male performers (Go-Go Boys) is overtly on display (Watney 2002, 161). According to UrbanDictionary.com, Go-Go Boys are 'Dancers who are employed to entertain crowds at a club. Usually gay clubs.' While the audience is usually tipping them directly for their performance, Go-Go Boys are not considered technically or legally prostitutes. As in *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, they are typically very scantily dressed in hot pants or briefs – calling into mind the young muscular toughs of physique or beefcake magazines, first launched in 1951 by American photographer Bob Mizer and titled *Physique Pictorial*. The alternative to more explicit gay erotica which was forbidden at that time, physique magazines portrayed an array of young male models wearing clothes that served the purpose of accentuating and revealing their bodies, and put an emphasis on bulging muscles and naked skin. The magazines featured semi-nude and full frontal nudity, and stylized variations on gay male icons and fantasy figures such as the uniformed policeman and the army man, the cowboy and the sailor. Highly theatrical, and referencing heavily from Hollywood westerns and sword-and-sandal aesthetics, beefcake photography placed an emphasis on clothing and props as means of extending the sexual appeal of the models, mimicking the visual language of mid-twentieth century fashion and advertising photography with the use of rear projection and studio props such as pillars and Greek columns, fish-nets and draperies, to simulate a hyper masculine, primarily heterosexual environment and stimulate the predominantly gay audience that beefcake magazines were aiming to reach. Some of the men depicted in physique magazines also prostituted themselves with their magazine spreads discreetly functioning as advertisement for their services. For example, J. Brian Donahue's *Golden Boys* magazine, operating from 1963, showcased a selection of good-looking young Californians men that were also available for hire, operating from a boy brothel that was apparently frequented by Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams (Escoffier 2009, 150). The same year, Mizer has developed a system of symbols which he used to mark photos with, each one denoting the model prostitute's sexual orientation, active/ passive role, penis size, etc., such as:

An 'x' with prongs on all four ends marked the model as having a boastful and arrogant personality. A circle with a downward-pointing arrow denoted the model as having a dominant, forceful personality. An 'x' with a black circle above it marked the model as physically dangerous, and so on (Bell, 2017).

One of Mizer's most famous *physique* male models-hustlers was Joe Dallesandro, immortalized in Lou Reed's 1973 song *Walk on the Wild Side*. In his physique images, and the films he made in the early part of his career, Dallesandro appears unclothed, his naked body in full view for an audience of admirers. Dallesandro, probably drawing upon his own experience as a hustler, starred in Andy Warhol's production of Paul Morrissey's 1968 film titled *Flesh*, playing a NYC street hustler – the first of a trilogy (the other films are *Trash*, 1970 and *Heat*, 1972). The 1996 cover of the videotape release, through its design, reinforces the cultural perception of the figure of the male prostitute as a street-savvy conman. Dallesandro can be seen peering at the viewer, a red bandana tied around his greasy hair - looking very much like a Latino boy offender in a late fifties street gang (such as the

¹³ "HAL FISCHER," Cherry and Martin, accessed August 18, 2018. A similar outfit of sneakers and gym shorts (minus the sleeveless t-shirt) was adopted and worn by the young, scantily clad busboys at legendary New York City nightclub *Studio 54* in the late 70s, enhancing the clubs's debauchorous mood.

Sharks, depicted in the 1961 film production of *West Side Story*). Reay describes one of the few instances in the entire film where Dallesandro is actually wearing clothes and how Morrissey's camera '[...] cruises him on the street, scanning upwards: lingering briefly on his blue-jeaned crotch, belt, black T-shirt, open light blue shirt, and red bandana' (2010, 206).¹⁴

A decade later, Californian documentary photographer Anthony Friedkin has featured black and Hispanic hustlers in his more racially and ethnically diverse visual investigation around male sex work and the urban scene in Los Angeles. The photographs were part of *The Gay Essay* (1973) portfolio – a body of work that focuses on representations of the lesbian and gay communities in Los Angeles and San Francisco at the time. In the *Hollywood* (1971) section of the photographic essay Friedkin is looking at and focusing on male prostitution that he encountered on Selma Avenue, just off Hollywood Boulevard. The black-and-white images of hustlers are showing some tough-looking young men, ones you would not necessarily describe as attractive or good-looking, dressed in various garments straight out of the rough-trade hustler's closet: tight denim trousers, a denim or leather jacket, wide belt and buckle, a muscle-hugging shirt, or a wife-beater tank top. The guys are captured by Friedkin sitting or standing on street corners, looking around, waiting for a car to pull up. In an interview with Friedkin, he comments on elements of physical and mental sexual violence that were integral to the scene he observed, and also considers how young were some of the men he photographed. It is clear that as a heterosexual male Friedkin found the setting odd, dangerous and to some extent worrying, and it is interesting to note how the exact same setting will probably continue to trigger and elicit sexual arousal in some gay men – clients and artists alike. It is exactly at this point that the appeal of "rough trade" prostitution appear to exclusively occupy the domain of the gay imagination, and seems to be completely absent in a discourse of heterosexual male prostitutes who sell sex to women.

5. You know who I am. I know who you are. We have no secrets. (Male escort fashion online)

Streetwalking male sex workers do not necessarily always cater exclusively to a gay clientele. In *Portrait of an Ageing Hustler* (1979), writer and contributing editor to *New York magazine* Orde Coombs portrays the life and times of Bobby Vignolo – a 36 years old male prostitute struggling to make ends meet in New York City in the late 1960s and 1970s. As a typical young heterosexual male Vignolo's targeted customers were female, however the article suggests that as he grew older and his looks somehow faded, he expanded his business and begun catering to gay men as well. No better luck for his friend Kelly – an ageing African American escort Vignolo has taken Coombs to meet '[...] in a black hustler's bar on 42nd. Street.' In their heyday Bobby and Kelly exchanged sexual services for money or goods. When Kelly was the sexual companion of 'the wife of one of the biggest white civil-rights lawyers in the country' she bought him gifts such as clothes from *Barneys* and men's jewelry from *Tiffany*. We are also told that since she left him he didn't managed to find another 'good meal ticket, and now he's forced to hustle at the Ramrod, a late-night, all-male movie house on Broadway at 49th.' Back to Vignolo, in his 'tight-fitting denim suit which sits well on his five-foot-ten-inch frame' – the article establishes and confirms a street hustler stereotype: 'As he walks he puts his hands in his pockets and pulls down the red tank top he's wearing. He must, always, show the trimness of his body, the glistening pectoral muscles.' Coombs charts Vignolo's descend from a young, optimistic 21 years old guy who just finished his army service, trying his luck in the big city, to that moment when '[...] he stopped wearing the suits that he could no longer afford to clean' convincing himself that '[...] he looked sexier in jeans.' Coombs describes a poignant moment when Vignolo first locked eyes with a wealthy German woman sitting by herself at the bar he has been working in, cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, calling him 'Juvenile pap moving into congealed hustler shape.'

One can recognize a thread of narcissistic and at times nihilistic self-awareness evident in the way male hustlers such as Bobby Vignolo choose to represent themselves once they have acquired a sympathetic audience. This narcissistic perspective is best captured in today's representations of male prostitution mostly via the use of selfies and plandids – the planned candid photographs, on diverse website and social media platforms online. *Portrait of an Ageing Hustler* emphasizes the difficulties of male sex workers like Vignolo and Kelly in obtaining consistent work and a steady clientele as they mainly rely on chance encounters. But one can't help but imagine the impact of the Internet on the livelihood of prostitutes such as Vignolo and Kelly had they been in operation today, given the various possibilities and numerous ways to promote oneself online. By 2009, thirty years after Bobby Vignolo's struggles with reinvigorating his career were documented by Coombs, it was established that the 'Use of the internet as an advertisement tool is the newest method

¹⁴ The red bandana is also an established fashion item associated with gay males cloning culture. Fischer notes it as a signifier for "top" or "bottom" gay sexual roles – depending on it being placed in back pocket right ("passive"), or back pocket left ("active"). The photo that accompanies the red and blue handkerchief entry in *Gay Semiotics* is reminiscent of the front and back cover of the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* (1971) album, featuring Dallesandro's life-size denim crotch (complete with a real zipper) and denim encased tight buttocks.

used by prostitutes to attract customers' (Lee-Gonyea, Castle, and Gonyea 2009, 325). This was with reference to a new area of study at the time, and with regards to male and female prostitutes, though it was noted that the existing research failed to consider websites that promote male escort services for female consumption. The study that J. A. Lee-Gonyea et al. conducted primarily focused on data (i.e. physical description, description of services) rather than image analysis and an acknowledgement of the notions of personal and purposeful style, though it mentions the visual elements that accompany the physical description of male escort on escort websites (2009, 335). Almost a decade later in 2018 the presentation of self through photographs had become part of the daily reality of many individuals, let alone features heavily as a prime and strategic marketing tool on escort websites. For contemporary male prostitutes advertising online, the selfie is the most important and accessible self-marketing tool. Selfies '[...] empower individuals to be active agents in defining their own beauty, gender and sexuality' (Eler, 2017). Selfie self-portraits are '[...] pleasure, attention, and validation all in one' (ibid.). In addition, the plandid – a hybrid of “planned” and “candid” subjective shot, elaborates on the selfie by offering an opportunity to construct meticulously composed, nonchalant-appearing images that suggest a perfect, desirable moment in a wonderful, attractive lifestyle. By pointing a readily available smartphone or digital camera at themselves man and woman choose to either replicate or challenge contemporary notions of beauty and appearances. Especially as far as online representation of the male body and masculinity, men can now be called “narcissistic,” “social climbers,” or “fashion conscious”; or turned out to be “sexually available” or “objectified” – labels or classifications that were previously attributed to, and primarily associated with women. Towards the end of the second decade of this new millennium, connections between sexuality, vanity and social ambition are finally not necessarily made only in the context of female traits. These connections allow us to understand a number of common denominators in the way male escorts choose to present themselves online, in their marketing efforts to attract prospective clients. Using their online profiles in the form of a product package for customers to judge and evaluate, conveying a spiritual but highly sensual presence for women, or a decidedly sexual and particularly racy one for men.

Roberto Dolce, aka *Sweet Roy* is probably Italy's most famous and popular gigolo, a regular on Italian TV talk shows, collecting anything between 500 to 2000 Euros (around \$700 to \$3000) for his services, offered solely to single women. Dolce's personal *Instagram* account page (@roberto_roy_dolce, where he calls himself a 'happiness consultant') is featuring 40 selfie and plandid images of himself dressed in all sorts of expensive, fancy looking clothes: two and three-piece suits; formal shirts; a variety of ties and other accessories including a chunky, expensive-looking watch; glasses; belts (with a silver Hermes "H" buckle); and other male jewellery items. His thick dark hair, eyebrows and beard are all well manicured. The profile contains only few photographs where Dolce can be seen wearing casuals; four photographs show him only in underwear or focusing on his half-naked body. Dolce's *bella figura* photographs seem to lack any sense of self-irony as he fully embraces the stereotype of the Italian Playboy and the Latin Lover – a Hollywood-influenced Italian Romeo, posing as a sophisticated, suave, sensual and sexy, sort of ladies' man. One plandid shows him in typical *American Gigolo* mode (and to a certain extent, *American Gigolo* attire) as he's walking down the street, nonchalantly carrying his suit jacket over his shoulder. Dolce is an example of a growing number of contemporary male prostitutes using social media platforms and dedicated escort websites as direct promotion tools, showing awareness of fashion as a marketing tool.

Allan Tyler looks at various strategies that are employed by (mainly gay) male sex workers to promote their professional services in his essay *Advertising Male Sexual Services* (2014). Since his research was conducted, mainly due to the decline of print media and the continuous rise of digital media, it is probably fair to say that the majority of male sex workers advertised their services and communicate with their clients on dedicated business pages (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*) or via escort agency websites. In the section titled *A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words* Tyler highlights the importance of photography to '[...] reinforce identities that are based on physical or personal characteristics, or on particular services' and how over the past ten years or so changes in the visual and photographic modes used in advertising male sex work also depicts a cultural change in the perception of the sexual behavior of male homosexuals in general, and being involved in male prostitution in particular, at least for the workers, their clients, and the platforms they choose to advertise on. Tyler mentions a relatively tame image from the early 1990s of '[...] an attractive, well groomed young man in a white sleeveless T-shirt [...]' and the more sexually explicit images that we are seeing today, influenced by the dynamic content and image dissemination on social/sexual networking and e-commerce sites and environments such as *Gaydar*, *Manhunt* and *Grinder* (2014, 96-98). Grov and Smith add that in the digital age, once one paid an initial fee, the escorts' profiles/ advertisements could include:

[...] long descriptions of their services as well as photographs and short videos, which was not possible in print. This allowed sex workers to present a more professional face and to reach potential customers in a more compelling and targeted manner (2014, 250).

Having looked at a variety of European and International websites that are dedicated to promoting sex work,¹⁵ and that feature profiles of male sex workers, I couldn't help but noticing that there is a very clear difference between the

¹⁵ *Gentlemen4Hire* (U.K); *Dukes of Daisy* (U.K.-U.S.); *The Men's Company* (Belgium); *The Men's Company* (U.K); *Elite Male Models* (Spain); *London Privé* (U.K); *Escorta* (Italy); *Societyservice* (Netherlands); *Redlights* (Netherlands);

perception and promotion of male sex work based on sexual orientation. Gay male prostitution seems to be primarily associated with the body, carnality, sex, promiscuity and sordidness. Straight male prostitution is associated with high-class, companionship, the finer things in life, and if it comes to it – being positive about sex. Those associations are reflected in the promotion strategy and visual language that is employed by escorts on their profile pages. Straight male escorts focus on creating a sensual enigma (very much in the style of Christian Grey, the fictional character from the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy; some straight escorts use “Grey” as a fictional surname); Gay male escorts focus on body parts – in the personal information they provide and the photos they display (“8” thick & cut;” “big and ripped;” “real monster cock;” “full of cum;” “gold virgin ass;” etc.).¹⁶ Madison James – a London-based, mortgage broker and heterosexual male escort highlights the difference in his response to the question ‘Do You Pick and Choose Which Clients You See?’

If I don’t feel I’m suitable for the client, I’ll let her know in the most polite way possible. There’ll be a million tale-tale signs but it all boils down to your gut instinct. The way they communicate with you, the questions they ask, trying to haggle about the rates and prove how big my d*ck is, which is a clear indicator that they’re not the type of client I’m looking for. Imagine calling up a female escort and asking her off the bat how tight her vagina is (2017).

Dan G, a twenty-seven-year-old former paratrooper from York, United Kingdom, apparently choose to offer men and women companionship and joyful sex since he is ‘[...] a very understanding person who can relate to people lives and emotions and just like to give people a great time and make some wonderful memories’ (2018). This is at least what he says about himself on his profile page on *The Male Escort Agency* website. The photos on his page show him alternating nicely between a sophisticated, worldly gigolo standing by a piano dressed in a black tuxedo, a white shirt, and a black bow tie; the life of the party wearing a suit jacket with his jeans, holding a bottle of champagne and a flute glass; or projecting gay escort realness as he pulls down his white *aussieBum* briefs. The photos on Dan G’s profile are typical in how they reinforce stereotypical views of male escorts. Rather than opting for standard and straightforward mirror selfies, the model performs for the camera this idea he has about what his clients would like to see – the fantasy-turned-real that he is, or who he might be, rather than who he really is. Quite a few escorts include the sentence: “what you see is what you get.” But how can we know what to expect if what we’re looking at online is only a façade? A desirable surface that was put together as an assemblage of signs denoting the sexual state of their producer.

Russian James advertises his unique selling proposition on *www.sleepyboy.com* – a UK site for male escorts and sex workers catering to gay men:

In Western country, men talk about being alpha to hide insecurity of being little girl and puff tiny little chest to look like tough man. In mother Russia, we no need talk. We are real men, alphas, gods. Look at our president. If I make Putin look like pussy, what do I make you look like fag? I come from cold country but will make your life fiery hell. Do not pretend you do not secretly wish for this. Come worship young fitness muscle god from Siberia (2018).

Accompanying the intentionally vulgar manifesto, that substitutes real representation with cultural stereotypes and that probably offers the prospective client a turn-on narrative, is a portfolio of photographs primarily showing Russian James posing bare-chested, or wearing nothing at all, making the most of his stereotypical pumped-up gym body. Being “a man’s man,” the other images are showing him smoking a “manly” cigar, or posing for selfies in front of a gym mirror. As his profile says, Russian James will also meet woman, so some images show a softer side as he engages in cooking activities, or present him more respectable-looking – standing in a reflective pose, wearing a tight, white button down shirt and black rimmed eyeglasses. Russian James’s profile epitomises classic gay escort style and life style aspiration. As the main point-of-sale is sex, the selfies focus on body image, presenting the male body as an object of desire, highlighting the goods on offer: cock, ass, muscles, feet. The few items of clothing on display do not serve the purpose of proposing a coherent outfit, but function more as highlighters of various body parts. Fashion here fulfills a role similar to the one it had in physique photography, which was to draw the eyes and minds of the audience to what lies underneath. It is about communicating a user experience of seeing through clothes rather than looking at clothing and appreciating them and the role they performs in the social construction of identity. Other than the visible branding of favorite underwear brands such as *Calvin Klein*, *aussieBum*, *Andrew Christian*, *C-IN2*, *2xist*, and *Charlie by Matthew Zink*, comparing 1950s physique pictures with some male escorts selfies won’t reveal much difference, and can only confirm how, as far as gay men’s erotica is concerned, little clothing (men’s underwear; posing pouches), or a complete lack of them, is one of the main factors that determines how sexually desirable one could turn out to be.

Charisma Beauties (Germany); *Callboy* (Germany); *Meine Begleitung* (Germany); *Gayescortclub* (Germany); *Topczehescort* (Czech Republic).

¹⁶ See J. A. Lee-Gonyea et al., “Laid to Order: Male Escorts Advertising on the Internet,” *Deviant Behavior*, 30 (2009): 342-344.

6. Conclusion

In previous research I explored the representation of the rough-trade prostitution scene, focusing on the intensities of the character of the white, hetero-flexible, working class male as a gay fantasy figure since the late 1940s. In the aftermath of World War II, perhaps influenced by the hyper-masculine image of the American GI and the Liberation experience,¹⁷ French artists such as Jean Cocteau, Soungouroff, Jean Boulet, Paul Smara, and Roland Caillaux featured in their erotic drawings characters of tough looking sailors, soldiers, factory workers and down-and-outs, that could be identified as "gay-for-pay" male prostitutes. The 1960s and 1970s saw the continuous prominence of the figure, from the nonchalant, streetwise swagger captured in the documentary pictures of Larry Clark and Danny Fields; to the passive posture of Joe Dallesandro and other male physique and bodybuilding models; and later – the representation of male prostitution in art in the work of Bill Rice, John S. Barrington, Kenny Burgess, Mark Morrisroe, Pedro Slim, George Dureau, Philip-Lorca DiCorcia and Eve Fowler; and in contemporary fashion photographs (Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott; Willy Vanderperre, to name a few). It seems that in life and art the figure of the male prostitute captured the imagination of diverse and predominantly gay audience – gay artists and potential clients alike. One of the key points of the study was to highlight the criminal aspect closely associated with male prostitution, and suggest that criminal fantasy plays a key role in the hustler-client relationship. Relying on a rich history of male prostitution as it is depicted in literature, visual arts, and film, the study considered how artists were drawn to associate prostitution with rough and coarse, lower-class men who performed a fantasy of hyper masculinity mainly for white middle-class gay male clients. There was always a strong element of risk and danger associated with rough-trade hustling, in part due to the illegal status of homosexuality and of prostitution, and the shame and stigma associated with both. This had forced male sex workers to operate at the fringes, in environments and places that are both private and dangerous. In the big cities places such as backstreets and dingy hotel rooms; old piers, docks and waterfront areas; industrial ghost areas; parks and public toilets, became the real life and fictional backdrops for tales of sex and desire. The bleakness and roughness of the location completed the fantasy of the rough encounter – having sex with a Real Man – a manly heterosexual, as opposed to a supposedly effeminate homosexual. The vicious real-life murder of some high-profile gay clients: silent film actor Ramon Navarro; film director Pier Paolo Pasolini; and fashion designers Gianni Versace and Rudolph Moshhammer, by their rough-trade, gay-for-pay male hustler companions brought to light (and to public awareness) the particular circumstances of the gay hustler-client associations and the dangerous implications of their encounter, particularly bearing in mind the different socio-economic status between male hustler and client.

The starting point of this current research was this strong negative connotation, the promiscuity and the despair associated with homosexual prostitution, as opposed to that of a heterosexual gigolo that manifests a celebration of his masculinity – where male prostitutes appear powerful, even triumphant. The purposes of this study was to try to identify the male sex-worker's "uniform," looking at the different ways in which male prostitutes utilize fashion and styling as an extension of their persona and the impact of specific fashion clothing styles on their client's imagination. It is at once apparent that the visual systems employed by male sex-workers are still almost exclusively derived from traditional representations of hegemonic heterosexual masculinities (rather than fully acknowledge the dress associated with gay masculinities such as the feminized gay Twink, Club Kids, Gay Goths, etc.);¹⁸ and that male and female customers of male prostitutes are not necessarily only looking for the full, traditional prostitute experience (as in full-on sex), but for more rounded psychosexual experiences. These can include, for women, the extremely-popular "boyfriend experience"; travel (domestic/international); dinner date; shopping, social events and parties; days out and evenings in; and for men: sexual dominance; kinks; raw (condomless) sex; parties; massage; spanking; fist-fucking; role play; dirty talk; foot fetishism; muscle worship; and any other activity covering the gamut of sexual practices and sensibilities. The overall style and the implication of the encounters are also entirely different. It seemed that women prefer an encounter that simulates the experience of sharing moments with a boyfriend or a husband – an "imitation of life" revolving around "normal activities" such as a visit to a museum, a dinner date, going to a social function. As Madison James tells us: 'My clients require a lot more time and attention. Sex is mental after all' (2017). For gay men it seems like the focus is on everything *but* replicating romantic experiences, emphasizing the role fantasy play in how one can obtain what he cannot obtain in reality, while engaging in a good-natured sexual romp with a stud. Mourning the mainstreaming and commercialization of gay culture, American novelist John Rechy – a teacher and a writer by day and a gay hustler by night, whose book *City of Night* (1963) documented gay life on the fringe commented that '[...] gay men should not adopt the sophomoric model of heterosexual dating; gay men should always have sex first' (McNamara 2004).

Other than the wider and more varied sexual practices that are on offer to men, it is apparent, by viewing a large number

¹⁷ See Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, for a discussion about representations of masculinity and the hard-hitting American GI in France at the Time.

¹⁸ See Trevon D. Logan's discussion of hegemonic masculinity contextualized with clients' preferences in *Economic Analysis of Male Sex Work* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2014), pp. 113-116.

of European and International Internet profiles, that the majority of gay escorts are eighteen to twenty-something Caucasians, with a fair number identified as Latin (mainly originating in Brazil).¹⁹ Whereas when it comes to heterosexual gigolos men from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are involved, with large number of gigolos born of Indian or Black ancestry. The age group is also more varied, with men well into their fifties and sixties offering their companionship to women in exchange for money. However, in both cases the client's age group seems to be older than most of the service providers. When I discussed the study with a female friend and colleague – a creative, bright, and successful woman in her early 50s, a wife and mother of three, she found it hard to believe that young women her daughters' age would consider booking a straight male escort. She told me she'd understand if older women choose to do so, perhaps in their forties or fifties.²⁰ In the case of homosexual men, the stereotype of the aging gay male ("old queen" is a popular term used by gays and straights) lusting after the body of a young man, is still very common in art and life, and – in a community that cherishes youth and beauty – the fact that clients would be men who are older and past their prime is probably obvious. We can find this echoed in fictional work such as Jean Genet's *Querelle de Brest* (1947); Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948); John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963); James Leo Herlihy's *Midnight Cowboy* (1965); Andy Warhol's *My Hustler* (1965); and Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) among others; and in real-life couples/artists and muses Calvin Klein and Kevin Baker (and Klein's ex-boyfriend Nick Gruber) and Karl Lagerfeld and Baptiste Giabiconi.

The Internet is awash with pages and services such as the ones described in this chapter. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, they all seem to communicate similar messages by using similar means. Clearly there are many various personal factors influencing here with regards to different economic and social-class groups; diverse cultural backgrounds and upbringings, numerous sexual orientations and preferences, in addition to the individual level of motivation and level of involvement in prostitution. But when it comes to the visual representation and the systems of signs used to represent, denote, signify or evoke desire, it seems everyone is relying on relatively limited elements. This at least becomes apparent when viewing sites such as *The Men's Company* (www.gigolo-escort.co.uk), *RentMen.com* or *Friendboy.pro* that cover multiple locations around the world. What is most important to note in this context is the seemingly increasingly limited options to operate freely, initially brought about by the September 2010 closure of the adult services section of *Craigslist's* website in cities across the USA, followed by the December 2010 closure in all cities worldwide. In August's 2015, *Rentboy.com* – the Internet's largest male escort website was shut down, following a lawsuit for promoting prostitution filed against Jeffrey Hurant – the website owner.²¹ What followed recently only spelled more bad news for independent sex workers across the globe, with the closure of the *Backpage.com* website in Apr 2018. The reason for the closure is the allegation of apparent sex trafficking facilitated by ads posted on the site, which is clearly most concerning, and obviously signifying a terrifying problem. However, it is important to note that the majority, if not all male escorts advertising online are adults over the age of 18, promoting themselves to other adults, with the intention of participating in consensual sexual activity.²² According to the *Reuters* news agency, the UK version of *Backpage.com* had countless male sex service ads at the time of its closure, so this and other closure operations of sites promoting and advertising male sex services spelt out a problematic future ahead. In the context of this research, the crisis for human rights and freedom of speech around the world, and the newly discovered penchant for rules across many (supposedly liberal) Western cultures, one can't help wondering whether the West is now at risk of '[...] giving up its cherished culture of sexual freedom for something far worse: a revived Puritanism' (Eglinton, 2018). This could potentially severely impact on the prostitution and sex industry, with sex workers returning to the streets – if not to protest, then to find work and balance their ability to earn a living.

¹⁹ Pruitt's 2005 research and analysis of 1262 escort profiles on www.escorts4you.com showed the following variables: White 87.6%; Black 6.0%; Hispanic/Latino 1.8%; Asian 1.3%; Mixed 1.7%; Unknown 1.7%.

²⁰ Madison James confirms in an interview for a mainstream, international fashion magazine for women (*Cosmopolitan*), that the average age of his clients is between 38 to 50.

²¹ Prostitution is illegal in the United States, with Nevada the only state to permit some legal prostitution.

²² 'David Bimbi, professor of health sciences at LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York, drew a clear distinction between this business and other illegal activities. According to Bimbi, many of the arguments against sex work — that it promotes pimping, sex trafficking and exploits minors — "fly out the window" when it comes to Rentboy, which was a site where adults self-advertised to other adults' (2015).

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