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**Article:**

Harvey, K. [orcid.org/0000-0002-8484-6710](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8484-6710) (2015) Men of parts: masculine embodiment and the male leg in eighteenth-century England. *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (4). pp. 797-821. ISSN 0021-9371

<https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2015.117>

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‘Men of Parts: Masculine Embodiment and the Male Leg in Eighteenth-Century England’

(Word count: 7, 401 text, 3, 166 endnotes)

[Figure 1] In Thomas Gainsborough’s painting of c1752, John Plampin (c1727 – 1805)

reclines atop a grassy mound, supported by a mature sycamore tree. He is groomed and sleek. His left hand is covered with a soft leather glove, from which dangles gently the right glove. His right hand is tucked firmly into his white satin waistcoat. No skin is on show apart from his dignified but youthful pink round face. His eager and ready hound hints that he could rise at a moment’s notice, if he so wished. But for now, Plampin the hunter – in his fitted black breeches, knitted white stockings and relaxed legs falling slightly apart – stretches his legs out ahead of him and relaxes with easy confidence.

Plampin’s represented form is shaped by changing fashions in men’s clothing as much as by Gainsborough’s visual style and the convention of portraiture. Beginning in the Middle Ages, and particularly for men, looser clothing was gradually replaced with tighter garments which, by the Renaissance, presented ‘newly accentuated sexual differences as embodied.’<sup>1</sup> Bifurcated garments became synonymous with masculinity.<sup>2</sup> But it was the court of Charles II that introduced a template

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<sup>1</sup> Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford and New York, 2010), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Vincent, “From the Cradle to the Grave: Clothing the Early Modern Body,” in Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher, eds, *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body: 1500 to the Present* (Abingdon, 2013), 163-78, at 169.

that would be long-lasting for men of all social groups: a three-piece suit comprising plain, narrow and tapered breeches, topped with a vest or waistcoat and coat.<sup>3</sup> Projection had long been ‘the fundamental principle of masculinity’ but changes in clothing meant that by the mid-eighteenth century the male form projected most clearly at the leg, a body part that now served as synecdoche for the longer-lined and closely-wrapped male silhouette.<sup>4</sup> Plampin’s apparent ease belies the tight fastenings that clothe his body from neck to toe.

Historians’ understanding of the history of men’s dress remains shaped by what J. C. Flugel, in his book *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930), characterized as ‘the Great Masculine Renunciation’.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford, New York, 2003), 15-22; John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2007), 14-5. For breeches and trousers in the later period see, Anna Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, CA; London, 1995), 71; Laura Ugolini, *Men and Menswear: Sartorial Consumption in Britain, 1880-1939* (Aldershot, 2007), 23; Anne Hollander, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (New York, 1994), 61-2. See Gayle V. Fischer, *Pantaloon and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States* (Kent, Ohio, 2001) for challenges to male-only pantaloons.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, 2011), 13; Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello, “The Art and Science of Walking: Gender, Space, and the Fashionable Body in the Long Eighteenth Century,” *Fashion Theory*, 9, no. 2 (June 2005), 175-204, at 184. On the historic tightness of men’s dress, see Tim Edwards, *Men in the Mirror: Men’s Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (London, 1997), 16.

This saw the simplification of men's dress from the late eighteenth century in a process of uniformity and decorative reduction, contrasting with the 'erotic exposure' of women's dress. 'Man abandoned his claim to be considered beautiful', Flugel argued, leading to a 'repression of phallicism' and 'an abhorrence of the male genitals' by the early twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Both Flugel's interpretation and his emphasis on the way clothes signified is characteristic of the history of men's dress, including the only thorough-going history of English men's clothing during the eighteenth century, David Kuchta's *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity* (2002).<sup>6</sup> Kuchta traces the Great Male Renunciation back to the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Aristocratic men's claims to political legitimacy in this period were based on a renunciation of the effeminizing world of fashion and the deployment of a masculinist discourse of 'inconspicuous consumption', Kuchta argues, exemplified in a shift away from flamboyance and towards darkness and simplicity. From 1750 it was middle-class men who appropriated this discourse.<sup>7</sup> This account of the great male renunciation

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<sup>5</sup> J. C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (New York, 1930), 111, 208.

<sup>6</sup> For a useful summary see the article by Chloe Wigston Smith, "Materializing the Eighteenth Century: Dress History, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Study," *Literature Compass*, 3, no. 5 (September 2006), 967–972.

<sup>7</sup> David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550-1850* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2002); David Kuchta, "The Making of the Self-Made Man: Class, Clothing and English Masculinity, 1688-1832," in Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*

has been criticized, partly on the grounds that men continued to engage with fashion well into the nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>8</sup> This essay argues that the public authority that accrued to men through their clothing was based not on a new image of a rational disembodied man but instead on an emphasis on male anatomy and masculinity as intrinsically embodied.

This essay also engages work on sexual difference, including when and how such differences changed, as well as how historians should study them. Clothing is tied closely to categories of sexual difference. As Thomas King puts it, ‘the “great masculine renunciation” made men and women’.<sup>9</sup> Precisely when men and women were ‘made’ is a moot point for historians.<sup>10</sup> Randolph Trumbach locates the shift in 1700, connecting changes in categories of sex with those of gender and sexuality to argue for a new heterosexual masculine identity in particular.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Laqueur envisaged a more

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(Berkeley, 1996), 54-78. For a similar but earlier account of English and French men’s clothing, see Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (1974; Cambridge, 1976), 64-72.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Brent Shannon, *The Cut of his Coat: Men, Dress and Consumer Culture in Britain, 1860-1914* (Athens, Ohio, 2006), 21-51.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas A. King, *The Gendering of Men, 1600-1750. Volume I: The English Phallus* (Madison, 2004), 181.

<sup>10</sup> For a review of some of this literature see Karen Harvey, “A Century of Sex? Gender, Bodies and Sexuality in the Long Eighteenth Century,” *The Historical Journal*, 45, no. 4 (December 2002), 899-916.

<sup>11</sup> Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution: Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago and London, 1998); Randolph Trumbach, “From Age to Gender, c. 1500-1750: From

sudden shift from a ‘one-sex’ (vertical) model of sexual difference to a ‘two-sex’ (horizontal) model in medical writing at the end of the eighteenth century, a chronology that matches more closely Kuchta’s finding that the renunciation became widespread amongst men after 1750.<sup>12</sup> This essay confirms this view, suggesting that widespread change happened after mid-century. Yet this essay engages critically with the discursive or constructionist approaches that typify this work. Dror Wahrman has called for ‘a corporeal critique’ of cultural histories of gender and Lyndal Roper has insisted that historians develop tools that acknowledge the ‘embodied subjects’ of the past.<sup>13</sup>

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the Adolescent Male to the Adult Effeminate Body,” in Fisher and Toulalan, eds., *Routledge History of Sex and the Body*, 123-41.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Dror Wahrman, “Change and the Corporeal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Gender History: Or, Can Cultural History Be Rigorous?,” *Gender & History*, 20, no. 3 (November 2008), 584-60, at 599; Lyndal Roper, “Beyond Discourse Theory,” *Women's History Review*, 19, 2 (April 2010), 307-319, at 316. On the challenge to cultural history see Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Cambridge, 2008), 114-7; Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2005). On the impact of constructionist approaches to sex see Thomas Laqueur, “The Rise of Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Historical Context and Historiographical Implications,” *Signs*, 37, no. 4, *Sex: A Thematic Issue* (Summer 2012), 802-12, at 811.

Scholars in several disciplines counsel that cognition, language and human culture are embodied.<sup>14</sup>

Historians can subject the concept of embodiment to cultural-historical analysis. Significantly for this essay, Laqueur argued that it was in the late eighteenth century that the body was naturalized as a pre-cultural truth; sex became embodied as an ontological not a sociological category.<sup>15</sup> Others, informed by the work of feminist philosophers who explore the social or lived body as also constructed or performed, have examined medical and social practices around the physical body,

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Fiona Coward and Clive Gamble, "Big Brains, Small Worlds: Material Culture and the Evolution of the Mind," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*, 363, no. 1499, *The Sapient Mind: Archaeology Meets Neuroscience* (June 2008), 1969-1979; Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., *Embodiment and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge and New York, 2006); Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (2000; London and New York, 2002); Tim Ingold, "Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World," *Environment and Planning*, 40, no. 8 (August 2008), 1796-1810. Such work is also challenged, though. See, for example, Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Los Angeles, London, 2012). Two examples of early modern British historians who have drawn on this work are Mark Jenner, "Follow your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories," *American Historical Review*, 116, no. 2 (April 2011), 335-51 and Kate Smith, "Sensing Design and Workmanship: The Haptic Skills of Shoppers in Eighteenth-Century London," *Journal of Design History*, 25, no. 1 (January 2012), 1-10.

<sup>15</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 8, 207.

including the materiality of clothing in their analysis of how sex and gender were performed.<sup>16</sup> Yet thinking about the body as an instrument in the creation of performed sexed or gendered identities is not the same as examining the physical body as a material factor in experience, nor even probing the ‘relationship between the body’s cultural construction and its corporeal experience’, as Laura Gowing has done for seventeenth-century women.<sup>17</sup>

This essay explores the possibility of analysing sex and gender as embodied, not simply performed. I suggest that historians can study the lived and embodied experience of gender – in this

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Wendy D. Churchill, “The Medical Practice of the Sexed Body: Women, Men, and Disease in Britain, circa 1600-1740,” *Social History of Medicine*, 18, no. 1 (April 2005), 3-22; Laura Gowing, “Women’s Bodies and the Making of Sex in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Signs*, 37, no. 4, *Sex: A Thematic Issue* (Summer 2012), 813-822. On clothing and the body see Paul R. Deslandes, “Exposing, Adorning, and Dressing the Body in the Modern Era,” in Fisher and Toulalan, eds., *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body*, 179-203, at 180; Wendy Parkins, “Introduction: (Ad)dressing Citizens,” *Fashioning the Body Politic: Dress, Gender, Citizenship* (Oxford and New York, 2002), 1-17, at 2. Influential works of feminist philosophy include Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York; London, 1993) and Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994). See also Nick J. Fox, *Beyond Health: Postmodernism and Embodiment* (London and New York, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Sex and Reproduction in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2003),



case masculinity – by using an interdisciplinary material culture approach to clothing and the body that tries to move past semiotics and discourse to combine the material and the representational.<sup>18</sup> I use a range of sources to reconstruct men’s experiences of their dress and in particular the dressing of the leg. Visual representations are combined with written commentaries from a range of genres: works of political satire, dance, morality, aesthetics, erotica and pornography. I also use a small sample of the accounts, receipts, bills and miscellanea of six men, together with some of their letters, and which include information on clothing, dating from 1701 to 1830. In contrast to probate inventories, accounts are rarely used in large-scale systematic studies of consumption because of the huge variety of forms these documents take. Yet even this small selection provides evidence of the range of clothing goods purchased and the variety of meanings they held for consumers. Finally, the essay integrates examples of male leg wear, dating from c1738 to c1825, drawn from the collections of the Bath Museum of Fashion, the Manchester Gallery of Costume (Platt Hall), the Museum of

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<sup>18</sup> On the importance of studying the intersection of culture and practice in the history of masculinity see Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard, “What Have Historians Done with Masculinity? Reflections on Five Centuries of British History, circa 1500-1950,” introduction to a Special Feature on Masculinities in *The Journal of British Studies*, 44, no. 2 (April 2005), 274-80; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012), 14-15; Karen Harvey, “Oeconomy and the Eighteenth-Century “House”: a Cultural History of Social Practice,” “Domestic Practice in the Past: Historical Sources and Methods,” Special Issue of the journal *Home Cultures*, 11, no. 3 (November 2014), 375-389.

London, the National Maritime Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>19</sup> Historians have shown that the long eighteenth century saw dramatic changes in sex and gender identities and that changing ideals of manhood and forms of dress accrued to men a new authority in the public sphere. This essay argues that these changing identities were created and experienced materially, affording clothing a principal role in this story. I begin by examining the production, consumption and men's comments on dress, before integrating these with the visual and material record. In contrast to semiotic accounts of male dress that focus on a narrow range of meanings for the dominant template, I argue that there was a wide range of meanings attached to male dress. Differences in men's clothing connoted social rank and life-stage, but men also associated their dress with values such as thrift, decency, benevolence and homosocial bonds. One particularly powerful constellation of meanings that accrued to the leg in particular – pertaining to male beauty and power – stands in stark contrast to accounts of a male renunciation. The essay explores this in some detail, arguing that this cultural context combined with the increased exposure of the male body through legwear to create an increasing consciousness of the male form. The final section of the essay argues that the leg connoted not just male beauty and strength but specifically reproductive power. The essay argues that the changing material experience of the clothed male body had a direct impact on masculinity as

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<sup>19</sup> Such collections are not representative of historic clothing; nevertheless all the items of legwear from the relevant dates in each collection were surveyed for the research, a indicative sample of which is discussed in this essay.

embodied identity, before ending with an exploration of the emergence of a new form of citizenship based on the body in the late eighteenth century.

### Production, consumption and meanings

The diversity of clothing choices for eighteenth-century men – in quantity and quality, cut, color and fabric – brought by new production methods and new textiles allowed for considerable variety within the new overall template of coat, waistcoat and breeches. The single greatest change in the use of textiles during the early modern period was the replacement of heavy and dark wools by lighter linen and cotton. Even plebeian wardrobes were transformed by this.<sup>20</sup> Yet prices of woollens and worsteds declined whilst those of linens and cottons stabilized (and in some cases rose).<sup>21</sup> New textiles were used by people of varying social rank but in different quantities and qualities and they were not accessible to all.

This was true for both breeches and stockings. Cotton became a widely-used textile for breeches but only began to replace the traditional leather breeches for laboring men in the final two

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<sup>20</sup> Beverly Lemire, *The Business of Everyday Life: Gender, Practice and Social Politics in England, c.1600-1900* (Manchester, 2005), 119-20.

<sup>21</sup> Carole Shammas, "The Decline of Textile Prices in England and British America prior to Industrialization," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 47, no. 3 (August 1994), 483-507, at 492; Lemire, *Business of Everyday Life*, 115.

decades of the eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup> The stocking industry was hugely affected by cotton: 22% of domestic cotton workers in 1795 were framework knitters in the hosiery industry.<sup>23</sup> Prior to the eighteenth century, fine knitted silk or jersey stockings with stretch and translucence were available only to the very wealthy. Other men wore stockings made from stitched linen or hand- or frame-knitted (after William Lee invented the stocking frame in 1589) from wool or worsted.<sup>24</sup> Wool or worsted stockings could be rough or fine, but would inevitably sag.<sup>25</sup> Following the adaptation of Lee's knitting-frame for cotton in Nottingham in 1732 and later changes which enabled ribbing (and therefore elasticity) in the stocking, cheaper knitted and fitted white cotton stockings became more widely available.<sup>26</sup> More men now enjoyed access to the sleek pale look previously achieved only in knitted silk and modelled by John Plampin (the tell-tale wrinkles at both knee and ankle suggesting silk not cotton). Yet, as with breeches, it took some time before the poor wore white cotton hose. Cotton still only accounted for 15% of stockings mentioned in newspaper advertisements for

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<sup>22</sup> Styles, *Dress of the People*, 90.

<sup>23</sup> S. D. Chapman, *The Cotton Industry in the Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke, 1972), 60.

<sup>24</sup> On Lee see Joan Thirsk, "The Fantastical Folly of Fashion : the English Stocking Knitting Industry, 1500-1700," in N. B. Harte and K. G. Ponting , eds, *Textile History and Economic History: Essays in Honour of Miss Julia de Lacy Mann* (Manchester, 1973), 50-73, at 68-70; Chapman, *Cotton Industry*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Thirsk, "Fantastical Folly," 56-9, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Chapman, *Cotton Industry*, 14.

runaways after 1770, most remaining worsted of varying colors.<sup>27</sup> In the Suffolk village of Brandon, in 1789, the postmaster owned at least 21 pairs (of which 15 were cotton), the tailor 16, the blacksmith 11 (of which 8 were worsted), and a servant 3.<sup>28</sup> All fitting within the template of the three-piece suit, these men's legs would nevertheless have cut contrasting figures in texture, fit and color.

Men's clothing purchases were conditioned by rank and wealth, though this was perhaps attenuated by second-hand and (from the second half of the eighteenth century) inexpensive ready-to-wear clothes.<sup>29</sup> Within this general picture, micro-communities developed their own sartorial codes. Lemire notes that young working men in late-eighteenth-century London, for example, purposefully adopted a style of dress that was quite distinct from the sombre template and instead mimicked earlier aristocratic style. Her conclusion is that clothing fashions 'ancient hierarchies and marked the modern era'.<sup>30</sup> The variety in men's clothing allowed for varied meanings that outstripped modesty, sobriety and the rise of middle-class manly hegemony; for men, sartorial style was combined with personal decency, thriftiness, benevolence, deference and male homosocial bonds. Whilst discourses of luxury had long associated conspicuous or excessive consumption with

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<sup>27</sup> Styles, *Dress of the People*, 88.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 337, Table 5.

<sup>29</sup> Lemire, *Business of Everyday Life*, 126.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127, 134.

effeminacy and lack of economy, advice counselled men to spend proportionately more on clothing than women.<sup>31</sup> One contemporary recommendation for laborers' budgets instructed husbands to take 42% of the annual household clothing budget (compared to the 28% taken by the wife), partly because men's shoes and clothing were more expensive than women's.<sup>32</sup> One of the most striking features of men's accounts is the remarkable frequency with which they record small items of clothing. This underlines the regularity of men's consumption of relatively modest goods and services, as opposed to the expensive and dynastic items with which they have sometimes been associated.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, virtually any page of a man's eighteenth-century account book belies 'renunciation'.

Men's consumption of clothing was no doubt driven by personal taste and body shape. Yet even with the small sample used here there are some noticeable patterns in both the nature of men's purchasing and the meanings they gave to this consumption. There were differences across the life-cycle. Young men's accounts – particularly bachelors – show new acquisitions, the building up of a

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<sup>31</sup> Claire Bartram, "Social Fabric in Thynne's Debate Between Pride and Lowliness," in Catherine Richardson (ed.), *Clothing Culture: 1350-1650* (Aldershot, 2004), 137-49.

<sup>32</sup> Styles, *Dress of the People*, 338, 40; McNeil and Riello, "Art and Science of Walking," 185.

<sup>33</sup> Amanda Vickery, "Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Consumer and her Possessions, 1751-81," in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds, *Consumption and the World of Goods: Consumption and Society in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1993), 274-301.

wardrobe and relatively few repairs. While a student at Cambridge, for example, the young Daniel Baker wrote a thank you letter to his parents in 1706, listing the items they had sent to him. ‘A new suit of brown color cloaths’ and ‘A pair of breeches Norway Doe’ were included: just two pairs, then, to accompany the 4 new shirts, 4 pairs of stockings and five new pairs of gloves.<sup>34</sup> At a similar stage in life though with greater independence, the apprentice grocer George Newton amassed an extensive wardrobe in the first six years of his apprenticeship and particularly in the months just before and after he took up that apprenticeship in Darlington. He made entries for 33 new clothing items (from two different tailors) in 1774 and 1775.<sup>35</sup> He bought a pair of leather breeches for 7 shillings in 1775 and another in 1776 (though for more than double the previous price).<sup>36</sup> As he grew into his new found independence, the descriptions of clothing change: we see ‘plated buttons’, ‘superfine claret cloth’ and ‘shalloon’ appear in 1776, for example.<sup>37</sup> By 1781 he was doing what men invariably did with their most valuable possessions: he made lists of them. The list dated 18<sup>th</sup> February 1781 includes 9 shirts, 13 pairs of stockings (6 blue, 1 black, 3 unbleached, 1 bleached, 1 white worsted and 1 white cotton) a red and white spotted neckcloth and three pairs of breeches (1

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<sup>34</sup> Letter of Daniel Baker, March 24<sup>th</sup> 1706. Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies: D/X 1069/2/23.

<sup>35</sup> Account and memo book of George Newton. Sheffield Archives: TR753, ff1, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, f6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, f7.

black, 1 'rib de leur', 1 leather).<sup>38</sup> Older (particularly married) men tended to make fewer new purchases, and their accounts included more entries for repairs. Two out of three of the smaller weekly items in Sir Richard Brooke's (6<sup>th</sup> Baronet of Norton Priory in Cheshire) accounts with his tailor for the year 1815 were for 'Sundry Repairs'.<sup>39</sup>

The practice of regular clothing repairs evident in the manuscripts sources are also palpable in the many fine extant examples of eighteenth-century men's legwear. Most items that survive in museum collections are naturally high-end items in good condition, carefully preserved for their quality and style. This makes the visible signs of wear all the more remarkable. A large proportion of breeches in particular contain holes.<sup>40</sup> Many such breeches were kept in use with repeated repairs, a surprising number of a very poor standard. [Figure 2] This is the case for these late-eighteenth-century breeches in olive brown (originally black) twilled silk.<sup>41</sup> It is of course extremely difficult to be certain about who undertook these repairs and when. Yet we can be sure that these repairs were

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., f197.

<sup>39</sup> Accounts of Richard Brooke with John Elam for 2 December 1815. Cheshire and Chester Archives: DNB/C/15E/134 1815.

<sup>40</sup> See for example, Green silk breeches with linen lining, 1760-1770, Bath Museum of Fashion: II.24.2B; and Breeches, silk with linen lining and velvet, late eighteenth century, Manchester Gallery of Costume (Platt Hall): 1949.72.

<sup>41</sup> Breeches, black twilled silk with linen, 2<sup>nd</sup> half of eighteenth century, Manchester Gallery of Costume (Platt Hall): 1954.1107. See also the repairs to pantaloons, knitted silk, c.1820, Victoria and Albert Museum: T683A-1913.



not undertaken by a competent seamstress; whilst many men could sew well, we might be witnessing quick and essential repairs carried out by the male owners of the garments. Repairs suggest thriftiness as well as a possible attachment to particular garments. This was evidently the case for Robert Sharp, a schoolteacher and shopkeeper, who not only had clothes repaired but made new clothes out of old. Being smaller than his son William, Sharp had made a pair of black breeches and a waistcoat out of some trousers and a coat that William sent in 1825, whilst in 1827 planned again to get 'excellent waistcoats' out of some second-hand trousers he received.<sup>42</sup> This circulation of garments between men comes out strongly from their accounting of clothes. It echoes the ageing of men's bodies, as sons passed up their clothes to their shrinking fathers. As George Newton dressed one morning in 1779, his reaction to finding his clothes too small was instinctive: 'Stockings too little: resolv'd to send them to my Father'.<sup>43</sup>

The homosocial circulation of clothes also traced the contours of the social hierarchy, as clothes were passed down from master to servant or workman. A poacher's son was rewarded with

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<sup>42</sup> Letter from Robert Sharp to William Sharp, July 11th 1825, in *The Diary of Robert Sharp of South Cave: Life in a Yorkshire Village 1812-1837*, eds. Janet Crowther and Peter Crowther (Oxford, 1997), 23; Letter from Robert Sharp to William Sharp, Wednesday 17th October 1827, in *Diary of Robert Sharp*, 166.

<sup>43</sup> Account and memo book of George Newton, f61.

‘a Pair of Breeches & a Coat of something of that Sort that wou’d be of use to Him’,<sup>44</sup> and a new courier who complained that he had no breeches was given a leather pair to enable him to carry out his duties.<sup>45</sup> Francis Bull thanked his benefactor in the most effusive terms on receiving a present of old clothes. ‘Reverend & worthy, indulgent & compassionate bounteous & ever valuable Sir’, he began,

I would give you as many thanks as the clothes contain threads. I thank you dear Sir for the handsome and very valuable black coat. I thank you for the genteel blue coat, I thank you for the neat cloth breeches. I thank you for the pieces you sent to repair them with. I thank you for the beautiful wig, and I thank you for paying the carriage of the whole.

In haste, Bull had shaved off his hair to don the wig but then realized he could not wear a wig at all times. So he weakly asked, ‘as I have cut off my hair am at a loss for a cap: if you have one to dispose of, silk or velvet, should be glad of it’. It didn’t end there. The coat and breeches were all very well but did not make an outfit: ‘I am ashamed to speak, yet must own that your present would

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<sup>44</sup> Letter from Thomas Lister, first Baron Ribblesdale (1752-1826) to David Kaye (steward?), 24<sup>th</sup> January 1786.

Yorkshire Archaeological Trust: MD335/1/8/4/19.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Fiore to Frederick Robinson Newby at Thirsk, 8th September 1789. Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and

Record Service: L 30/15/19/5.

have been rather more complete if you had obliged me with a waistcoat along with it.<sup>46</sup> There was here a script of benevolence and gratitude, even if the breeches were full of holes, yet Bull's dutiful gratitude did not quash his equally strong sense of fashion and decency.

Decency was a palpable motivation in the repairs to breeches. These garments were particularly prone to damage given their tight fit over body parts that rubbed incessantly on seating and (for some) horses but their covering of the lower part of the body meant that all holes had to be stitched and sealed. Breeches marked out the male leg as decent but also adult, signalling a boy's transition from incontinence to mastery of his bowels.<sup>47</sup> The loosening, loss or fall of stockings also suggested a worrying regression or degeneration.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, neat and closer-fitting garments avoided imputations of being 'ragged', a term used to describe both clothing and people.<sup>49</sup> Francis Bull likened the change wrought by his new clothes from his 'dirty ragged apparel two years ago' to

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<sup>46</sup> "Copy of a letter from M<sup>r</sup> Francis Bull of Daventry to M<sup>r</sup> Samuel Palmer, on receiving a present of old Clothes" [no date]. Cheshire and Chester Archives: CR 147/33.

<sup>47</sup> Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 19. See Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 24, 32, for the continuation of this practice into the twentieth century.

<sup>48</sup> Styles, *Dress of the People*, 65.

<sup>49</sup> Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 19; Styles, *Dress of the People*, 63-69.

‘the reality of some of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.’<sup>50</sup> Dress was profoundly transformative for a man and clothing provided not one but several different lexicons of masculinity.

### The gentlest wave and the member of strength

The social practices surrounding men’s clothing suggest a range of meanings for men’s dress and legwear. Yet cultural representations suggest a different and particularly resonant set of meanings attached to the male leg: those of beauty, power and sensuality. When authors wanted to depict beauty, they used both the female and the male form to do so. In William Hogarth’s *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), for example, the serpentine line of beauty formed around women’s bodies at the waist and in men’s along the legs. This perfect curve was best represented in a man’s ‘muscular leg and thigh’, in which the waves and twists of the lower leg in particular had the greater variety and beauty.<sup>51</sup> [Figure 3]. Covered with skin and fat, the serpentine line curved around the male leg, in a ‘flow from muscle to muscle along the elastic skin, as pleasantly as the lightest skiff dances over the gentlest wave’.<sup>52</sup> Dance was not just a metaphor but as a practice exemplified

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<sup>50</sup> “Copy of a letter from M<sup>r</sup> Francis Bull of Daventry to M<sup>r</sup> Samuel Palmer”.

<sup>51</sup> William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*. Written with a view of Fixing the fluctuating ideas of Taste (London, 1753), 56.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. On the male beauty and aesthetics more broadly see Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven, 1994).

Hogarth's aesthetic vision of the body. Dance was central to polite male comportment and showed the strong and beautiful male body in action.<sup>53</sup> Its techniques were even adopted in military drilling, both practices producing social harmony and consolidating 'the strength, agility and grace of the male body'.<sup>54</sup> The male leg was particularly important to eighteenth-century dance, in which the male dancer was required to execute fast, repeated and high but graceful jumps. More generally, the legs provided the foundation of the movement of all dancers. In Kellom Tomlinson's *The Art of Dancing* (1724), graceful movement depended on the legs, 'the neat Management of which the Perfection of Dancing so much depends'.<sup>55</sup> [Figure 4] In the accompanying illustrations, the movements are performed by the male leg while the female leg is oddly hidden. [Figure 5] The relative compactness of men's lower garments made walking easier for men and movement of the body was profoundly gendered.<sup>56</sup> Though both men and women had legs, it seems only men were

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<sup>53</sup> See also Annie Richardson, "An Aesthetics of Performance: Dance in Hogarth's "Analysis of Beauty",," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, 20, no. 2 (Winter 2002), 38-87.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew McCormack, "Dance and Drill: Polite Accomplishments and Military Masculinities in Georgian Britain," *Cultural and Social History*, 8, no. 3 (September 2011), 321.

<sup>55</sup> Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures; whereby the Manner of Performing the Steps is made Easy by a New and Familiar Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London, 1724), 26.

<sup>56</sup> McNeil and Riello, "Art and Science of Walking," p. 195; Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex: in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge, 2004), 175-98.

taught to use them. This movement was not only an expression of strength (and sometimes latent violence) but also embodied the highest standards of beauty.

The exposure of the lower half of the male body in visual culture was accentuated as light-colored breeches became more widespread in the second half of the eighteenth century, an exposure that contrasts sharply with the emphasis on decency in men's discussions of clothing. [Figure 6] This amateur image gives a good impression of the effect, showing the male groin full frontal and exposed, yet also oddly vacant. The result impresses upon the viewer the physical presence of the man's body, hiding in plain sight. The spread of lighter breeches reflects both technological and cultural change. They were made possible by the new lighter textiles discussed above but were also popularized by the fashionable figure of the 'dandy', whose neat and close-fitting style became particularly prominent by the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> It was George Bryan 'Beau' Brummell (1778-1840) who was the exemplar of this 'paradigm of erect masculinity'.<sup>58</sup> Yet the take up of these garments was also driven by their reference to military wear and its wider cultural context. [Figure 7] This full-length portrait by Joshua Reynolds of 1782, Colonel Banastre Tarleton dons such breeches as part of his uniform for the cavalry section of the British Legion, in which he

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<sup>57</sup> See Rhonda K. Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton, 1999),

Susan Vincent, *The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body from the Renaissance to Today* (Oxford, 2009), 116.

<sup>58</sup> Vincent, *Anatomy of Fashion*, 24.

was Lieutenant-Colonel during the war with America. On his return in 1782, he was famous for his severe treatment of his combatants in America.<sup>59</sup> Newspapers reports on an American assassination plot included superfluous descriptions of his appearance, including that he ‘has a strong resemblance to the immortal Wolfe’.<sup>60</sup> General Wolfe was another young war hero who had already been immortalized as one personification of ‘British patriotism and manliness’.<sup>61</sup> In Reynolds’ portrait, Tarleton is a ready man of action and the wild-eyed horse in the background is being barely restrained by another figure. Grounding the image is Tarleton’s pale, firmly erect right leg. Legs were a sign of men’s fighting strength; this was why the Irish herald painter Aaron Crossly thought that of the parts of a man to be included in heraldry, the leg was ‘the Member of Strength, Stability, Expedition and Obedience’.<sup>62</sup> But this portrait also suggests full exposure of the undressed male leg. Naked legs, as we have seen, were ambivalent. This is nowhere clearer than in British images of

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<sup>59</sup> Stephen Conway, “Tarleton, Sir Banastre, baronet (1754–1833),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2012 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26970>, accessed 17 July 2014].

<sup>60</sup> *London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post*, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1782; *London Courant Westminster Chronicle and Daily Advertiser*, 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1782. All newspapers accessed via *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

<sup>61</sup> Kathleen Wilson, “Empire of virtue: the imperial project and Hanoverian culture, c.1720–1785,” in Lawrence Stone, ed., *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815*, (Abingdon, 1994), 128-64, at 150.

<sup>62</sup> William Ian Miller, “Weak Legs: Misbehaviour Before the Enemy,” *Representations*, 70 (Spring 2000), 27-48; Aaron Crossly, *The Signification of Most Things that are Born in Heraldry* (1724), 50.

Scottish legs. English prints after 1745 traded in the prejudice that Scottish men were mean, uncivilized and bare-legged as a result, but at the same time great Scots with high-skirted tartan and low-hanging stockings reflected the ‘noble virtue and martial prowess’ of the Highlands.<sup>63</sup> As a series of wars – and losses – threatened the British nation during the final third of the eighteenth century, this manly military persona developed as one element of a reinvigoration of a rough and tough masculine ideal and wider consolidation of gender roles. A tightly fitted heroic figure had become the model for ‘modern masculinity’ by the nineteenth century, but this figure was taking shape decades before.<sup>64</sup> The process was reflected in other sartorial changes, as young gentry men simplified their dress to emulate sportsmen and all men’s legwear was eventually modelled on working-men’s trousers by the nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Matthew P. Dziennik, “Whig Tartan: Material Culture and its use in the Scottish Highlands, 1746-1815,” *Past & Present*, 217, no. 1 (November 2012), 117-147, at 118. See also Ian Leask, “Sex on (Bare) Legs? “Thomas Lee” and “Irishness”,” *The Irish Review*, no. 42 (July 2010), 72-84.

<sup>64</sup> Vincent, *Anatomy of Fashion*, p. 55. See also Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750-1810* (London and New Haven, 2006).

<sup>65</sup> Harvey *Men in Black*, 128; Lemire, *Business of Everyday Life*, 123.



Tight, pale legwear was a significant change in men's dress for other reasons. It mimicked skin pulled tight across muscles, the marker of a particularly manly kind of strength.<sup>66</sup> It also underscored men's European whiteness and an absence of the coarse skin and hair associated with black men.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, in many cases these breeches were skin, being made from varieties of leather.<sup>68</sup> At the same time that clothing tightened around the male body, a shift of emphasis from humours to muscles and nerves in medical writing defined the body more sharply defined as self-contained.<sup>69</sup> The experience of the body's edges were theorized and skin was redefined as the sensitive boundary to a newly individualized body in works of medicine and philosophy that borrowed from a

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<sup>66</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1989), 58.

<sup>67</sup> George Newberry, "Representations of "Race" in British Science and Culture during the Eighteenth Century" (PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sheffield, 2012).

<sup>68</sup> Irene Fizer, "The Fur Parasol: Masculine Dress, Prosthetic Skins, and the Making of the English Umbrella in Robinson Crusoe," in Ileana Baird and Christina Ionescu, eds, *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture* (Farnham, 2013), 209-226, at 216.

<sup>69</sup> Christopher E. Forth and Ivan Crozier, eds, *Body Parts. Critical Explorations in Corporeality* (Lanham, Maryland, 2005), 5.

neoclassical emphasis on the body's borderlines.<sup>70</sup> According to Anne Hollander, this neo-classical aesthetic drove sartorial changes for men in ways that echoed nude sculpture and appeared to reveal "natural" anatomical facts'.<sup>71</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century these newly outlined male bodies exemplified toughness and grace. Even in sports such as boxing, strength and aggression were polished off by politeness as brawny fighters stripped to the waist but retained their breeches, black leather shoes and silver buckles.<sup>72</sup> The physical power of the male body had to be kept under effective (self-)control and this manly restraint – central, as Flugel, Sennett, Roche, Zakim and Kuchta have argued, to bourgeois men's claims to citizenship – had to be accompanied by the physical charms of the male body. Here was a potent and distinctively eighteenth-century alignment of beauty, power and gentility in the male body, expressed in clothed but simultaneously exposed legs. The distinctiveness of the male body was more clearly defined as that body – and the legs in particular – became more, not less, exposed.

### Judging with great accuracy

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<sup>70</sup> Mechthild Fend, "Bodily and Pictorial Surfaces: Skin in French Art and Medicine, 1790-1860," *Art History*, 28, no. 3 (June 2005), 311-339.

<sup>71</sup> Hollander, *Sex and Suits*, 84-88. Quote at 86.

<sup>72</sup> Karen Downing, "The Gentleman Boxer: Boxing, Manners, and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century England," *Men and Masculinities*, 12, no. 3 (January 2010), 328-352.

In this cultural and material context, there was an increasing consciousness of the male form. Men's legs were scrutinized, a frequent jibe in print culture poking fun at a man's 'spindle leg'.<sup>73</sup> No doubt an emerging ideal of a classically-contoured male body gave rise to anxiety. There were, for example, a large number of men who suffered impairments of the lower limbs, some produced by the very conflicts that drove the heroic ideal. Literary treatments of such characters as affecting objects of benevolent sensibility were a far cry from the experiences of the damaged returning soldier.<sup>74</sup> Men constituted 81% of those who appeared with a disability at the Old Bailey between 1675 and 1775, and of the impairments noted in trials, leg impairments were the largest single category (accounting for 39.6%). Significantly, trials involving disabled people increased considerably after mid-century, and particularly so for men.<sup>75</sup> Commoner ailments such as gout clearly affected men's use of their legs, whilst the leaner male silhouette, as Hollander put it, would have been 'undeniably hard on the

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<sup>73</sup> See Anon, *The Breeches; or, The Country Curate and Cobler's Wife. A Comic, Satiric, Poetic, Descriptive Tale* (1786), 7; John Hope, *Occasional Attempts at Sentimental Poetry* (1769), 151.

<sup>74</sup> Simon Parkes, "Wooden Legs and Tales of Sorrow Done: The Literary Broken Soldier of the Late Eighteenth Century," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36, no. 2 (June 2013), 191-207.

<sup>75</sup> David Turner, "Disability and Crime in Eighteenth-Century England: Physical Impairment at the Old Bailey," *Cultural and Social History*, 9, no. 1 (March 2012), 47-64, at 50-53.

truly fat'.<sup>76</sup>

Some writers suggested that the attention men gave to their legs had simply gone too far:

“Tis not thy Leg that God rejoices in’, warned Matthew Towle in 1770, ‘no, ‘tis thy Soul’.<sup>77</sup> How justified a criticism this was we cannot know, though some men were ridiculed for their vanity in the matter of their legs. John Stuart, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Bute, controversial head of government in 1762/3, was later remembered by a political rival as a vain man obsessed with his legs. In a singeing satire, a young Bute, ‘took the resolution neither to use a looking glass, indulge himself with one fine attitude, nor contemplate the beauties of his admirable legs, ‘til he had made himself a perfect master of all Classical learning’.<sup>78</sup> Men’s legs were surely also judged by women. Hogarth implied coyly that the new white cotton stockings enabled women’s forensic examination of men’s lower limbs:

as stockings are so close and thin a covering, every one judges of the different shapes and proportions of legs with great accuracy. The ladies always speak skilfully of necks, hands and arms; and often will point out such particular beauties or defects in their make, as might easily escape the observation of a man of science.<sup>79</sup>

Kaja Silverman has noted that the relative richness of male dress before the alleged great renunciation dislodges the idea that women have been the ones on display.<sup>80</sup> But men’s bodies were

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<sup>76</sup> John Chute hid his legs in a chair and domino when he had the gout. See Daniel Claro, “Historicizing Masculine

Appearance: John Chute and the Suits at The Vyne, 1740-76,” *Fashion Theory*, 9, no. 2 (June 2005), 147-74, at 161.

Quote from Hollander, *Sex and Suits*, 88.

objects of erotic beauty in the eighteenth century and beyond.<sup>81</sup> New fitted leg-wear allowed men's bodies to be closely observed by men and women.

Men clearly recognized their own – not just each other's – bodies as sexualized objects of display. The Birmingham bookbinder and bookseller, William Hutton, remembered awakening to his potential sexual attractiveness as a 16-year-old in 1739. He was, he says, 'arriving at that age when the two sexes begin to look at each other, consequently wish to please: and a powerful mode to win is that of dress.'<sup>82</sup> It is worth noting Randolph Trumbach's finding that in London during the 1720s it was tailors, with their interest in clothing, who were – after gentleman – the second most common group of men found engaging with prostitutes in the 'practical male libertinism' through which men

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<sup>77</sup> Matthew Towle, *The Young Gentleman and Lady's Private Tutor* (1770), 14.

<sup>78</sup> "An Allegory of Leicester House," J. C. D. Clark (ed.), *The Memoirs and Speeches of James, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Waldegrave, 1742-1763* (Cambridge, 1988), 229.

<sup>79</sup> Hogarth, *Analysis of Beauty*, 80.

<sup>80</sup> Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," in Tania Modleski, ed., *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* (Bloomington, IN., 1986), 139. Quoted and discussed in McNeil and Riello, "Art and Science of Walking," 182.

<sup>81</sup> Harvey, *Reading Sex*, 124-145; Shannon, *Cut of his Coat*, 83-4.

<sup>82</sup> William Hutton, *The Life of William Hutton, F.A.S.S.* (London, 1816), 26-7. Quoted in Styles, *Dress of the People*, 58.

now proved their heterosexual identity.<sup>83</sup> Hutton was evidently seeking to consciously manipulate his own appearance through clothing as part of a heterosexual identity. The attention that the young grocer George Newton gave to his body – and to recording this – suggests the effort involved morning and night:

September 12<sup>th</sup> 1779 Sunday

Rose at ½ past 6: cleaned my head with Bran, com'd it well out.

7. Wash'd my Hands & Neck; went to the Barber; waited near an hour

8. Hair dress'd. & shav'd. return'd [...]

9. dress'd my self. mem. not a fine shirt clean.<sup>84</sup>

... 8. Shut up Shop, got myself shav'd, got my supper, clean'd my shoes, wash'd myself.

At 10pm, Newton went to bed, exhausted not by his extensive ablutions but by writing: ‘ Mem. Tired of keeping a Journal’.<sup>85</sup> [Figure 8] The significance of clothing to George Newton is perhaps best captured in this sketch.<sup>86</sup> It does not show any particular artistic talent; the head is as long as the calf, for example. Yet Newton paid very close attention to the detail of the cut, trim, pattern and texture of the man's outfit. The persistent marks are not a pattern of dots, in my view (that would be quite a

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<sup>83</sup> Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, 90-98. Quote at 90.

<sup>84</sup> Account and memo book of George Newton, f61.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, f64.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, f64.

suit!), but are instead Newton's attempt to show the weave of the cloth. He has inserted delicate button-holes on the coat, breeches and waistcoat; his heavily filled in ribbon and hat suggest the rich texture of velvet; his buckles are tiny slivers of paper around which he has colored in the shoes. Finally, his cross-hatch shading at the back of the leg gives the figure a shapely pair of legs. All this is in stark contrast to the literally disembodied woman to whom the man – perhaps Newton himself – seems to be gesturing. George Newton's accounting, inventorying and particularly this careful sketch must be placed in the context of other men such as Francis Place, the London breeches-maker, and James Lackington, the London shoemaker, for whom clothing was a sign of their respectability, moral worth and financial success.<sup>87</sup> Newton objectified the male form and relished the dressing of it.

The evidence from Hutton and Newton that men reflected upon their own bodies as objects of attention opens up another possibility: that men experienced their own bodies as sensual things. Changes in the shaping of stays at the end of the century, wrought by women's entry into the trade, emphasized the curved female form as erotic.<sup>88</sup> The male form had been regarded as beautiful and men had attended to regular ablutions before the late eighteenth century, of course, but new textiles and new styles must have affect men's experience of their own bodies. Stockings were increasingly made of lighter and smoother fibres with stretch, likely to encourage a feeling of movement and

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<sup>87</sup> Styles, *Dress of the People*, 59-60.

<sup>88</sup> Lynn Sorge-English, *Stays and Body Image in London: The Staymaking Trade, 1680-1810* (London, 2011), 181-212.

liberty. Some silk suits were known to constrict men.<sup>89</sup> Yet fabrics used for breeches were getting generally softer and (particularly if unlined) would move with the body, not against it. Handling eighteenth-century breeches reveals that many had a surprising degree of elasticity. If good quality and kept in the right conditions, leather breeches remained supple and sleek. At the interface between the interior and exterior of the body, the blurring of clothing and skin brought breeches to the centre of the sensual experience of the body. In some cases, this was further enhanced by a construction in which the legs were each made from one panel, with the seams on the outside leg, and were sharply shaped around the calf.<sup>90</sup> [Figure 9] This pair has been stored at the Museum of London inside out, preserving their dazzling whiteness.<sup>91</sup> Padding above the upper hip gives a straight line through the leg and torso, creating a columnar effect that exemplifies the classical silhouette. Such a close fit makes the physical properties of the garment – rather than simply its look – particularly significant. They are lined with soft buckskin and the seams are on the outside leg. With a good fit, there would have been virtually no friction and the wearer would have experienced these breeches as a proverbial ‘second skin’. There is always an unstable boundary between person and clothing, such that we

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<sup>89</sup> Claro, “Historicizing Masculine Appearance,” 156.

<sup>90</sup> See Buckskin pantaloons, 1776-1800. Museum of London: 39.5/27.

<sup>91</sup> Buckskin breeches, 1801-1825. Museum of London: 37.5.



might see the a person as both a body and its clothing.<sup>92</sup> Yet whilst some historians see the intimate role of clothing in defining the self as declining in the early modern period, others suggest instead that the dressed body now became more significant to gender identity during the eighteenth century.<sup>93</sup> Brekke locates a new ‘masculine idiom of material selfhood’ in America and McCormack notes the ‘specific corporeal masculinity’ valued in the British militia.<sup>94</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall noted that new pantaloons in particular, ‘showed off

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<sup>92</sup> Daniel Miller, “Introduction,” Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller , eds, *Clothing as Material Culture* (Oxford and New York, 2005), 1-19, at 3; Kaori O’Connor, “The Other Half: The Material Culture of New Fibres,” in Küchler and Miller , eds, *Clothing as Material Culture*, 41-60; Sophie Woodward, “Looking Good: Feeling Right – Aesthetics of the Self,” in Küchler and Miller, eds, *Clothing as Material Culture*, 21-40; Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body* (Oxford, 1998), 4.

<sup>93</sup> Compare, for example, Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge and New York, 2000), 2 and Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2004), 178-9. On the changing relationship between people and things see Mathew Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1996), 190, 7-8.

<sup>94</sup> Linzy Brekke, ““To Make a Figure”: Clothing and the Politics of Male Identity Eighteenth-Century America,” in Amanda Vickery and John Styles, eds, *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven, CT., 2006), 225-46, at 244; McCormack, “Dance and Drill,” 323.

men's limbs and sexual parts, making them conscious of the way they stood'.<sup>95</sup> Christopher Breward has gone so far as to suggest that the mid-nineteenth-century male wardrobe was 'more embodied' than women's.<sup>96</sup> This flies in the face of the 'masculine myth of disembodiment'.<sup>97</sup> It also balances Laqueur's focus on how, as a result of the new significance of the body to categories of gender, '[w]omen were too bound to their bodies'.<sup>98</sup> In contrast, we can observe a new public role for the male body and arguably a new self-consciousness amongst the men whose bodies were increasingly on show. New tight-fitting breeches would have given men an acute sense of the surface, shape, position and feel of their own body, as well as its exposure.

#### Twenty boys in his calves

The sensuality we find suggested in representations, men's commentaries and in the clothing itself takes us some way from modesty and sobriety. In this final section of this essay I wish to explore more closely this eroticism of the male form, which was so often focussed on the male leg.

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<sup>95</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London, 1987), 412.

<sup>96</sup> Christopher Breward, "Manliness, Modernity and the Shaping of Male Clothing," in Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, eds, *Body Dressing (Dress, Body, Culture)*, (Oxford, 2001), 165-81, at 165.

<sup>97</sup> Alison Bashford, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine* (Basingstoke, 1998), xvi.

<sup>98</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 216.

As Hollander has noted, late-eighteenth-century clothing for men produced, ‘a lean, well-muscled and very sexy body with long legs’.<sup>99</sup> Eighteenth-century ‘sexiness’ may be difficult to reconstruct, but we can get pretty close to it in pornographic writing. In John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), the narrator (Fanny Hill) describes the legs of her ‘shapely, healthy, country lad’ as objects of her sexual desire:

new buck-skin breeches, that clipping close, shew’d the shape of a plump well made thigh, white stockings, garter-laced livery, shoulder-knot, altogether compos’d a figure in which the beauties of pure flesh and blood, appear’d under no disgrace from the lowness of a dress, to which a certain spruce neatness seems peculiarly fitted.<sup>100</sup>

As the encounter progresses, these ‘clipping close’ breeches struggle to contain the young man’s excitement:

I stole my hand upon his thighs, down one of which, I could both see and feel a stiff hard body, confin’d by his breeches, that my fingers could discover no end: curious then and eager to unfold so alarming a mystery, playing as it were with his buttons, which were bursting ripe from the active force within, those of his waist-band and foreflap flew open at a touch, when

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<sup>99</sup> Hollander, *Sex and Suits*, 88.

<sup>100</sup> John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (London, 1749), 186.

out it started; and now, disengag'd from the shirt, I saw with wonder and surprise, what? not the play-thing of a boy, not the weapon of a man, but a may-pole.<sup>101</sup>

Erotic writing allowed male readers a space in which to admire male bodies as powerful, hard, mobile, strong and vigorous but also as sensitive, responsive, flaccid and vulnerable; imaginary female viewers as a device disarmed accusations of same-sex desire that such of male bodies might provoke.<sup>102</sup> Fanny Hill is thus articulating a male viewpoint.<sup>103</sup> And Cleland's description revels in the physical pleasure derived from wearing these clothes; the sensuality of the 'clipping close', new (and therefore extremely soft) buckskin breeches against the skin of the wearer is palpable. The adjective 'confined' and the adverb 'bursting' describe his sensations, not hers.

Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure is atypical amongst English literature of the mid-eighteenth century in its explicitness but some evidence suggests that men may have escaped their foreflaps more commonly than we might expect. An episode in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1767) seemed to accept that some forgetful men might sit at dinner with their breeches undone. The character of Phutatorius experienced burning pain in the groin when a hot

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>102</sup> Harvey, *Reading Sex*, 129. See also 124-45.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 35-77.

chestnut rolled off the dinner table into his lap because he had neglected to fasten his front fall.<sup>104</sup>

The material culture of men's breeches provides further suggestive evidence. Whilst the lining of all the eighteenth-century breeches I have consulted was plain and undecorative, there was one significant exception: the lining to the front fall. [Figure 10] There are several possible explanations for this. Whilst medical writers suggested that men's health required clothing made of wool and cotton because they could be kept easily clean, perhaps in the absence of underpants and with only linen shirts to cover the groin, silk lining was chosen to rest softly against the sensitive skin.<sup>105</sup> Other fabrics could provide this comfort, however. Silk was for display and its use on the inner side of a man's fly suggests that men did indeed allow their front flaps to fall in public.

This gives a new twist to what Anne Hollander identified as 'a new genital emphasis' in late-eighteenth-century men's clothing.<sup>106</sup> We could link this new presence of the male leg, thigh and groin to a specifically heterosexual form of masculinity, drawing upon Trumbach's account of the defining of heterosexual masculinity opposed to a sodomitical and effeminate other. Yet this is too schematic a treatment of the way that gender interacted with people's sexual desires and also

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<sup>104</sup> Laurence Sterne, *The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London, 1767). Volume 4, 134, 133. For an account of this episode see Brian Michael Norton, "Tristram Shandy and the Limits of Stoic Ethics," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 18, no. 4 (June 2006), 405-423, at 408, 413.

<sup>105</sup> See McNeil and Riello, "Art and Science of Walking," 192.

<sup>106</sup> Hollander, *Sex and Suits*, 88.

neglects the complexity of effeminacy, a discourse that far exceeded the sexual.<sup>107</sup> A tough manly body was not necessarily an expression of heterosexuality, though it does concur neatly with Tim Hitchcock's argument that eighteenth-century English culture was increasingly phallogentric.<sup>108</sup> This phallogentricism was manifest in the closely dressed male leg that appears to have connoted not just beauty and strength but male reproductive power. A striking example appears in the erotic book *A Spy on Mother Midnight* (1748). 'Mother Midnight' was a term for midwife, and early in the story the women at a lying-in begin to sing the praises of Mr. Richard to their friend, Sukey:

Mr. Richard is a rare well-made Man, he's strong built and stout limb'd; I warrant you there are twenty Boys in his Calves; he's none of your Spindle-shanks: He has a hardy Complexion, a Pair of wanton Eyes, and a Nose! Ah! Sukey, such a Nose! You Jade, you, that's a promising Member; I warrant it would do a Woman's Heart good to measure the Length of it.<sup>109</sup>

Mr. Richard's nose is the 'promising member' – the penis – and his calves are the measure of his fertility. If the seeds of boys were found in men's calves, then men's reproductive potency and

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<sup>107</sup> Helen Berry, "Queering the History of Marriage: the Social Recognition of a Castrato Husband in Eighteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop Journal*, 74, 1 (Autumn 2012), 27-50, at 30-31; McCormack, "Dance and Drill," 318.

<sup>108</sup> Tim Hitchcock, "Redefining Sex in Eighteenth-Century England," *History Workshop Journal*, 41, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 73-90.

<sup>109</sup> *A Spy on Mother Midnight: or, The Templar Metamorphos'd. Being a Lying-in Conversation* (London, 1748), 20-21.

Britain's fighting strength rested firmly upon the lower leg. This casts a new light on the close-fitting legwear of this period and in particular the padded stockings or artificial calves that men adopted.<sup>110</sup> It may also explain why men strove to improve and display their calves. A 'Receipt for making the Limbs thick & strong' gave men tips on how to improve their calves but perhaps because of its link to fertility was designed 'only for young Men'.<sup>111</sup> Old men's bodies – as well as women's – were widely ridiculed in the eighteenth century, as vigour and reproductive potency played an increasingly important role in representations of masculinity.<sup>112</sup> One wonders in this context whether George Newton's father enjoyed receiving cast-off stockings from his flourishing son. But young men should strengthen their calves, in the case of this recipe by wearing shoes with heels no higher than a quarter of an inch. This would 'have the admirable effect of thickning the calves of the legs' by exercising the muscles. The evidence, the author noted, could be found amongst the low-heeled but strong-legged Highlanders, as well as the right arms 'of workmen & most of all Labouring

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<sup>110</sup> C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes* (1951; New York, 1992), 80-82.

<sup>111</sup> "Receipt for making the Limbs thick & strong," 1727: GD18/2125/31.

<sup>112</sup> Harvey, *Reading Sex*, 138-9. For women, dress and ageing, see Amanda Vickery, "Mutton Dressed as Lamb?

Fashioning Age in Georgian England," *Journal of British Studies*, 52, no. 4 (October 2013), 858-886.

persones'.<sup>113</sup> Notably, arms represented labor but legs were the part suited for elite display.<sup>114</sup> Now the most exposed part of the male body, they were physical evidence of a man's status as well as his virility. As a book of maxims informed its readers in 1753: 'It is natural for a man, even for an Englishman to have a certain serenity settled in his eyes, when there is no further doubt about the fine shape of his leg'.<sup>115</sup>

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This essay has argued that sex and gender are thoroughly embodied identities, both in their construction and our experience of them. Historians' work on these historical identities must therefore integrate both the discursive and the physical. To this end, I have drawn together the disparate sources of representations, archival records and material objects. Each suggests different interpretations of clothing that broaden our understanding of men's experience. But I have tried in particular to use the material culture of clothing to generate new insights into the embodied experience of masculinity. Dressing is not just 'picture-making', as Hollander remarked, because the

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<sup>113</sup> "Receipt for making the Limbs thick & strong," 1727: GD18/2125/31. "Medical recipes and prescriptions," 1647-1850 (in Papers of the Clerk family of Penicuik, Midlothian: The National Archives of Scotland). Thanks to Alison Montgomery for this reference.

<sup>114</sup> Crossly, *Signification of Most Things that are Born in Heraldry*, 50.

<sup>115</sup> M. de La Beaumelle [Laurent Angliviel], *Reflections of \*\*\*\*\* being a Series of Political Maxims* (1753), 169.



distinctive feature of clothing as representation is that it is worn on the body.<sup>116</sup> As such, it has a crucial role to play in historians' engagement with corporeal accounts of human emotion, sensation and experience. Clothing is both physical and representational: it is worn, felt, imagined and represented. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach to the material culture of clothing allows us to explore sensation and meaning-making, ensuring that we retain an emphasis on culture, ideology and power even as some of the work on corporeality threatens to write these out.<sup>117</sup>

Discussing the early roots of the 'the Great Male Renunciation' in early-eighteenth-century periodicals, Erin Mackie asks, 'how did this absence of display come to mark the presence of masculinity and power?'<sup>118</sup> Yet if there was an absence of display in men's clothing, this only served to foreground the male body underneath. Changes in eighteenth-century clothing did not disguise the male body but brought it forth. In the process, men were increasingly differentiated from women and defined by their bodily form. The historically specific embodiment of masculinity I have discussed here shows the historical fiction of 'the mystery, the enigma, the unspoken of the male body'.<sup>119</sup> John Harvey is right that 'power-dressing' works in an 'inward and intimate way': 'if clothes "mean", it is

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<sup>116</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (1975; Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA., 1993), 311.

<sup>117</sup> Ruth Leys, "The Turn to Affect: a Critique," *Critical Inquiry*, 37, no. 3, (Spring 2011), 434-472.

<sup>118</sup> Erin Mackie, *Market à la Mode: Fashion, Commodity, and Gender in The Tatler and The Spectator* (Baltimore and London, 1997), 190.

<sup>119</sup> Quote from Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 198.

in the first place to ourselves'.<sup>120</sup> Men could enjoy the brush of soft and supple fabric on their skin and – as the century wore on – the way tight clothes empowered and enlivened. If ready-made clothing in late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America connoted democracy without social divisions and clothing reforms in late-eighteenth-century France asserted a vision of the liberated citizen's body, Kuchta proposed that the emphasis in England was a pairing of 'modest masculinity with political legitimacy'.<sup>121</sup> By contrast, this essay has argued that we might think of the new claims to power that non-landed men made in this period not as renouncing the male body but instead as an example of claims to a corporeal or 'embodied citizenship'.<sup>122</sup> New clothes meant many things to

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<sup>120</sup> Harvey, *Men in Black*, 14.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men's Dress in the American Republic, 1760-1860* (2003; Chicago and London, 2005); Jenna Weissman Joselit, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America* (New York, 2001), 2; Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the "Ancien Regime"*, trans. Jean Birrell (1989; Cambridge, 1994), 464. Quote from Kuchta, "Making of the Self-Made Man," 65.

<sup>122</sup> "Embodied citizenship" as used in contemporary political theory refers to the ways in which the material body affects the citizenship status of political subjects. See, for example, Carol Lee Bacchi and Chris Beasley, "Citizen Bodies: is Embodied Citizenship a Contradiction in Terms?" *Critical Social Policy*, 22, no. 2 (May 2002), 324-52 and Tanya Titchkosky, "Governing Embodiment: Technologies of Constituting Citizens with Disabilities," *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens de sScologie*, 28, no. 4 (Fall 2003), 517-542.

men, but they established the male body as not just different but newly embodied in beauty and power through a fusion of flesh and fabric.