

Providence College

DigitalCommons@Providence

Art & Art History Student Scholarship

Art & Art History

Fall 2010

With Lovers as Her Muse: How Men Influenced the Designs of Coco Chanel

Sara Spirito

Providence College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/art_students



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), [Modern Art and Architecture Commons](#), and the [Theory and Criticism Commons](#)

Spirito, Sara, "With Lovers as Her Muse: How Men Influenced the Designs of Coco Chanel" (2010). *Art & Art History Student Scholarship*. 1.

https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/art_students/1

It is permitted to copy, distribute, display, and perform this work under the following conditions: (1) the original author(s) must be given proper attribution; (2) this work may not be used for commercial purposes; (3) users must make these conditions clearly known for any reuse* or distribution of this work.

*Reuse of included images is not permitted.

WITH LOVERS AS HER MUSE: HOW MEN INFLUENCED THE DESIGNS OF COCO CHANEL

SARA SPIRITO

Coco Chanel (1883- 1971) revolutionized womenswear in the fashion industry. She was a strong woman who rejected social norms in her choice and design of dress, and the idea of women's clothing as uncomfortable or complicated. This developed, in part, through a series of relationships in which Chanel was involved, revolving around athletic, high society men who were horsemen and polo players. She integrated her personal style with that of these men, bringing menswear materials and new silhouettes of comfort and sleekness to women's fashion. She took items of clothing directly from their closets and put them into her designs. Deconstructing the intricate feminine looks of the time, she was able to participate in and even dictate the change in women's dress emerging around World War I. Without these men and their inspiration, Chanel would not have become the important designer that she became, shifting womenswear design in the early-twentieth century to an unprecedented and dramatic degree. While Chanel had the talent to be a great designer in her own right, she was able to enter the world of great wealth and fame because of these men, and catapult these new styles onto the world stage with a level of success that no one before her was able to achieve.

Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel was born on August 19, 1883, in Saumur, France, to peddler Albert Chanel and Jeanne Devolle.¹ Albert Chanel insisted on constantly traveling, often leaving his children and asthmatic and ailing wife for

extended periods of time when she was too sick to travel with him.² On February 16 1895, when Gabrielle was only eleven years old, her mother succumbed to her sickness, and was found dead.³

Gabrielle and her sisters, Julia and Antoinette, were taken by their father to the orphanage at Aubazine, where he abandoned them; it was the last time they were ever to see him.⁴ The orphanage was in a monastery, and was extremely undecorated and sparse; Gabrielle spent seven years there.⁵ When Gabrielle turned eighteen, she was sent to Nôtre Dame, a boarding school associated with a convent in Moulins.⁶ These environments could be the foundation for Gabrielle's early simplistic style of dress. In the strict atmosphere at Aubazine, the orphans were dressed in white blouses with black box-pleated skirts.⁷ Later, when Gabrielle lived in Moulins, she observed schoolboys wearing "long-sleeved, tightly belted black overblouse[s], beneath which showed two fingers of shorts that stopped just below the knee; then came a patch of bare calf... then a generous strip of sock and finally the very high uppers of the short boot," as well as a colored, loose tie against a bit of white collar.⁸ This was a look that she would revisit, and transition for a female, once she started designing her own clothing.

At Nôtre Dame, Gabrielle was reunited with Adrienne Chanel, who was technically her aunt, even though they were the same age.⁹ Adrienne introduced Gabrielle to Louise Costier, who was also

known as "Aunt Julia" and was a very talented seamstress. She helped hone Gabrielle's sewing abilities, and taught her how to be creative with what she was making. She also introduced her to beautiful hats, which made a huge impression on Gabrielle. She had never seen hats like these at Aubazine, and Aunt Julia took it a step further by reconstructing and adorning them as variations on the idea of the "capote," a small Victorian bonnet that was tied with strings and embellished with a hatpin.¹⁰ Perhaps it was through Aunt Julia that Chanel developed her ability to take an item of clothing and transform it into something personalized and specific to her needs. She would later do the same when she took her lovers' clothing and changed it into womenswear.

At Moulins, Gabrielle and Adrienne took jobs as dressmakers in the shop of Henri Desboutin known as House of Grampayre.¹¹ Originally, Gabrielle's real aspirations were to become a singer; she performed in a cabaret in Moulins that was very popular with soldiers stationed there, as well as the young aristocracy. It was here that Gabrielle became Coco, with her renditions of the two songs "Ko Ko Ri Ko" and "Qui Qu'a Vu Coco." The name Coco caught on, and soon all the soldiers she entertained called her by that name.¹² Here, Chanel also met the man who was arguably the most important of her life, Etienne Balsan.

Balsan was a young cavalryman, and extraordinarily wealthy.¹³ He came from a family of textile manufacturers, but personally bred pedigreed horses, which were among the fastest in France.¹⁴ Almost immediately, Balsan influenced Chanel's way of dressing. In an effort to help her become a more established singer, he took her to have clothing made for her, constructed of riding cloth, but

Chanel insisted on making her own hats.¹⁵ Eventually, Chanel came to realize that she was not a good enough singer, no matter what she did to improve.¹⁶ Balsan, at the same time, came into his inheritance, and was discharged from the military. He decided to buy an estate called Royallieu, where he would be able to keep, breed, and ride horses. Chanel, who was very interested in horses, expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for his investment.¹⁷ When Balsan asked if she would be interested in coming to see his horses train, she jumped at the chance to move in with him.¹⁸ She insisted to him that she could be his apprentice, and learn to ride.¹⁹

Chanel wore austere clothing to differentiate herself from other mistresses of the time.²⁰ She was pulled into the world of sport through her lovers; in the United States, women played sports with frequency in this period. Because of this shift to interest in sport, there was a necessity to dress for the occasion.²¹ This often meant adapting men's clothing for use by women. In the nineteenth century, menswear was often very conservative and dull, but consisted of a number of ever-changing items of jackets, trousers, cravats, ties and hats in the upper and middle classes, that acted to distinguish their status in society.²² This was further accentuated by the wearing of top hats, silk ties, gloves, canes and watches.²³ The womenswear style of the era was highly decorated and restricting, denoting a dependant social role, because of their inability to function or conduct daily activities without the essential male.²⁴

Some women defied this notion, however, following an alternative style of dressing. This consisted of men's ties, hats, suit jackets, waistcoats and shirts, combined with women's traditional clothing, such as a dress. It was crucial that it was mixed with

components of normal women's dress,²⁵ and was often utilized by employed women.²⁶ It excluded trousers, because they connoted rebellion, deviance and/or defiance; through the nineteenth century, society looked at women wearing pants as making an effort to try to rob males of their authority.²⁷ The women's suit jacket originated in the clothing of horse riding of the seventeenth century, and jackets were popular in the country and by the sea, worn with blouses with men's shirt collars, bowties and straw hats, mimicking the English style.²⁸ Riding also created new dress, with menswear-inspired coats, cravats and hats, but women were still wearing full skirts with petticoats, and later trousers, underneath. In the 1900s, men's trousers were introduced to women for riding, but were entirely unacceptable in any other public situation.²⁹ Some women also chose to wear men's ties, because they showed a man's societal position, and reflected women's independence. Women of all social classes wore ties.³⁰ The English designer, Redfern, was the first to produce jackets for women made from menswear materials, with details of the men's version such as lapels and buttons on the sleeves.³¹

This can be put into context with other artists of the time such as Georgia O'Keeffe, who was adopting a similar manner of dress. These female artists were using cross-dressing to promote androgyny, sexual liberation, elective lesbianism, personal originality, and empowerment by taking items that men wore and using them against them.³² Other female artists, such as Rosa Bonheur claimed to wear men's clothing simply out of necessity.³³

Balsan taught Chanel to ride, and she was a very eager student. She practiced in any kind of weather for extended periods of time. Eventually, Chanel was so good that Balsan was showing her

off; she would ride in his clothes during the day, and in the afternoons, would change into more feminine clothes to ride with Balsan and his friends.³⁴ Balsan kept Chanel very well, and had her clothed by a tailor at La Croix St. Ouen, who worked for stable boys and huntsmen. Chanel had him make her a pair of riding breeches like the ones that she borrowed from an English rider of her acquaintance at Royallieu. He was taken aback by this request, but fulfilled it and further created for her outfits of lapel-less jackets with white shirts.³⁵ Chanel would take shirts, ties, jackets and jodhpurs from men at Royallieu to wear, or cut them down, changing the silhouette to fit her better (fig. 1).³⁶ All of these alterations made riding much easier for Chanel as she was not reduced to a bulky long skirt and sidesaddle riding. It was also a shocking and entirely new concept.

Figure 1 shows Chanel sitting straddled across a horse, wearing pants, a white blouse, a wide tie, and a simple, flat-brimmed hat. This simplified and masculine style would have been abnormal at Royallieu, where women always rode side-saddle, never in the manner that Chanel was doing so. While some of these articles were seen on other women of her time, her use of pants is very bold, declaring to the men that she could do exactly what they could, especially while taking these items out of their closets. This style is also reminiscent of her time spent at Aubazine, and the clothing she saw schoolboys wear: no doubt this influenced what she is wearing on this horse. The clothing fits her well, and appears to be tailored; whether she did this herself upon removing these items from the closets of her male counterparts, or had these items tailor-made for her, it shows that this was a planned manner of dress. The hat that she wears is also blatantly of her own design.



Photo credit unavailable.

Figure 1. Coco Chanel in men's riding clothes on a horse

At this time, Chanel was creating beautiful simplified hats to wear that were smaller and far less complicated than the styles usually worn by ladies of this era. Some of the women at Royallieu, such as Gabrielle Dorziat, Emilienne d'Alençon, and Marthe Davelli, who were actresses, singers and local celebrities, had Chanel create hats like these especially for them. With these women in the public eye, attention was drawn to Chanel's designs.³⁷ Chanel added very simple trimmings to her hats and had them worn in a straight fashion.³⁸

The most important person who Chanel met at Royallieu was a talented English polo player named Arthur 'Boy' Capel. He was independently wealthy through shipping and coal enterprises, had a fantastic work ethic, and astute business sense.³⁹ When Chanel grew bored at Royallieu and wanted to work, he supported her bringing up the issue with Balsan.

Chanel wanted to move to Paris to design hats, and Balsan thought this was a preposterous idea. With urging by Capel, Balsan agreed to let Chanel use his own personal apartment on Boulevard Malesherbes.⁴⁰ Balsan did not take her considerable ambitions seriously, and this likely factored in driving her to Capel.

Chanel, herself, later stated that, "I was able to start a high fashion shop because two gentlemen were outbidding each other over my hot little body."⁴¹ This quote in and of itself shows that Chanel was well aware of the opportunities these men were giving her, and what she was giving in return to get them. She was entirely manipulating her situation and these men into helping her achieve the success she so desired in life. Capel, in particular, appreciated her will, her intelligence, and instead of her beauty, he valued her uniqueness. Because of her love for his clothing, he had her taken to his tailor to have an actual wardrobe made. They lived together in Paris; Balsan was funding her business and Capel was paying for her lifestyle. They were, in fact, sharing her, as she was undoubtedly continuing the relationship with them both.⁴²

Chanel was buying flat-topped straw hats and boaters at the Galeries Lafayette, and then altering them to sell in her shop.⁴³ Her prices were high, but her novelty and Capel's business savvy allowed her to continue successfully. With help from Capel, she moved to 21 Rue Cambon and opened a second millinery store in Deauville on the English Channel.⁴⁴ She never could have achieved this without his assistance; unbeknownst to her, he had deposited securities to back up her business. Interestingly enough, Chanel was furious at this news: at this point, she wanted her success to be her own.⁴⁵

Chanel's own shyness, perhaps, contributed

to an air of mystery that surrounded her, with an unwillingness to greet her own customers that caused more interest in who she was.⁴⁶ She was extremely uncomfortable in Paris, but in Deauville, it was entirely different. It was a more relaxed atmosphere, wealthy women were buying her hats and accessories, and it was also here that a great interest was sparked in her clothing. One day when Chanel was cold, she took a sweater from Capel's closet, cut it down the middle to avoid it wrinkling her clothing, finished the edge with a ribbon and added a collar and bow. It was a huge hit. Women did not care what it would cost, they wanted the exact same garment.⁴⁷ In fact, they wanted everything she was wearing, and she was taking these things from Capel's closet. She started creating knitted shirts like the polo shirts Capel wore, as well as sweaters and blazers.⁴⁸ Chanel was her own best publicity. She and Adrienne would wear her clothes and hats, and passersby would admire their novelty and simplicity.⁴⁹ Chanel also made waves in Deauville for bathing suits and for swimming, and wearing masculine, rounded toe, comfortable shoes; everything she did was revolutionary.⁵⁰ Because of her newfound fame, and her relationship with Capel, the renowned French cartoonist, Sem, immortalized them in a comic, thus solidifying her notoriety.⁵¹

Chanel introduced into womenswear the use of jersey, also taken from Capel. It was extremely practical and easy to wear. It shifted with the body in a very appealing way, giving a woman an easy way to move. Chanel took the material and made it into suits of a jacket and a skirt that was shorter and looser than other styles of the time. She also purchased thin jersey made for men's underwear, and cut it very simply, keeping her lines clean. It was a huge success,⁵² and initiated the first women's sport clothing line, meant

to be worn by the active woman without a corset.⁵³

The outbreak of World War I was an unexpected boon for Chanel's enterprises. In August of 1914 when it started, the war triggered the desertion of the beachfront vacation spot of Deauville. Capel insisted she keep her shop in Deauville open, however: because of his close government ties to French and British officials, Capel knew this would not last long. Eventually, people started to flock back to Deauville as a safe haven; they often came with no belongings.⁵⁴ The women coming in had the money to buy new wardrobes, and needed practical clothing to wear; with Chanel's shop the only one open, they had little choice, but the clothing was entirely conducive to the situation and their needs.⁵⁵ Chanel offered these women straight skirts, sailor blouses, shirts and boot-heeled shoes, along with very simple hats.⁵⁶ These items were sold at extremely high prices for the time, from 3,000-7,000 francs.⁵⁷ Chanel also modified the nurses' uniforms to make them more elegant, citing it as her war contribution.⁵⁸ It was not much to give in return for the fortune she made during World War I, for not only were her clothes successful in Deauville, but also in Paris; even upper-class women needed comfort and practicality.⁵⁹

An additional store was opened in the seaside resort of Biarritz, again funded by Capel, in 1915. With its proximity to neutral Spain, Capel thought it would be wise for Coco to open up another shop here.⁶⁰ Its location made it easy for visitors to the summer palace of the king, Russian nobility, and wealthy Spaniards to shop, and this granted her new notoriety. Meanwhile, the Americans were also enamored of her work, with *Harper's Bazaar* publishing the first image of one of Coco's dresses, deeming it a "charming chemise." *Vogue* soon fol-

lowed suit. She continued to create new clothing for specific necessities, such as a rubberized chauffeur's coat for women to wear while out on a rainy day.⁶¹

For Chanel's Biarritz engagement, she needed specific kinds of materials that were hard to obtain during the War. Once again, she depended on her lovers to help her succeed. Capel was able to get her tweeds from Scotland, and Balsan's brothers helped her to get broadcloth and silks.⁶² She was so wildly successful in this undertaking that she was able to pay Capel back in full for all his support, including the couture house in Biarritz. This finally proved to both Capel and Chanel that she was independent,⁶³ a fact that made Capel feel both jealous and useless.⁶⁴ She moved out of their shared apartment and into her own on the Quai de Tokyo, as well as moved her shop to 31 Rue Cambon where it still stands today.⁶⁵

Chanel and Capel would never be married because of her lowly background and his continued rise in status. Nonetheless, even after his marriage to Diana Wyndham, the daughter of a British lord,⁶⁶ they continued their relationship.⁶⁷ On the night before Christmas in 1919, Capel left Chanel in Paris to drive to meet his wife,⁶⁸ and was killed in a car accident. Chanel insisted that she be driven to the scene, where she was overcome with emotion, losing the only man she would ever truly love.⁶⁹

Shortly thereafter, however, in 1920, Chanel was introduced to Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovich, a Russian émigré, who was eleven years her junior.⁷⁰ He was the grandson of Czar Alexander II, and the first cousin of Czar Nicholas II, and was a member of the Russian Imperial Horseguard as well as a polo enthusiast. He was once very affluent, but after fleeing Russia, he only had jewelry to show for his wealth. Many of these items ended up being given to

Chanel, including pearls, gold chains, and jewel-encrusted crosses.⁷¹ Dimitri's Russian heritage was a great source of inspiration to her, with ethnic embroideries, tunics, lavish jewels, perfumes,⁷² and furs.⁷³ Chanel put his sister, Grand Duchess Marie, to work in her studio as an embroiderer for her new designs.⁷⁴ She was also living in exile, and would charge a great deal less for embroidery and beadwork than French seamstresses. She made Russian inspired blouses and tunics, as well as jackets, coats with passementerie, and evening gowns with bugle beads and pearls, all with the staple of embroidery.⁷⁵ Grand Duchess Marie also crocheted chenille hats, which were extremely popular, along with the Russian-themed look.⁷⁶ Chanel had always liked furs, but now was enthusiastic about exotic furs such as leopard, monkey and fox, as well as furs native to Russia like sable, ermine and mink, and she created furs coats and trims.⁷⁷

An evening dress from 1923-4 comes explicitly out of Russian influence. The use of embroidery and beading would probably have been done in the workshop of Grand Duchess Marie. It reflects the peasant style of clothing construction, especially pertaining to the boxy-ness and layering of materials. The added bugle beads and pearls is decisively Russian, and the entire dress is covered in these materials, making it glitter; these beads are also put together in designs that reflect Russian folk art. The silhouette, while square, is also long and slimmed, eliminating excesses.

Perhaps the most influential role the Grand Duke played, however, was that of introducing Chanel to Ernest Beaux, a chemist who created fragrances for Czar Nicholas II.⁷⁸ Russians were known throughout Europe to be proponents of the use of perfume.⁷⁹ He used eighty components to create the

fragrance, including jasmine, but also used something entirely new, aldehydes.⁸⁰ The aldehydes were synthetic chemicals that allowed the scent to last much longer.⁸¹ The fragrance was extremely feminine and popular and Chanel marketed it in a way entirely her own. She took sample bottles and gave them to her best customers, and sprayed her fitting rooms with the fragrance. She created a craze and an air of privilege associated with Chanel No. 5. She also pretended to be nonchalant about finding it, and not being able to get any more.⁸² She developed a partnership with Pierre and Paul Wertheimer, who agreed to distribute and produce the fragrance, while Chanel received 10 percent of the profits. This product gave her financial security for the rest of her life, and she never would have created it without Grand Duke Dimitri and his connection to this Russian perfumer.⁸³

The last of Chanel's influential lovers was the English Duke of Westminster. In 1923 while vacationing in Monte Carlo, Chanel was introduced to the Duke, who made many attempts to charm her. She brushed these off, believing him to be insincere.⁸⁴ The richest man in England, the Duke was exceedingly shy, and was undoubtedly attracted to Chanel because of her now-supreme confidence.⁸⁵ He was known to be an excellent horseman, nicknamed Bendor after one of his winning racehorses, and while she related to his love of horses, she rejected him nonetheless. She could not bear involvement with another man who would not commit to her.⁸⁶ When she eventually gave in to his advances, she made it very clear to him that she would not give up her career for him. He responded by creating workrooms for her in England, so she could stay with him while she designed.⁸⁷

From 1926 to 1931, her collections be-

came extraordinarily English in nature.⁸⁸ Once again, as she had with lovers in the past, she wore his clothes and adapted her clothes to his lifestyle. At a horse race in 1924, Chanel took the Duke's polo coat and wore it belted, causing a media stir (fig. 2).⁸⁹ As the Duke had houses and boats everywhere, which he made readily accessible to her, they traveled often,⁹⁰ allowing her to broaden her view of the world. She also participated in sports alongside the Duke, such as hunting, tennis, golf and fly-fishing, among other activities.⁹¹

She was endlessly inspired by his life, creating English polo coats and tweeds.⁹² Items associated with the British aristocracy such as blazers, waistcoats, cardigans and shirts with cufflinks were all part of her collections. The Duke made materials very accessible to her; after she was introduced to Scottish tweeds, he bought a tweed mill there to make a specific kind of tweed that was soft and lightweight to be crafted into her signature blazers and suits.⁹³ She then took these items and lined them in fur.⁹⁴ A coat (ca. 1931) is made of black wool, with the cuffs and neck lined with white fur which tie in a bow and hang like a scarf. The look is extremely similar to the one established by Chanel when she was spotted wearing the Duke's polo coat. This coat hangs in a more feminine way, however, fitted more closely to the body, with a defined waistline, mimicking the female body's curves. It also falls slightly below the knee, identically to the way his coat falls on her. It is masculine in nature, but is undeniably designed with a female in mind, with detail and attention throughout, even as it comes directly from the closet of the Duke of Westminster.

She was also influenced by Fair Isle knits and the geometric patterns associated with them



Photo by Phillips/Topical Press Agency/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Figure 2. Coco and The Duke Hugh Grosvenor, 2nd Duke of Westminster (1879-1953) at Chester Races With French fashion designer Coco Chanel (1883-1971), 1st May 1924

and which appeared in many evening dresses of this era.⁹⁵ She took these knits and turned them into cardigans, altering them from their original masculine line into something a woman would prefer to wear (fig. 3).⁹⁶ Figure 3 shows Chanel wearing such a cardigan. It is masculine in nature, in its pattern and oversized profile. The arms look like they consist of an excess of material, making them unfitted, but certainly giving a very comfortable appeal. It is reminiscent of the cardigans she made in the past by taking an item out of Capel's closet, cutting it down the middle and adding a finished edge. As can be seen in this image, there is contrasting material down the edges, as well as at the cuffs, hinting that the same technique may have been repeated here, as she had done before. The way the neckline is cut and the bulkiness added to the shoulders also accentuate the length and gracefulness of the neck, giving



1923 © Topham/The Image Works

Figure 3. Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. French dress designer.

a feminine flair to a masculine article of clothing.

Chanel altered more of the items associated with the Duke so as to fall into a womenswear category, such as sailor suits, reefer jackets, mechanics' dungarees and neckerchiefs.⁹⁷ Pulling directly from his lifestyle, she took his butlers' pinstriped vests and maids' uniforms, and his boat crew's peacoats with brass buttons, while yachting caps were altered into berets with jeweled pins, sailors outfits were modified into striped sweaters, and paired with jersey jackets and pleated skirts.⁹⁸ She also designed items that would suit her adaptation to his lifestyle, such as flared pants that would help her get onto and off boats easily, as well as pants in white silk for the evening, so called "silk pajamas."⁹⁹ With this trend, Chanel singlehandedly made pants-wearing acceptable for women around the world.¹⁰⁰

A quintessential Chanel outfit includes a

striped shirt much like a sailor shirt she would have seen on the Duke's boats, but also reminiscent of Capel's shirts, that she liked so much. The shirt is loose fitting and does not call any specific attention to her bust, nor flatter her waist. It is very relaxed. The pants are long, high and baggy, with a very low crotch, and pockets on the outside. Chanel cinches the pants with a simple black belt, featuring a design on the side. She wears these clothes with a great deal of ease and comfort, and this would certainly appeal to other women, both inside and outside her circle.

The Duke's lavish gifts of jewels were also integrated into Chanel's designs. He gave her necklaces, earrings, bracelets and rings of gold, jewels and pearls.¹⁰¹ Because she became so well-known for these jewels, she resorted to creating fake ones. She says about this invention, "I couldn't wear my own real pearls without being stared at on the street, so I started the vogue of wearing false ones."¹⁰² She wore these jewels for every occasion, from getting dressed up to going to the beach. The Duke's jewelry, along with the gifts she received from the Grand Duke Dimitri, became part of Chanel's new efforts to create jewelry. She took real jewels and mixed them with fake ones, often using the settings and styles of Byzantine crosses from the Grand Duke.¹⁰³ She justified this endeavor by saying, "It is disgusting to wander around loaded down with millions around the neck just because one happens to be rich."¹⁰⁴ In this sense, she justifies the simplicity with which she approaches the creation of jewelry, making it accessible to more people, because it just needs to look as if it is worth millions of dollars.

Chanel's relationship with the Duke of Westminster failed, even though it was thought that it would end in marriage. The Duke was looking for

a male heir, and Chanel was unable to produce one, as she was medically unable to conceive. When the Duke found a younger woman to fulfill this wish, Chanel was angry and humiliated. They fought horribly, with Chanel throwing a very costly jewel he had given her into the ocean, as a way to assert her independence and show that she did not need him.¹⁰⁵

Coco Chanel used the men with whom she was involved as major influences in her fashion design. Curiously, though, only the men who were involved with horses or polo proved to be inspirations. She looked to athletic horsemen as models for how she designed her clothes. She used these men specifically not only to help her establish a career, but compensate for her background, to the point where it might disappear.

The financial support and social influences that these men provided for Chanel are undeniable. Without their money, she would never have had the opportunities to open stores in places where the affluent would vacation, allowing for a different mix of clients, and allowing her to stand out on a level she would not have done alone in Paris, on streets filled with other couturières and seamstresses. They provided her with the connections to the people that would be able to help her access hard-to-find materials during the war, as well as create the quintessential elements of her career, such as Chanel No. 5. They introduced her to fashionable women who would wear her designs, and made Chanel a household name, as well as a name known in high-society circles.

Women wearing men's clothing was an idea very much in the air by the time Chanel started to design. While it was not original, and designers such as Paul Poiret had already taken the corset out of dresses, Chanel took this masculine style and

made it very popular, on a level that no one else had been able to achieve to that point in fashion history. Hailing from a peasant background, Chanel looked at the men she associated with as influential and affluent, and thus an association with them through her designs made others view her in this manner, as well. It is by no means a coincidence that Chanel was fascinated with horsemen. Having horses during this time automatically meant having a great deal of wealth, and her association with them and mirroring their styles made her appear to be their equal. As noted previously, it was already socially acceptable for women who rode horses to wear pants while doing so, and Chanel took this concept and made it more accessible to other women and other situations.

By appropriating their clothing and styles based on their lifestyles and pulling items directly out of their closets to wear and alter for herself, Chanel was put on par with the amount of power her lovers wielded. It became more popular than when any other designer did it because she was a woman designing for women, not a man doing so, and could relate to a woman's body. She was designing these powerful articles of clothing for herself and modeling them as well, and this would be very appealing to the other women seeing her. These women were usually very prominent because of the notable circumstances in which Chanel often found herself, on the arms of her lovers. She made the choices to take specific items, and as can be seen, she only took certain elements from each lover she had, with the exception of the Duke of Westminster, who was significantly the wealthiest, and from whom she took the most. This proves that she was taking these items to mimic the power and wealth of the men she was with, and it worked, because she became

extremely powerful and world-renowned herself.

This fascinating intersection of aesthetics with class, sexuality, psychology and sociology opened the door for Chanel to create the most significant revolution in women's clothing of the modern era.

ENDNOTES

¹François Baudot, *Mademoiselle Chanel* (Paris: Chanel, 1991), 5.

²Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 33-36.

³Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World - and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 37.

⁴Janet Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1998), 6.

⁵Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 41.

⁶Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 6.

⁷Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 43.

⁸*Ibid.*, 53.

⁹Baudot, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 5.

¹⁰Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 48-51.

¹¹Amy De La Haye, *Chanel, the Couturière at Work* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1994), 7.

¹²Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 9.

¹³Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 72.

¹⁴Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 10.

¹⁵Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 72-73.

¹⁶Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 10.

¹⁷Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 84.

¹⁸Axel Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own* (New York: H. Holt, 1990), 31.

¹⁹Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 85-92.

²⁰Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1984), 275.

²¹Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History*, 275-277.

²²Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 2000), 17.

²³Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 28.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 100-101.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 101-102.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 101.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 122.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 104.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 115.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 102.

³¹*Ibid.*, 104.

³²Susan Fillin-Yeh, "Dandies, Marginality and Modernism: Georgia O'Keeffe, Marcel Duchamp and Other Cross-Dressers," *Oxford Art Journal* 18, no. 2 (1995): 33-38.

³³Fillin-Yeh, "Dandies, Marginality and Modernism: Georgia O'Keeffe, Marcel Duchamp and Other Cross-Dressers," 37.

³⁴Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself Created*, 98.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 93-100.

³⁶Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 16-17.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸De La Haye, *Chanel, the Couturière at Work*, 10.

³⁹Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 18-19.

⁴⁰Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*, 50.

19. ⁴¹Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
51-52. ⁴²Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*,
⁴³Ibid., 54.
22-23. ⁴⁴Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
⁴⁵Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*, 57.
⁴⁶Ibid., 58.
⁴⁷Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
25. ⁴⁸Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*, 58.
⁴⁹Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
24. ⁵⁰Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her
World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself
Created*, 127-128.
⁵¹Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
24. ⁵²Ibid., 27.
⁵³Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*,
68-69. ⁵⁴Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
27-28. ⁵⁵Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*, 74.
⁵⁶Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her
World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself
Created*, 140.
⁵⁷Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
28. ⁵⁸Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her
World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself
Created*, 128.
⁵⁹Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*,
75-76. ⁶⁰Ibid., 78-79.
⁶¹Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
28-29. ⁶²Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*, 80.
⁶³Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her
World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself
Created*, 154.

- ⁶⁴Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*, 89.
⁶⁵Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
29. ⁶⁶Ibid., 29.
⁶⁷Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her
World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself
Created*, 167-168.
⁶⁸Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
29. ⁶⁹Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her
World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself
Created*, 176-180.
⁷⁰Baudot, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 11.
⁷¹Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
47-48. ⁷²Baudot, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 11.
⁷³Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
48. ⁷⁴Baudot, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 11.
⁷⁵Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
49. ⁷⁶Ibid., 49.
⁷⁷Ibid., 50-54.
⁷⁸Ibid., 54.
⁷⁹Charles-Roux, *Chanel: Her Life, Her
World- and the Woman Behind the Legend She Herself
Created*, 202.
⁸⁰Baudot, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 12.
⁸¹Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
54. ⁸²Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*,
134-135. ⁸³Ibid., 137-139.
⁸⁴Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
65-67. ⁸⁵Baudot, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 14.
⁸⁶Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
67-70. ⁸⁷Ibid., 71, 77.
⁸⁸Baudot, *Mademoiselle Chanel*, 14.
⁸⁹Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*,
72.

- ⁹⁰Ibid., 73-75.
⁹¹Ibid., 75.
⁹²Ibid., 78.
⁹³De La Haye, *Chanel, the Couturiere at Work*, 42.
⁹⁴Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 78.
⁹⁵De La Haye, *Chanel, the Couturiere at Work*, 42.
⁹⁶Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 80.
⁹⁷De La Haye, *Chanel, the Couturiere at Work*, 42.
⁹⁸Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 80.
⁹⁹Ibid.
¹⁰⁰Ibid.
¹⁰¹Ibid., 72-75.
¹⁰²Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*, 153.
¹⁰³Wallach, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life*, 87-88.
¹⁰⁴Ibid., 87.
¹⁰⁵Ibid., 83-84.