

A Clean Sharp Image Don Cherry's Suits as Sartorial Statements

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Volume 9, numéro 2, 2018

Fashion Cultures and Media – Canadian Perspectives
Cultures et médias de la mode – Perspectives canadiennes

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1059165ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.FCM.9.2.5>

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Éditeur(s)

York University

ISSN

1918-8439 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Petrov, J. (2018). A Clean Sharp Image: Don Cherry's Suits as Sartorial Statements. *Imaginations*, 9(2), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.FCM.9.2.5>

Résumé de l'article

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"A CLEAN SHARP IMAGE": DON CHERRY'S SUITS AS SARTORIAL STATEMENTS

JULIA PETROV

Abstract | Canadian sports commentator Don Cherry is notorious for his outspoken opinions and flamboyant style, both attracting popular attention. This article examines his attention-grabbing on-air style as an extension of both his values for the game of hockey and his view of himself as a working-class boy made good. I argue that Cherry deliberately uses his suits to embody his social and personal values. Drawing on fashion studies approaches, I show that while not exactly fashionable in terms of trendiness, Cherry's suits are examples of the ability of clothing to be indexical of working-class personality transformed.

Résumé | Le commentateur sportif canadien Don Cherry est célèbre pour ses opinions fracassantes et son style haut en couleur qui captent tous les deux l'attention du public. Cet article examine son style accrocheur devant la caméra comme une extension de ses valeurs pour le sport du hockey et de l'image qu'il a de lui-même comme celle d'un enfant de la classe ouvrière qui a réussi. J'avance l'idée que Cherry utilise délibérément ses tenues pour symboliser ses valeurs sociales et personnelles. Utilisant les approches des études sur la mode, je cherche à montrer que bien qu'elles ne soient pas véritablement du dernier cri en termes de mode, les tenues de Cherry sont des exemples de la capacité du vêtement à représenter la transformation de personnalité de la classe ouvrière.

The Canadian sports broadcaster Don "Grapes" Cherry is a fixture of national broadcasting and cultural life. He is best known for his segment "Coach's Corner," broadcast during intermissions in NHL games on CBC, CityTV, and Sportsnet channels. His weekly game commentary has earned the attention of a nation, and he was even voted the 7th Greatest Canadian in a national televised contest (Jubas). His legendary status seems to be as much due to his knowledge of the game as his garb: "loud as the jackets he wears" (Rush), as the *New York Times* put it. Indeed, he has become not only iconic because of his longevity as a media personality, but also iconic because his outfits have become conventionalised references to themselves.

To a casual observer, Don Cherry's championing of an aggressive, working-class masculinity in his "Coach's Corner" segments on CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada* may seem to be at odds with his custom-tailored, flamboyant style. Cherry's sartorial choices have been the amusing subject of countless interviews, YouTube compilation videos, Reddit threads, and even BuzzFeed quizzes, but, unlike his contributions to discourses around sports, Canadian national identity (Knowles; Dallaire and Dennis), violence (Gillet White and Young; Allain, "Real Fast and Tough"), and masculinity (Jubas; Allain, "A Good Canadian Boy"), the statements made by his suits, though widely acknowledged as being part of his popular appeal, have not been the sustained and singular subjects of academic

study. This article, then, will build on this earlier work and provide a fashion studies description of his style, drawing on Cherry's own words to get at the meanings of his outrageous on-air outfits.

Inspired by Julie Rak's analysis of Cherry's construction of himself in the context of Canadian celebrity, this article examines his suits from a cultural studies perspective, analysing Cherry's construction of his public image through the details of his iconic look. Far from just a strategy to draw visual attention to himself as a television personality (often at the cost of his conservatively dressed co-anchor, Ron MacLean), it is clear that Cherry is proudly savvy about the semiotics of his suits, and knowingly rejects mainstream menswear. His assertive provisioning of his own fabrics, the hyper-masculine cut of his jackets, the old-fashioned details of his collars and cuffs, and the brash prints that match his bold tone are all symbolic extensions of his expressed values for the game of hockey. While his stiff high collars and triple-breasted jackets cannot be called fashionable in the sense of following or setting trends, I argue that Cherry's style belongs to a tradition of working-class male sartorial self-definition, from 19th-century dudes, mashers, and swells, to 1950s teddy boys and the fashionable rappers of today, updated for a mediated modern visual culture that thrives on the projection of personality.

Cherry's Look

A former hockey player and coach, Don Cherry has been a fixture of sports commentary on Canadian television for nearly 40 years. Since 1986, he has been partnered with veteran sportscaster and referee Ron MacLean, who provides a gentle foil to Cherry's brash appearance and opinions. MacLean dresses professionally on air, in

a suit and tie, and his clothing choices are deeply conservative: blacks, blues, greys, and khaki colours predominate, with subdued patterns in stripes, dots, or checks only periodically introduced. He prefers single-breasted jackets, and generally eschews decorative details like pocket squares and tie clips. Overall, MacLean seems generally uninterested in promoting his personality visually; indeed, his style might be considered retiring even for a news reader or a politician. When studying video of the two hosts together over time, through clips made available online, a deliberate pattern of rhetorical opposition seems to emerge, with MacLean's drabness serving to further illuminate Cherry's flamboyance. Sometimes, the two men's outfits even seem coordinated, as though they had communicated beforehand which colours or patterns Cherry would wear, so that MacLean could wear something (usually a tie) to match or contrast with his costar.

In the early days of "Coach's Corner," Cherry would stand out less due to the patterns of his jackets (the early 1980s being a period of bold fabrics in fashion) and more for their cut (not the loose and unstructured sports jackets as were then popular), as well as his eccentrically old-fashioned shirts with their tall starched white collars and often contrasting patterned body. His ties, too, would frequently be the subject of comment on- and off-air. Yet as time went on, Cherry began to revel in increasingly more outrageous prints, which have, with the advent of the social network, been the fodder of blogs, YouTube compilations, and other internet commentary (Fig. 1). His jackets in particular are so closely watched that he brings them to the studio in a garment bag, putting them on only just before filming his segment (Poplewell). Part of this is so that he looks as neat as possible

(Cherry, *Hockey Stories* 82) but there is also a theatrical element to the anticipated reveal.

The classic Don Cherry look is readily classifiable. He wears two- or three-piece suits, often in a bright solid or extremely large-scale pattern. His jackets always have very wide shoulders, aggressively angled notched lapels, and can be single-, double-, triple-, or even quadruple-breasted. He accessorizes with pocket squares and a flower in his lapel (usually a rose, in honour of his first wife). Sometimes, he will also add a pin—a Remembrance Day poppy or a Support the Troops gold ribbon. His shirts (only ever worn once) may be white or patterned, but always with very high starched collars (3 ½ inches), the tabs held by a bar, and monogrammed wide cuffs, usually with prominent sports-themed cufflinks. A large wristwatch and heavy diamond ring on his left hand accentuate his gesticulations on screen. He does not wear tie bars, apparently because he often untucks his tie to demonstrate its design on screen: these are sometimes custom-printed for him and feature sayings or animals of which he is fond; alternatively, he also wears ties with sports franchise logos, cartoon characters, or in patterns that match his jackets. These are tied in a single Windsor knot, in a unique reverse method Cherry shares with his idol, hockey legend Bobby Orr (Pearce).



Figure 1: "The many suits of Canadian hockey commentator Don Cherry," Reddit, uploaded by used ihateyourband, 15 Jan 2013, <http://imgur.com/gallery/zT2H1>

Unlike some celebrities who assemble their outfits from available ready-to-wear garments, Cherry's suits are not off-the-rack. Starting in 1985, Cherry's suits were custom-made by Frank Cosco, an experienced Toronto tailor to professional athletes, until shortly before Frank's death in 2007. Since 2010, Cherry's main tailor has been John Corallo at the North Toronto boutique The Coop (Deacon). The bespoke

approach to building Cherry's suits is, like his shirt collars, outside the conventional fashion system. Cherry purchases his own fabrics (usually discount upholstery material from the national chain store Fabricland) and takes them to Coop for tailoring to his own specifications. Both the fabric and the fit are important to Cherry, as he revealed on his Twitter account in 2013: "Well, I go

to a store called Coop on Yonge Street. John, my tailor does a great job. I've been going to him for 3 years. I just give him material and I don't have to worry. They fit like a glove. Tight and that's the way I like them. It's very difficult to work with the material I give him as you know they aren't made for suits" (qtd. in Cowan). Thus, everything about his outfits is unique: their material, fit, and style.

The blog *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel*, dedicated to the subject of Cherry's on-screen looks, suggested that he looks like a 1920s gangster ("Is Don Cherry a Code Name?"). This is an apt metaphor, because, like Cherry, the enduring image

of these petty criminals, as portrayed in classic Hollywood films, is of working-class boys who maintained their image with casual violence, snappy dialogue, and occasional bigotry. Although Cherry's exaggerated suits are a long way away from the casual elegance of James Cagney, there is some similarity to the wide lapels, tall collars, and sharply tailored silhouettes of the early-20th century. The starched collars Cherry wears were a feature of menswear around 1905-1915. Indeed, his preferred combination of a white starched collar and patterned shirt can be seen in advertisements for Arrow Collars of that period (Fig. 2). Indeed, Cherry's use of patterned cloth, such as large-scale checks, tartans, or bold-coloured stripes is also a feature of Victorian and Edwardian sportswear, the fabrics of



Figure 2: "Arrow collars & shirts. Saturday evening post, April 12, 1913." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1895 - 1917. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Art & Architecture Collection, The New York Public Library. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-90e6-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

which were considered more informal than the solids and pinstripes worn for business or evening occasions. However, the emphasis on the chest and shoulders seen in Cherry's jackets is more characteristic of 1930s menswear (Fig. 3). While his jackets are, in general, cut higher, the placement of the buttons opening wide across the chest and narrowing towards the waist, as

well as the peaked lapels that point to aggressive shoulder pads, are throwbacks to that decade's fashion. Indeed, when interviewed by the national newspaper *The Globe and Mail* about his style in 2002, Cherry stated: "I consider my style that of the men of the 1930s, where men had an elegant style, tight suits, tight collars, lots of jewellery, a clean sharp image" (Pearce). Cherry was born in 1934, and his stated role-model is his father, Del Cherry—an amateur baseball and



Figure 3: Menswear 1930s - American, Plate 020. Gift of Woodman Thompson. Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15324coll12/id/9072>

football player—whose custom-tailored, dandy style was also derived from that era. Indeed, in his autobiography, Cherry captions a photograph of his father holding him as a toddler with the rhetorical question, "Doesn't he look like he should be in *Boardwalk Empire*?" (Cherry, *Cherry Straight Up and Personal* n.p.)—alluding

to the HBO series centred on criminal activity in Atlantic City, N.J. during the 1920s and 1930s. When interviewed for the Canadian lifestyle talk show *Steven and Chris* in 2012, Cherry reiterated: “I go back to 1936—the way [people] dressed back then. I thought they were the sharpest dressers of all” (“Backstage Q&A”).

Yet exaggerated collars, bold prints, and accentuated waistlines were also revived in the male fashions of the 1970s, the decade of Cherry’s coaching career. His son Tim suggests that the outrageous jackets date back to 1979, when Cherry was interviewed by American journalists wearing a crushed velvet burgundy or purple jacket: “To me, that was Dad’s first over-the-top jacket. It was pretty tame compared to some of the jackets he wears today” (Cherry, *Hockey Stories Part 2* 305). According to Cherry, however, he began wearing the high collars and plaid jackets that are synonymous with his style as early as 1971, when he was coaching in Rochester, N.Y. It is unsurprising, then, that he should choose to reference the fashions of his coaching days in his Coach’s Corner outfits.

Semiotics and Values

Cherry has been conscious of his clothing for a long time. In his books, he recalls what he wore at important junctures: writing about his earliest Coach’s Corner segments, he remembers his outfit: a tan ultra-suede jacket (Cherry, *Hockey Stories Part 2* 41). Remembering the challenges of presenting in Sochi during the 2014 Winter Olympics, he concludes: “I don’t know if ‘Coach’s Corner’ was good or not, but the suits were and Canada won both golds in hockey—that was the main thing” (Cherry, *Straight Up and Personal* 90). The syntax of the sentence makes it difficult to determine whether he is prouder of his and

Ron MacLean’s suits or the double gold medals won by the Canadian hockey team. Evidently, Cherry is also conscious of whether his clothing achieved its desired effect; reminiscing about his coaching days, he recalls wearing a plaid jacket whose flattering fit was not accurately recorded by a journalist: “So there I was with a nice jacket on, sort of a light brown plaid. I had black pants. I looked pretty good. [...]. The next day in the paper, a woman reporter really ripped us. [...]. She said, ‘Not only that, Cherry had a very bland jacket on.’ [...]. She didn’t say that I had a nice plaid jacket. [...]. Never let the facts get in the way of a good story” (Cherry, *Hockey Stories Part 2* 112-113). Although this incident took place in 2001 or 2002, Cherry remembers it bitterly. In his autobiography, he captions a photo of himself as a coach in the 1970s in a dark three-piece suit with a pocket square, watch chain, and pin nipping his tall collar behind a snowflake printed tie as “Looking sharp behind the bench in the Boston Garden” (Cherry, *Straight Up And Personal* n.p.).

Hockey, to Cherry, is not an excuse for mere play or casual violence; as he points out, “when you’re going to play hockey, you’re not going to see your friends, and you don’t want to look like a bunch of thugs” (Cherry, *Don Cherry’s Sports Heroes* 53). Even the violence that is, to Cherry, an important part of the game, comes with its own set of sartorial rules; Cherry considers one of his main contributions to hockey to be redesigning clothing to be more conducive to fights. He claims to have loosened elbow pads for swinging punches, tied down sweaters like sock garters to prevent being ambushed when another player would pull it over his head, and cut a slit in the neck of his jersey to save his neck from injury when it would get pulled (Cherry, *Straight Up And Personal* 162-4). In this context, the adapted hockey uniform is a means to

achieve the kind of aggressive play that Cherry equates with the game—the kind of behaviour that Kristi Allain has called “hegemonic Canadian hockey masculinity” (“Real Fast and Tough” 473).

To Cherry, wearing a suit—or at the very least, a shirt and tie—is part of the professional image required for hockey. Apart from having a uniform and special equipment to play the game, he frequently encourages both amateurs and professionals to wear formal clothing to delineate the sport as a distinctive activity and to civilize their behaviour. The game is special, and he believes that formality is part of hockey’s heritage. A care for image and protocol is, for Cherry, aligned with professionalism, team spirit, upward mobility, and Canadian culture (Cherry, *Don Cherry’s Sports Heroes* 54). Honesty and respectability are also important hockey values for Cherry, something he believes is expressed through dress:

One night on “Coach’s Corner,” I showed some basketball players walking into their game dressed like slugs, and then I showed some hockey players walking into their game dressed like they just stepped out of Esquire, and then I showed Evander Kane of the Winnipeg Jets in an interview, and he looked like a male model. I was making a point. Hockey players have respect for themselves and respect for the game. In many ways—the way they act and the way they dress. (Cherry, *Straight Up And Personal* 159)

He credits the lack of drugs and crime in hockey (as opposed to other sports) to this uniformed courtesies, and thinks this is something that starts at a young age in amateur hockey:

It does my heart good to see them [minor midget players] with their team jackets and their shirts and ties. What sport in the world has young players wearing shirts and ties to and from their games? The same as our junior teams—90 per cent shirts and ties. I remember in the American Hockey League, we’d travel ten hours on the bus, but when we’d get off, we would have shirts and ties, respect for the game and respect for ourselves. (Cherry, *Straight Up And Personal* 161)

As a television commentator on hockey, therefore, Cherry strives to maintain the same sartorial standard on screen. Setting a public example through his dress in demeanor hearkens back to a Renaissance ideal of the courtly gentleman with a moral imperative to dress according to his station, as a historian of the suit David M. Kuchta writes: “bravery in dress was justified by bravery in battle. Conspicuous consumption was a rightful and manly honor bestowed upon him by his noble status and position at court” (503-504). Just like his Renaissance predecessors, Cherry’s self-fashioning is a social and professional obligation.

Cherry’s consciousness about clothing has become part of his performance as a commentator. He is purposeful with his image and visibility, as he explained in an interview on *Steven and Chris*:

When I was in Boston I got a new suit and everybody in the papers were saying: “Oh, what a beautiful suit.” So I thought, “Well, if they like this suit, let’s get a plaid.” So I got plaid. It then got to a point where people were tuning in to see what I was wearing, not what I was coaching. Then I got into television. I remember they all wore

blue jackets. I said, "I don't have to wear one of those jackets." So I got into the plaid and everything else. Now I go out and get drapery and everything. I think the kids get a big kick out of it too. ("Backstage Q&A")

He frequently discusses his outfits on air, pointing out details to the camera. When he does, he highlights them as a costume; they permit him to express his allegiance to particular hockey teams through his choices of colours or logos, or to appeal to "the kids" with cartoon ties. In 2008, he gave fans a comic look into his style process with an appearance on the CBC satirical program *Rick Mercer Report* (Fig. 4). Cherry took the host through the drapery section at Fabricland, choosing a zebra print. The duo then proceeds to fittings at his tailor, and all the while Cherry signs autographs. In the last scene, Cherry adjusts his tie in a mirrored door, from behind which Mercer emerges wearing a copy of



Figure 4: Screenshot from "Making a suit with Don Cherry." YouTube, uploaded by Rick Mercer Report, 18 Nov. 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFpuMzza9hk>.

Cherry's suit in the zebra print, with a high-collared shirt, wide tie, and pocket square (but sans Cherry's signature rose in his lapel). In effect, Mercer is Cherry's mirror image—if Cherry is an effete, but heterosexual hypermasculine man, Mercer is openly gay, but heteronormative in his self-presentation; the joke is that according to stereotypes Mercer (who usually wears open-collar white shirts and black suits) should be wearing outrageous outfits. Yet I would argue that Cherry's suits are exaggerated symbols for what he perceives as his authentic self: a proudly well-tailored working-class athlete. Furthermore, as Rak suggests, his suits allow him to align himself with the costumed fan audiences for hockey, but also, in his self-aware outrageousness, as an outsider to the wealthy elite who control the media and the game.

Working-Class Dandy

It is very important to Cherry to stay close to his roots. He devotes a section in his autobiography to what he calls his "minor leaguer" ways—the lingering sense that his fame and success are fleeting. He describes feeling guilty flying first class, eating out, or buying expensive consumer items; he envies Ron MacLean's ability to treat himself and thinks about what it felt like to work an insecure job in construction or in minor-league hockey. He lives in a small house and drives old cars. He insists that this is a conscious consumer choice, rather than a character trait: "I am not cheap, I pay my rounds" (Cherry, *Straight Up And Personal* 106). Indeed, over and over again in interviews he underscores the fact that he sources and pays for his clothing himself. In an interview, the newspaper *Globe and Mail* asked him, "Where do you shop? Any special people who help you out—salespeople, friends, family? Do you have any sponsors?" (Pearce). In an age of celebrity stylists and endorsement

deals, such a question is natural. Yet Cherry bristled, and emphasized his independence in his reply: “I buy my own clothes, nothing is given to me, except the odd ties that a fan will send to me. Nobody picks out my clothes but me!” (Pearce). Eleven years later, in a series of tweets, he reiterated this point: “I pay for my shirts, suits, ties, jackets, cars etc. I pay for everything. I do not get anything for free. That’s just the way it has to be. As my dad used to say... there is no free lunch in this world” (qtd. in Cowan 2013). It seems that this sartorial independence is not merely a statement of his individuality, but also related to his sensitivity about his class roots.

As Kristi Allain has noted in her discussion of Cherry’s sports commentary, “A Good Canadian Boy,” the former coach champions a nostalgic vision of a primarily rural, working-class, aggressive masculinity within hockey, with its own wholesome morality policed through hard work and fair play. Yet there are many contradictions inherent in his avowed identities—his lucrative roles as spokesperson for leading brands and his fame put him far apart from the hard-scrabble country boys he identifies with. Furthermore, although his style harkens back to a tougher version of heteronormative masculinity, he himself recognizes that its performative flamboyance may be seen as camp: “I must admit my style has been called foppish, but I like it. I also heard on the radio the other day that I looked like a gay because everything was so clean and neat and all jewellery. Love it!” (Pearce). Indeed, more than one Twitter user has noted a similarity between his style and that of the camp gay icon Sir Elton John (CBC News; @Pegger3D). Homosexuality and eccentric or extravagant dress are aligned in heteronormative stereotypes because of their association with effeminacy. Susan Sontag has suggested that both are expressions of mediated popular modernity; in “Notes on Camp” (1964),

she writes: “Camp is the modern dandyism. Camp is the answer to the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture” (528). Her position has more recently been reasserted in Fabio Cleto’s definition of camp as an aesthetic, centering on carnivalesque flouting of conventions, especially in the decoration of the body through fashionable excess (9-10). While there are certainly elements of camp’s ironic frivolity in Cherry’s wardrobe choices, his fastidiousness about his appearance is, however, less related to a performance of sexuality and more closely aligned with a long tradition of working-class preoccupation with appearance as a declaration of cultural capital.

In his seminal 1979 text, Dick Hebdige analyzed the uses of dress by working-class youth subcultures in Britain, noting a tradition amongst many of them towards a kind of dandyism. The use of the term “dandy” may be a misnomer—generally, dandies are men who practice extreme self-restraint in their search for fashion perfection as opposed to being flamboyantly vulgar. However, in popular usage, the term does refer to men who display above-average concern with self-fashioning and the highly visible performance of style, in opposition to normative (casual) attitudes to clothing (see Breward for a definitive overview of dandyism). Likewise, in Hebdige’s case studies, these often-marginalized groups used dress to distinguish themselves. Hipsters, teddy boys, mods, Rastafarians, skinheads, and punks to varying degrees all appropriated nostalgic and aspirational aesthetics to locate their own imagined identities. While James Gillett, Philip White, and Kevin Young suspected that Cherry’s dandyism was a caricature and part of an act (61), a comparison between subcultural style and Don Cherry’s dress reveals compelling similarities. Cherry has fashioned himself into an icon:

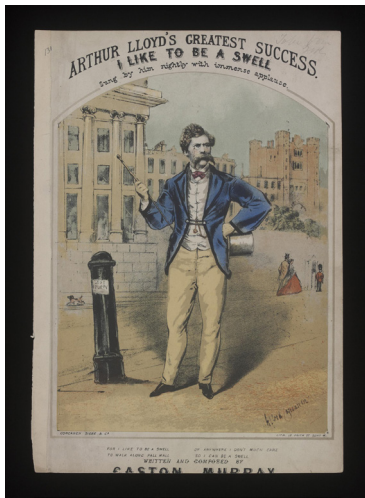


Figure 5: Alfred Concanen, Music sheet cover for 'I like to be a swell', written by Gaston Murray, sung by Arthur Lloyd, 19th century, lithograph, 33.5 x 23.5 cm, Gabrielle Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1249920/i-like-to-be-a-sheet-murray-gaston/>



Figure 6: Tiller family marionette company, marionette representing a young 'masher' brandishing a beer bottle, 1870 to 1890, carved wood with paint and fabric, 71 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O57558/marionette-tiller-family-marionette/>

like the players he coached, he uses his body as capital. This self-awareness of sartorial performance has a long history: Monica L. Miller identifies it in Black dandyism (219), its roots in the dress of the working classes, diasporic Africans, and sports figures of the early-20th century. Even earlier than that, the swells, mashers, and dudes of the 19th century were working-class men who dressed in upper-class styles, often in highly patterned and heavily accessorized suits to attract attention. These men were associated with various disruptions of middle- and upper-class social norms, with their affected clothing, slangy speech, preoccupation with leisure



Figure 7: "Cockney" and "Bowery" from World's Dudes series (N31) for Allen & Ginter Cigarettes, 1888, Commercial color lithographs, 7 x 3.8 cm each, The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection, Gift of Jefferson R. Burdick, Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/411306>, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/411240>

pursuits and alcohol, as well as their propensity towards assault: the swell (Fig. 5) betrays his pretensions to a higher status with his showy dress and extreme facial hair; the masher marionette (Fig. 6) holds a beer bottle in his hand, and such young men were known for sexually harassing barmaids and music hall actresses; and Fig. 7 shows a brutish yet stylish man from

the Bowery, an area of New York City notorious for gang activity.

All these classes of men, across time, have co-opted dominant cultural status symbols to overcome their own disenfranchised status—which Roopali Mukherjee has identified as a basis for hip-hop style (the alliance between rappers and luxury brands as a form of social positioning). Yet it can also be said to be true for other groups, such as the white working classes of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. And so, it seems, also for Don Cherry: he is able to use his platform to signal the values of those from backgrounds such as his and to give them cultural visibility.

But Is It Fashion?

Cherry's outfits garner a lot of public attention: there are blogs, Tumblrs, Twitters, and Pinterest boards dedicated to his "style," though most are tongue-in-cheek homages to his most outrageous looks. His jackets even have been screen-printed as designs for hockey jerseys, usually for charity games—the medium has become the message, as Cherry's outfits have come to stand in for the man himself. Some players, such as Montreal Canadiens defenceman P.K. Subban and Edmonton Oilers captain Connor McDavid, have worn Cherry-style suits as cheeky tributes to the legendary commentator (Subban actually borrowed one of Cherry's jackets for an on-air impression in 2015). His co-host, Ron MacLean, also riffs on Cherry's looks sometimes—wearing a double-breasted jacket on his return to "Hockey Night in Canada" in 2016 (Mudhar), or borrowing one of Cherry's jackets (in saffron-yellow raw silk) in 2002 ("Hockey Night in Canada"). Surprisingly, it fit him rather well through the shoulders and arms, although Cherry appears to

be much heavier than MacLean, which demonstrates how the suits are calculated to emphasize and enlarge Cherry's appearance.

Cherry points out that he has two wardrobes: one for his public appearances as a television personality and another for his private life. He writes: "All those fancy suits and jackets. Honestly, I treat them as costumes. I feel more at home with a T-shirt, cut-off sleeves and Crazeewear [American athletic-wear brand] pants" (Cherry, *Straight Up And Personal* 105). Yet this casual look is also costume-like. Indeed, candid images of Cherry out-and-about show him almost undercover in oversized trench coats or baggy football jackets, heavy boots or trainers, loose pants, and flat-caps worn low. Even when trying to be inconspicuous, he maintains a distinct visibility.

With his deliberate references to 1930s style, Cherry stands apart from the contemporary styles embraced by modernity. Yet he is not the only famous silver-haired male to wear anachronistic clothing. The eminently fashionable Karl Lagerfeld also wears extremely high collars (as high as four inches, custom-made for him by the London tailors Hilditch and Key), accessorizes with heavy jewelry, and does not shy away from bold pattern or outspoken opinions. He is equally aware of its theatricality; in 2007 he said of his style, "I am like a caricature of myself and I like that. It is like a mask. And for me the Carnival of Venice lasts all year long" ("Karl Lagerfeld's Quotes"). It is perhaps more appropriate to call both of their looks a style rather than fashion—while it is imitated, it is not commercially popular in the way that mass-market fashion is, and imitations tend to be loving humorous parodies of Cherry or Lagerfeld as personalities rather than wholesale attempts to copy a look for its aesthetic appeal. Karl Lagerfeld has even

integrated aspects of his look for fashion collections (such as white collared shirts for his ready-to-wear Fall 2017 collection) for those who wish to playfully masquerade as the designer, whose brand is his own appearance. Indeed, Cherry discourages would-be imitators; when asked on *Steven and Chris*, “What’s your number one fashion tip?” Cherry replied: “I don’t recommend anyone to wear what I’m wearing, especially the shirts. They’re very uncomfortable. As my Dad told me one time: it’s better to look good than feel good. You have to feel uncomfortable” (“Backstage Q&A”). Indeed, to suffer for fashion seems to be, for Cherry, another way to express his masculine strength and fortitude.

Cherry’s style might be called kitsch: it is iconic but irreverent. Indeed, Rak has suggested that there is an element of irony within Cherry’s wardrobe choices, a knowing nod to his fans and an idealized past (162). However, despite its seeming outlandishness, Cherry is totally committed to his look, and this consistency makes it seem sincere. Although he was named Canada’s “worst-dressed man” in 1994 (Smith), he actually produced a surprisingly sensible list of tips for wearing suits and ties for *Macleans* magazine in 2013, exhorting male readers to press their clothing and consider its fit and appropriateness to the occasion. Yet, for the 10th and final tip, he admits that while a casual look may be appropriate to some occasions (such as travelling by air), it is not for him. Likewise, in his autobiography, *Straight Up and Personal*, Cherry discusses his flight to Afghanistan:

It seems we are flying forever, and I can look around and everybody looks so comfortable in their casual wear. Why do I have to be so vain that I must travel in a suit, shirt and tie? Ron [MacLean] and I are the only ones in the media who travel in suits and

ties. Much to our regret, when the finals run into late June and we’re in the heat from places like L.A. and Tampa, the shirt looks uncomfortable—and they are, but you are who you are. (47)

No matter how outrageous he may seem to others, or how out of touch with contemporary trends, Cherry has a deep need to be authentic to his own vision of himself.

Conclusion

In the early 2000s, the “Coach’s Corner” segment was sponsored by men’s clothing brand Moore’s. As Thom Workman has pointed out, the contrast between their conservative, cut-price styles and Cherry’s flashy outfits presented an apparently ludicrous contrast (37). Yet as this article has shown, the company’s “Well Made, Well Priced, Well Dressed” slogan also fits well with Cherry’s ideas about respectful, humble, frugal, working-class hockey and, if we are to take his own words at face value, about himself also. Any expression of identity, including through dress, is inevitably informed by the intersecting gender, class, and other social contexts of the individual, and so Cherry’s suits are a performance of self and all-at-once reference: his father and the decade of his birth; traditional sportswear; the self-made working-class background he identifies with; his coaching career; the professional masculine image of Canadian hockey; his personal aesthetic; his late wife; and his performative role as an on-air commentator. Cherry is a master of the language of clothes; like him, his suits are loud, and like his on-screen opinions, their message is bold and straightforward. While undoubtedly calculated to make the maximum visual impact for media dissemination, they are also authentic to his sense of his own identity.

Don Cherry's significance as a Canadian public figure and his appeal to hockey fans and Canadians at large is due not only to his knowledge of the game but also to his skillful and sincere sense of style. The apparent paradox of his outlandish outfits and his conservative views and identity is resolved by viewing Cherry in light of the history of working-class dandyism. Furthermore, as he is perhaps the only Canadian public figure to generate so much media attention for his clothing, an analysis of Cherry's style is a contribution to the field of Canadian fashion studies and the ways in which dress and identity are uniquely aligned in this context.

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Image Notes

Figure 1: “The many suits of Canadian hockey commentator Don Cherry,” Reddit, uploaded by used ihateyourband, 15 Jan 2013, <http://imgur.com/gallery/zT2H1>

Figure 2: “Arrow collars & shirts. Saturday evening post, April 12, 1913.” The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1895 - 1917. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Art & Architecture Collection, The New York Public Library. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-90e6-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

Figure 3: Menswear 1930s - American, Plate 020. Gift of Woodman Thompson. Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15324coll12/id/9072>

Figure 4: Screenshot from “Making a suit with Don Cherry” YouTube, uploaded by Rick Mercer Report, 18 Nov. 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFPUmZz9ghk>.

Figure 5: Alfred Concanen, Music sheet cover for ‘I like to be a swell’, written by Gaston Murray, sung by Arthur Lloyd, 19th century, lithograph, 33.5 x 23.5 cm, Gabrielle Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1249920/i-like-to-be-a-sheet-music-murray-gaston/>

Figure 6: Tiller family marionette company, marionette representing a young ‘masher’ brandishing a beer bottle, 1870 to 1890, carved wood with paint and fabric, 71 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O57558/marionette-tiller-family-marionette/>

Figure 7: “Cockney” and “Bowery” from *World’s Dudes* series (N31) for Allen & Ginter Cigarettes, 1888, Commercial color lithographs, 7 x 3.8 cm each, The Jefferson R. Burdick Collection, Gift of Jefferson R. Burdick, Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/411306>, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/411240>