

## Article

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Gregory, Georgina

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# Masculinity, Sexuality and the Visual Culture of Glam Rock

## Abstract

Glam Rock, a musical style accompanied by a flamboyant dress code emerged during the early 1970s. This essay looks at the changing representations of masculinity which occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s, leading eventually to the Glam Rock phenomenon. The impact of social changes including the legalisation of homosexuality and the growth of the women's liberation movement and their effect on male representation will be explored. There will be an examination fashion and retailing for men, "unisex" style to demonstrate how menswear became increasingly feminised, culminating eventually in the adoption of full transvestism by male performing artists like David Bowie. The relationship between Glam Rock and other musical subcultures will also be discussed with a view to explaining how the eventual adoption of transvestism by Glam Rock performers exposed and challenged the hegemony of the prevailing metanarrative of heterosexual male freedom within 1970s popular culture.

**Georgina Gregory**  
University of  
Central Lancashire  
Department of  
Historical and  
Critical Studies

## Erillik, Cinsellik ve Glam Rock'ın Görsel Kültürü

### Özet

Glam Rock, 70'lerin başında, gösterişli ve süslü bir giyim biçimi eşliğinde ortaya çıkan bir müzik tarzıdır. Bu makale, 60'larda ve 70'lerin başında, daha sonraları Glam Rock olgusuna yönelen, erilliğin temsillerindeki değişimi inceliyor. Erkeklerin temsili etkileyen, eşcinselliğin meşrulaşması ve kadın özgürlüğü hareketinin genişlemesi gibi toplumsal eğilimler üzerinde duruluyor. Erkeklerin moda pazarı ve erkek giyiminin gittikçe kadınsılaşması, hem kadın hem de erkek için olan giyim tarzının yaygınlaşması inceleniyor. Bu eğilimlerin ulaştığı son nokta, David Bowie gibi erkek sahne sanatçılarının transvest tarzı. Glam Rock ve diğer müzik alt kültürleri arasındaki ilişki, transvestizmin Glam Rock sanatçıları tarafından uyarlanmasıyla, 70'ler popüler kültüründeki heteroseksüel erkek özgürlüğünün nasıl sergilenip buna nasıl karşı çıktığı üzerinde durularak tartışılıyor.

## Masculinity, Sexuality and the Visual Culture of Glam Rock

<sup>1</sup> The "spectacular" youth subcultures usually include Mods, Punks, Hippies and Skinheads. See Stratton (1985) for a text which challenges the anti-consumerist Marxist rhetoric of the Birmingham School.

<sup>2</sup> The introduction to *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson, 1976) contains quotes from and references to both Althusser and Marx. The debt to Gramsci and his theories of hegemony is clearly acknowledged on p. 38.

Although youth and subcultures have been the subject of considerable interest within cultural studies, Glam Rock appears to have been overlooked by the majority of historians and theorists, who have concentrated instead, on the so called "spectacular youth subcultures".<sup>1</sup> This may be due to the importance placed on social class in the early studies carried out at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1978; Hebdige, 1979). The Birmingham School continued an earlier tradition established by the Chicago School of sociologists who were particularly active in the 1940s – 1960s Chicago School theorists (Gordon, 1947; Cohen, 1955 and Becker, 1963) characterised members of subcultures as anti-social, deviant "outsiders", living on the margins of mainstream society, whereas the research undertaken by the Birmingham School placed subcultures firmly within a framework of social class struggle.<sup>2</sup>

Dick Hebdige, an alumnus of the CCCS was one of the first researchers to investigate the importance and the symbolic function of fashion within the subcultures. His work on style was an important advance on existing fashion histories (Laver, 1982; Yarwood, 1975) which tended to focus on haute couture and the fashions of the elite, usually attributing fashionable change to the endeavours of individual designers.

According to Hebdige, through the application of the technique of "bricolage", the subcultural stylist is able to



demonstrate resistance to a subordinate social position by offering a symbolic challenge to the "normality" of the social order established by dominant groups (101-112). He dismisses Glam Rock as "frivolous, narcissistic and politically evasive", describing the artists Lou Reed and David Bowie as performers whose "extreme foppishness, incipient elitism and morbid pretensions to art and intellect" precluded their acceptance by the masses. Using a Marxist argument he dismisses Bowie's contribution to pop as a collusion with consumer capitalism creating a dependent adolescent class. Hebdige ascribes the dominance established by those in power, to their economic strength and questions around hierarchies of sexuality or gender are thus side-stepped.

Taylor and Wall (1976) also employ a very negative reading of Glam, arguing that it was an offensive, commercial and cultural emasculation of the far more "masculine" and "authentic", middle-class "underground". This class-based cultural analysis contains an implicitly male focus which reinforces a masculinist hagiography. The failure of subcultural theorists to dislodge assumptions of dominant masculinity in youth culture clearly outlined by McRobbie (1980) who signalled the need to consider the cultural expression of sexuality and gender from alternative viewpoints to those based on class.

More recent work on subcultures (Thornton, 1995; Gelder and Thornton, 1997) informed by Bourdieu's (1984) studies of

taste, avoid the overly simplistic binary oppositions which characterise many of the earlier studies. As well as calling for more use of empirical research, Thornton argues that the hegemonic dichotomies of mainstream vs. underground and commercial vs. "alternative" are misleading forms and should be replaced by approaches which give a "more complicated picture which takes account of the implications of cultural plurality" (96-97). This cultural plurality is particularly relevant to the 1970s, a decade where a number of subcultures flourished simultaneously. The 1970s saw the emergence of the Two-Tone Punk and Rastafarian as well as the less well-documented or seriously theorised, Glam Rock, Progressive Rock, Funk and "Casual" subcultures.

Whilst Marxist theories may be inadequate when attempting to explain the subtle nuances of cultural diversity and difference, theories of postmodernism offer an alternative mode of analysis. McRobbie (1994) explains how postmodernism has helped to undermine the class based Marxist analysis of culture, allowing for more flexible interpretations of cultural identity. Although it is acknowledged that postmodernism is a theoretical concept that resists definition (Storey, 1993; Strinati, 1995). Collins suggests that the key characteristics of the paradigm include the formation of complex social spaces where pluralism is celebrated and where clearcut structures of class or dominance are less easy to detect (115).

These politics of identity and difference seem particularly appropriate to a study of the diverse range of subcultural groupings which appeared during the 1970s. Thwaites, David and Mules (1994) discuss the complexity of cultural identities and their contribution to the establishment of social meanings. They argue that the multi-layered complexity of cultural identities precludes simplistic generalisations or fixed meanings.

This research aims to re-examine the social meanings of the visual culture of Glam Rock, taking into account the



forementioned developments. Rather than focussing on social class and deviance, contemporary issues around gender and sexuality will be related to the emergence and expression of the style and the challenge which it posed to the hegemony of masculinity and heterosexuality in the historiography of subcultural studies.

To what extent did the style signal a crisis of masculine identity as a reaction to the rise of the women's movement? Following a period of sexual liberation in the 1960s, did Glam Rock reflect uncertainty about the nature of masculinity? How and in what ways did the Glam style facilitate the expression of "alternative" sexualities? The noticeable absence of female Glam performers is also of interest and requires explanation. Did the sexual liberation created by 1960s youth cultures conceal an inherent misogyny and homophobia which was exposed by the flamboyant dress code of performers such as David Bowie, Marc Bolan and the New York Dolls? To what extent was the Glam Rock style influenced by the prevailing trends in contemporary mainstream menswear?

Through an examination of the contemporary pop music press, teenage magazines, films, newspapers and fashion magazines the evolution of the Glam Rock style will be documented in order to explore these questions. By avoiding a class based analysis and looking instead at sexuality and gender, the complex layers of youth culture and cultural identity will be investigated.

### The Stylistic Apparatus of Glam Rock

Glam Rock was an aural and visual style which played a significant role within popular music culture from the early to mid 1970s. The main characteristics of the visual style, worn almost exclusively by male performers were: transvestism,<sup>3</sup> the use of glittery, shiny and soft fabrics such as velvet, satin and lurex; leather clothing; spangled, shiny or brightly coloured

#### 3

The most overt visual example of this transvestism was the photograph of David Bowie wearing a dress on the cover of the *Man Who Sold the World* L.P. in 1970. There were also open references to transvestism in songs – e.g. Lou Reed's *Walk on the Wild Side* and *Make Up on the Transformer* L.P. of 1972.



4

See Hoskyn's (1998: xii) "Ten Glam Signatures".

5

Marc Bolan was originally Marc Feld, David Bowie/David Jones, Gary Glitter/Paul Gadd and Luther Grosvenor/Ariel Bender. David Bowie adopted a number of alter egos as dramatic devices, including "Ziggy Stardust", "Aladdin Sane" and "The Thin White Duke".

platform soled shoes and soft flat slippers. Heavily applied make up and extreme quasi "feminine" hairstyling, from the long black corkscrew curls of Marc Bolan and the blonde layers worn by Brian Conley of the Sweet, to the orange feathered coxcomb pioneered by David Bowie (See Fig. 1) were also de rigeur.

By looking back to earlier traditions of glamour established in the cinema during the 1930s as well as creating space age projections, the style made simultaneous references to both the future and the past (See Figs. 2 and 3). These references were created from a repertoire of outfits, which included skin-tight jumpsuits, wide lapelled, jackets, flares, shorts, feather boas, platform-soled boots, top hats and assorted jewellery. Transvestism, suggestions of androgyny, bi or homosexuality were expressed with the heavy use of irony and a camp sensibility (See Fig. 3).

The musical style of Glam Rock was characterised by mechanical drum sounds and formulaic three minute pop songs<sup>4</sup> (T Rex, Suzi Quatro, Mud, the Sweet); affected Cockney vibrato vocals (David Bowie, Ian Hunter, Steve Harley); high squealing backing vocals (T Rex and the Sweet); complex chamber rock arrangements (Queen, Alice Cooper) and an emphasis on high drama and shameless artifice. Many performers adopted glamorous pseudonyms and others went further by assuming complete alter-egos.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the individual components of the style could be seen to a greater or lesser extent, in the popular music culture of previous decades. Glamour has always been an essential feature of popular music and male pop stars like Liberace, Elvis Presley and Billy Fury had all worn gold lame suits during the 1950s. Nik Cohn, describes the musicians window in Cecil Gee's shop on Charing Cross Road thus:

*Inside there was a Vathek-like magnificence, the most splendorous sights that I'd seen in my life: danceband uniforms of lame or silk or satin, all tinselled and starred, a shimmering*

*mass of maroons and golds, and purples, silvers and pure sky blue, like fireworks* (43).

At the height of his fame, Elvis wore a lame suit, eye make up and dyed his hair black: Little Richard too, was famous for his elaborate hair styling and narcissism<sup>6</sup> (See Fig. 4). Where Glam Rock differs from its twentieth century precursors is in the openness of its references to alternative sexualities, transvestism and camp; post war youth culture from its inception having been almost exclusively heterosexual in its orientation.

### Social Change, Sexuality and Masculinity – the Post-War Legacy

The roots of the social changes which led to the evolution of Glam Rock can be traced back to the social climate of the post-war period and the legal changes which took place during the 1960s. The 1960s was an age of liberal, humanitarian reforms and single issue campaigns. Economic expansion led to a more widespread affluence which had helped to eradicate many of the problems of poverty and inequality that had previously preoccupied politicians and it was now possible for attention to be focused on more personal issues of conscience and individual liberty. Following the horrors of the Second World War and the legacy of restrictions imposed by rationing, the 1960s was a decade which began with a new found spirit of optimism and calls for a fairer, more egalitarian society. Reforms that were introduced included the abolition of capital punishment, divorce law reform and, of major importance to the Glam Rock style, the partial decriminalisation<sup>7</sup> of homosexuality between consenting adults.

According to Weekes, during the 1950s homosexuality was still perceived by the majority, to be either a weakness, or a mental aberration. He quotes from a "sympathetic" account in a book entitled *Society and the Homosexual* where it is referred to as a "severe mental sickness" and a "mental disorder" (156-158).

<sup>6</sup> Chuck Como, in a tribute to Little Richard, described his impact on teenagers of both sexes during the 1950s: "The kids wanted to see Richard so bad, they would play hooky to come and see the show. For the kids just to look at Richard was really something. They had never seen a man like that – with long hair and all that make up and shaking his head and all that" (quoted in White, 1984: 73).

<sup>7</sup> Although the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 was essentially liberating, the decriminalisation only applied to consenting adults over 21 in the privacy of their own homes.



8

See Pearce for a detailed account of newsmedia coverage of homosexuality in Cohen and Young's (1973) "The Manufacture of News". David also describes the attitude of the popular media towards homosexuals (197).

David also refers to the "rabidly homophobic" books of the 1950s which speak of the "potential evil" and "corroding practices" of homosexuals (156). It seems that the extreme cultural anxiety surrounding alternative expressions of sexuality was dealt with by either vilifying or stereotyping homosexuals. Even during the early 1960s, the *Sunday Mirror* published an article on "How to spot a possible homosexual", advising readers to look out for their "shifty glances", "dropped eyes" and a "fondness for the theatre".<sup>8</sup> These fears regarding homosexuality appear to have acted as a barrier to the involvement of heterosexual men in the world of fashion. As Cohn points out, during the 1950s:

*Famous names apart, dressiness was confined largely to homosexuals. Since they were cut off from the mainstream anyway, both sexually and socially, they had nothing to lose by outrageousness in their clothes (24).*

The "feminine" qualities expressed within Glam Rock style could be traced back to the early 1960s when menswear gradually began to be treated as "fashion". This reversed the tendency for men to avoid overt displays of either sexuality or fashionability which had prevailed through much of the 19th and 20th cc. (Craig, 1994; Steele, 1989). According to Breward (1995), the rhetoric of masculinity was dependent on the denial of men's fashion and the attribution of fashion to the feminine sphere. Pumphrey also reinforces this point, arguing that in order to maintain the codes of masculinity, men also rejected other activities associated with "ideal transformations" like window shopping, attending fashion shows and subscribing to fashion magazines (97). Connikie (1989) suggests that the declining infant mortality of the post-war years led to a gender imbalance which put pressure on heterosexual men to compete with one another in the search for a partner. It may be that this competition had an impact on the growing market for youth fashion which had occurred since the war.

Elizabeth Ewing describes how the youth explosion of the fifties and sixties dealt a "death blow" to leadership by the establishment (229). Furthermore, she argues that fashion began



to have less to do with status and class and more to do with issues of identity and individuality. Young people certainly had more disposable income to spend on clothing. Abrams (1950) attributed this rising youth income to a rise in real earnings of fifty percent from the 1930s to the 1950s. In addition, teenagers were choosing to spend the majority of their new-found wealth on clothing and other products connected to youth culture.

The growing economic power of teenagers, combined with the evolution of a separate youth culture, created a "generation gap" which, according to MacInnes, led to a new form of social division:

*The 'two nations' of our society may perhaps no longer those of the rich and the poor (or, to use old fashioned terms, the 'upper' and 'working classes'), but those of the teenagers on the one hand and on the other, all those who have assumed the burdens of adult responsibility (56).*

### **Youth Culture, Fashion Design and Contemporary Menswear**

As teenagers became more powerful demographically, economically and socially, the fashion industry began to respond and the advent of a youth designer culture during the 1960s provided a vehicle for a gradual change to the established traditions of menswear. Immediately after the war the conservative legacy of 1950s middle class menswear still prevailed, with suits in firm fabrics and sombre colours predominating (Powell and Peel, 1988: 32-33). However, in 1947 a School of Fashion was opened at the Royal College of Art and soon fashion courses were offered up and down the country. Rouse (1989) points out that the education policies of the post-war government led to the provision of local authority grants which allowed young people from working-class backgrounds to study fashion and design. Youthful designers like Ossie Clarke, Mary Quant and Zandra Rhodes, although coming from differing social backgrounds, were less inhibited by tradition or



9

In her autobiography, *Quant on Quant* (1966) she said that she believed that "young women were tired of wearing clothes essentially the same as their mother's". By creating boutiques selling clothes specifically for and by young people, the older generation were effectively excluded.

10

*Rave* claimed to be "Britain's most influential young magazine". On page 2 of the July 1966 edition, a footnote indicates a national survey shows that *Rave* is read by approx. 1,200,000 people. This suggests that it was very popular.

11

In his debut page of May 1967 he tells readers that he is going to tell them "What's around, like the latest male fashions, the birds we're after, and naturally their problems. You see, although I'm in the know, I'm on your side. Being interested in girls, I like knowing about their problems".

the conventions of haute couture which had always dictated to the masses from above. By 1955 Quant had opened her own shop named "Bazaar" in Chelsea in order to further her aim of selling her designs exclusively to young women."

Similar developments began to take place in menswear during the 1960s where there was a subtle movement towards lighter, softer clothes which were less firmly structured; suits often being replaced by separates. This informality was accompanied by a growing feminisation of clothing for the male youth market. Cohn (1971) explains how the fashion entrepreneur John Stephen revolutionised menswear in the late 1950s by introducing pink denim jeans and lilac shirts. The more "feminine" styled fashions for men were not confined solely to the working classes. In 1965 the November edition of *Men in Vogue* featured a photograph of the fashionable aristocrat Julian Ormsby Gore, wearing a dark green silk ruffled shirt. Two years later an article by Johnny Rave in the July 1967 edition of *Rave*, a popular girls magazine,<sup>10</sup> asks readers whether they think "The feminine look for men is sissy?" He goes on to say, "Take a look at the fabulous gear in these sketches. It proves that a feminine influence can achieve a very sleek, smart effect" (49).

Although the magazine was primarily for consumption by teenage girls, Johnny Rave was brought in during the Spring of 1967, ostensibly to offer "a boy's point of view on boyfriend problems" but he also gave advice on male fashions, showing examples of clothing and discussing current trends.

Through an analysis of the contents of *Rave* over a two-year period from 1965-67 it is possible to trace the subtle changes in menswear, from the sharper Op and Pop art Mod fashions of the mid 1960s, to the looser, softer and more feminine Hippieinspired clothing which emerged later in the decade (See Fig. 5). It is interesting to note that although Johnny Rave was clearly advocating feminine styled clothing for men in his fashion and advice pages, he made a point of emphasising his heterosexuality while doing so,<sup>11</sup> presumably to reassure an

assumed heterosexual readership regarding his own sexual orientation. The contemporary codes of masculinity were carefully preserved through the relegation of men's fashion to the safety of the feminine sphere and the pages of a magazine aimed at teenage girls.

Heterosexual masculinity is also clearly affirmed in the Autumn/Winter 1969 edition of *Men in Vogue* where the writer Jessica Jessel, in an article featuring shirts by Michael Fish the Unisex designer, assures readers that: "Not since the days of the Regency Bucks have shirts been so frilled and furbelowed, so colourful, so carefree and yet so unashamedly admired by women". The presumed heterosexuality of readers of *Men in Vogue* is never in doubt – advertisements in the magazine invariably feature male models, standing alongside admiring women, often touching them seductively. Some of the features go a step further, by pre-empting and addressing readers' latent fears of homosexuality in relation to their dress and personal hygiene.<sup>12</sup>

This insistent affirmation of male heterosexuality reinforces Rutherford's (1988) contention, that a hallmark of twentieth century masculinity is the privileging of heterosexuality over other expressions of sexuality. Traditional masculinity was likely to have been threatened at this time in the wake of the 1967 Act to decriminalise homosexuality and the emergence in America, of the Gay Liberation movement in 1968. Although legal reforms had sanctioned homosexual activity to a limited extent, as Edwards points out: "The 1967 Sexual Offences Act was an act of tolerance, compromise and reform, not of acceptance, victory and revolution" (22).

12

See Jessel, J. (1969) "Post Post Shave." *Men in Vogue* 1(4), Autumn/Winter. This article about male grooming tells readers "Heterosexual hackles are apt to rise at the mere suggestion of make up for men. On the continent the eau de toilette has been de rigueur with no attendant homosexual over-or-under tones".

### The "Unisex" Style and the Rise of Androgyny as an Expression of Cultural Conflict

Although visible signs of homosexuality may have been frowned upon, the gradual feminisation of menswear continued to create a fashion climate that offered a visual challenge to



13

Weeks documents the close interaction between the "swinging scene" of the 1960s and the homosexual world: "Many of the youths who worked or shopped in the trendy boutiques of Carnaby St. or Kings Rd. might be seen in the height of fashion at new gay bars in the evening" (180).

conventional representations of masculinity. The evolution of Unisex fashions played an important role in making androgyny more acceptable within popular music culture and youth style. There is much talk in the 1960s media about the Unisex phenomenon. Contemporary magazines contain images of male and female models wearing identical outfits, including his and hers swimsuits, pyjamas and shirts, hairstyles, underwear and T-shirts (See Figs. 6 and 7).

According to Cohn in an account of menswear in the late 1960: "Men were wearing more and more silks and satins; women more and more trousers and shirts and clumpy shoes – apparently styles were becoming interchangeable" (153). He goes on to describe the growing number of boutiques which had begun to cater for both men and women. Whilst women have been represented as overly susceptible to the frivolous pleasures associated with shopping, men during the interwar and early post-war period had not been similarly conditioned. Reassurance was at hand for the faint-hearted, particularly those men who might fear being labelled homosexual for showing excessive interest in their clothing. *The Guardian* fashion pages of 1969 informed readers that: "Men are beginning to realise that they can still be men and take an interest in fashion and wear clothes that have a similar feeling and direction as women's" (Walker, 1969: 7).

According to Mort (1998) the Unisex boutique provided young men with an "alternative version of masculinity to that offered on the football terraces and in the public houses". Unisex shopping enabled young men to engage with frivolous consumption, and more particularly, with women's clothing at close quarters.<sup>13</sup>

Unisex fashions appear to be markedly more stereotypically "masculine" in their styling, in that both young men and women were depicted wearing jeans or flared trousers, with shirts or T-shirts – the casual uniform of young men of the period. The main "feminine" stylistic input was derived from the mutual adoption



by both sexes, of long flowing and artificially curled hair (See Fig. 8). There are no examples of men wearing women's dresses in any of the magazines I studied, other than one isolated example. The July 1967 edition of *Rave* features the "male mini skirt" (See Fig. 9). However, the tongue in cheek photograph is indicative of a general fear or intolerance of such blatant displays of transvestism. The model on the left defends his masculinity by wearing a tie and the posture of both models suggests a defensive hypermasculinity. It was not until a few years later that such deeply embedded codes of masculinity were transgressed further and Male pop performers took the Unisex style to its ultimate conclusion.

During the early 1960s the Beatles had helped to pave the way for a softer, less stereotypically masculine style of appearance<sup>14</sup> and, far from diminishing their popularity with female fans, their new style helped to firmly establish "Beatlemania". The longer hair styling and collarless Beatlesuits of the early 1960s soon gave way to the adoption of clothing inspired by mid '60s psychedelia. On the cover of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, they can be seen wearing brightly coloured, orientally influenced, silk suits. Other artists (see Fig. 10) also began to wear frilled shirts with lacy cuffs, silk jackets, velvet flared trousers, jewellery, scarves and beads. The new styles could be purchased from the new London boutiques Granny Takes a Trip, Mr. Freedom or the aptly named Dandy (Cohn, 1971: 122).

The Rolling Stones took effeminacy a step further by appearing in drag in the promotional film *Have You Seen Your Mother Baby, Standing in the Shadow*. This clumsy attempt to represent stereotypical femininity was soon replaced by a much more sexually ambiguous "dandyism" which was attributed by some, to the group's connections with a group of bisexual aristocrats. Stanley Booth, speaking of their American tour in 1969 said:

*We all got faggier by the day. The wonder is that by the end of the tour we weren't all wearing dresses. We all had to brush our hair*

## 14

Constantino describes the interest expressed by the media in fashions inspired by the Beatles. Their increased use of colour led to declarations that "the Dandy" had returned in British menswear (99).



15

Doomwatch was launched by the B.B.C. in 1970 to cover environmental problems. In the same year Americans celebrated their first "Earth Day".

*out of our eyes every eight seconds. You never saw a more limp wristed bunch of sissies (quoted in Hoskyns, 1998: 12-13).*

At the Hyde Park festival of 1969, following the death of Brian Jones, Booth's fears were realised when Mick Jagger appeared wearing a white muslin mini dress. The expression of such overt transvestism and the rejection of "straight" masculinity appears to be linked to the growing solidarity amongst homosexuals which eventually surfaced in Britain in 1970 with the activities of the Gay Liberation Front. According to Weeks, after the legal changes of 1967, attitudes to homosexuality began to relax – leading to the appearance of gay disco-type pubs where young gay men could dance and socialise more freely (albeit in private) (180-183).

### Responses to the Growing Feminisation of Menswear

The sartorial excesses of psychedelia and the camp dress sense of artists like Jagger, were soon to be challenged from the within the same youth culture which had helped to create them. According to Polhemus, where Hippies had espoused love, peace and tolerance, skinheads welcomed conflict and many were accused of attacking minority groups including asians, homosexuals and hippies (69-71). Where Hippie fashions for men had celebrated feminine qualities, the Skinhead dress code of short-cropped hair, Doctor Marten boots, jeans, donkey jackets and Ben Sherman shirts represented a reactionary blue collar masculinity.

The hypermasculinity of Skinhead culture offered resistance to the perceived threat to traditional working class masculinity posed by homosexual men and Hippies, the so called "alternative" culture also fragment. Disenchantment with Hippie philosophy caused by the gradual collapse of the counter culture, led to a growing concern for the environment,<sup>15</sup> a rejection of consumerism and a call for political action. This



contrasted sharply with the idealism of the 1960s where the emphasis had been on individual experience rather than collective activity.

An article from the early 1970s publication *The Story of Pop* documents this moral crisis, explaining to readers, that following the events at Altamonte and the student protests against Vietnam: "Rock is after all more responsible and more important than anyone probably imagined at the time of the great Hippie days of 1967" (Fowler, 1973: 701). This sense of importance and responsibility led to a contradictory but growing conservatism within popular music culture. Street explains how "Progressive" music called into question the very idea of popularity, through the adoption of an elitist stance which dismissed popular music as trivial (190-193). Exponents of Progressive Rock Pink Floyd, the Nice, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, allied themselves to classical music and the avant garde. The seriousness of their music was often conflated with the sheer length of the songs, some lasting well over 20 minutes. At concerts, audiences were encouraged to sit politely and listen, rather than expecting to be "entertained".

This new sobriety was reflected in the dress of the exclusively male progressive musicians, who eschewed the foppishness of psychedelia in favour of a more sober, workmanlike style of dress which consisted of denim jeans, shirts, waistcoats and T-shirts. A thick, manly growth of facial hair was also a pre-requisite of the "progressive" look.<sup>16</sup> This rejection feminine influences on dress, accompanied by the burgeoning masculinity of the Rock bands, helped to re-assert the reactionary sexism and conservatism which the "Underground" had initially set out to challenge.<sup>17</sup>

The picture was further complicated by the activities of the Women's Liberation movement which had almost paralleled the ascendant Gay Liberation movement. According to Marwick (1982) the Women's Liberation movement was "scarcely evident" in Britain at the end of the 1960s, but attributes an

16

*Rolling Stone*, March 25, 1975, p. 39 features a clearance of real hair "Zappa" style moustaches - light or dark, only 75p.

17

See Walter, A. and Fernbach, D. (1972) "Sexism: Male Ego Tripping: Reactionary Left Politics." 7 Days 14: 22, for a description of the *San Francisco Diggers* sexist attitude to women within the subculture. Where men are described as "touch", being endowed with "style, guile, balls, imagination and autonomy", women are stereotyped as "soft" and "radiating children, scent and colours".



18

From 45,794 (3.7 per thousand) of the married population in 1968 to 74,437 (6.0 per thousand) in 1974 (Marwick, 1982: 172-173).

19

Edwards provides a detailed discussion of the complex relationship between feminism and masculinity in the 1970s (31-54).

20

According to Hoskyns, "With Hot Love at Number One, Bolan made a spur of the Moment decision to let Chelita put glitter under his eyes before appearing on Top of the Pops". At the next gig he was greeted by the sight of hundreds of beglittered fans' (Hoskyns, 1998: 18-19).

acceleration in activity with the publication of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* in 1970.

Although there were few signs of political activism in Britain during the 1960s, the liberal reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s had a major impact on the role of women. The Abortion Act of 1967, combined with the introduction of more accessible and effective contraception had allowed women greater sexual and social freedom. The Equal Pay and Matrimonial Property Acts of 1970 also gave women greater autonomy and, after the reform of the divorce law, the divorce rate in Britain rocketed.<sup>18</sup>

Glam Rock seems to have emerged out of this climate of social and cultural conflict and tension regarding the dominance of both heterosexuality and masculinity. Although the 1960s had led to a new freedom and more open attitude to sexual matters, the emphasis had been on male heterosexual freedom. Female homosexuality and the rights of women generally, had been ignored or played down. Both the Gay Liberation Front and the Women's Liberation Movement challenged the privileging of heterosexuality and masculinity by indicating that profound changes in the nature of sex roles and attitudes to sex were now necessary.<sup>19</sup>

Both Booth (1983) and Hoskyns (1998) attribute Marc Bolan with the invention of Glam Rock in 1971. Bolan certainly helped to pioneer the wearing of make up and glamorous stage clothing but the artist David Bowie's contribution to the Glam Rock<sup>20</sup> style was far more radical. During 1970, Bowie had totally transgressed the codes of masculinity by appearing on the cover of *The Man Who Sold the World* album, wearing a "men's" dress purchased from the London Boutique; Mr Fish. In *Alias David Bowie*, chief Art Director Mike Stanford said of the image:

*There was no ambiguity about it, the dress was made of creamy satin, printed with a large blue floral pattern. What was more, David's pose, with his hips provocatively tilted, one hand raised*

as if toying with his hair, the other elegantly extended, lightly holding a playing card, was irresistibly feminine (Gilman, and L., 1986: 225).

The impact of this display of transvestism was heightened by the disclosure in *Melody Maker*, that he was "gay and always had been". Late in the same year, *Rolling Stone* reported that he was "both gay and married".<sup>21</sup> Bowie's bisexuality was clearly expressed in the lyrics of songs and in the space age androgyny of his alter ego Ziggy Stardust. By flirting with homosexuality and bisexuality, Bowie and other Glam artists were able to challenge established representations of heterosexual masculinity within popular music culture.

However, with the exception of Suzi Quatro, there were no other female Glam Rock artists. Quatro appears to have been acceptable only because of her ability to play down her femininity by parodying instead, the codes of heterosexual masculinity. She usually appeared with her hair styled short, wearing leathers, jumpsuits or trousers, with her guitar slung low mirroring the look of the male rock star (See Fig. 11). A *Rolling Stone* article, "Suzi Quatro flexes her Leather" (Jan. 2, 1975: 28) emphasises her attempts to be accepted as "one of the boys", explaining to readers that, like the boys, she was besieged by (male) groupies. Her visual image was particularly challenging within the context of the contemporary ideology of popular music which rarely fostered the positive visual representation of women as overt sexual predators. Where the homo and bisexuality of male performers was emphasised in Glam Rock, Quatro's heterosexuality was represented as an exaggerated, camp parody of the archetypal, red-blooded, male rock star. Perhaps this reflected the newfound freedom of women as well as the greater equality between men and women?

To conclude; Glam Rock fails to fit comfortably within those theories which exclusively rely on dichotomies of youth culture vs. dominant culture, mainstream vs. "alternative", or within theories which privilege resistance to the class system.

21

See Hoskyns (1998:32) and *Rolling Stone*, Nov. 9, 1972, p. 25.



During the 1970s there were significant divisions from within "alternative" youth culture, as well as from outside it. Similarly, sexuality and gender appear to have been more important issues than age and social class in the evolution and the visual expression of the Glam style. The social liberation of the 1960s which had led to a greater acceptance of "feminine" influences in menswear, still concealed an element of hypocrisy towards alternative expressions of male sexuality. Whilst it became socially acceptable for men to wear lace and frills, this could only be sanctioned if they were perceived to be heterosexual. Likewise, the symbolic equality between the sexes which was represented in the Unisex fashions of the late 1960s belied the inequality which prevailed within youth culture.

The overbearing and "masculine" pomposity of progressive rock and the aggressive blue-collared posturing of male skinheads were a conservative and repressive force against the open expression of unconventional sexuality. By reasserting "masculine" values within youth culture, the threat to the hegemony of heterosexuality and masculinity was temporarily extinguished. In this context, the Glam Rock parodies of femininity and homosexuality, demonstrate the ability of camp to "make fun of what is really serious" (Booth, 1983: 11).

David Bowie's sophisticated flight to androgyny (Fig. 12), the open transvestism of groups like the Sweet (Fig. 13) and the clumsy camp of Gary Glitter or Slade (Fig. 14), all helped to highlight questions of sexual identity, power and control which had previously been ignored, or only partially addressed within youth culture. The Marxist critiques of Hebdige (1979) and Taylor and Wall (1976) which point to the inherent frivolity, narcissism and political evasiveness of the subculture, chose to ignore the sexism and homophobia which were often disguised in the more well documented subcultures. In some ways, the flights of fantasy offered by Glam Rock were more personally liberating than the self-centred heterosexual hedonism offered within the Hippies, Mods or Progressive Rock subcultures.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1:  
David Bowie's celebrated orange  
coxcomb or "mullet" from the  
*Aladdin Sane* L.P. cover.



Fig. 2:  
The outfit worn by Brian Eno was  
typical of the futurism and space  
age imagery seen in Glam Rock.  
Source: Hoskyns, 1998



Fig. 3:  
Vaudeville and the early cinema were  
the inspiration for the sequinned  
jackets worn by Bryan Ferry of Roxy  
Music. Source: Hoskyns, 1998





Fig. 4:  
Elvis and Little Richard were  
both earlier champions of  
glamorous stage outfits.  
Source: *Radio One Story of Pop*  
series, 1973, p. 707



Fig. 5:  
Mod inspired clothing worn by  
the pop group the Action  
compared to the Hippie clothing  
worn by Procul Harum.  
Source: *Rave*, 1965-67



Fig. 6:  
'Unisex' jeanswear. Source: 19  
magazine, 1968

**DIRECT TO YOU  
FROM  
THE WORLD'S FASHION CENTRE**

**Left:** 1968 Levi's Cords. Tailored in heavy blue denim. Tapered at 19" bottoms. Big wide girthless belt and zip pouch.

**Right:** 1968 Levi's Cords. Tailored in heavy blue denim. Tapered at 19" bottoms. Big wide girthless belt and zip pouch.

**Price:** 89/6

**Right:** 1968 Levi's Cords. Tailored in heavy blue denim. Tapered at 19" bottoms. Big wide girthless belt and zip pouch.

**Price:** 59/6

**Price:** 55/6

**Mr. James & Hill St. Richmond Surrey**

Fig. 7:  
An advertisement for Unisex clothing. Source: *Rave*, Sept. 1968





Fig. 8:  
'Unisex' hairstyles. Source: *Rave*, July 1968



Fig. 9:  
Miniskirts for men.  
Source: *Rave*, May, 1967



Fig. 10:  
Jimi Hendrix wearing velvet  
jacket and lace frilled shirt.  
Source: *Rave*, Dec. 1967



Fig. 11:  
Suzi Quatro – the sole female Glam Rock artist. Source: *Record Collector*, Oct. 1992



Fig. 12:  
David Bowie, Ziggy  
Stardust and androgyny.  
Source: Hoskyns, 1998





Fig. 13:  
The Sweet. Source, *Record Collector*, Oct. 1992



Fig. 13:  
Gary Glitter. Source, *Lancashire Evening Post*, June 1976

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