



VIDEO TRANSCRIPTION

# **A Queer History of Fashion**

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From the Closet to the Catwalk

**HAL RUBENSTEIN**

Author, Editor at Large, *InStyle Magazine*

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Video length: 4:44 | This video is online at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=QB8PwkFSP6s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QB8PwkFSP6s)

Men's fashion editor at the *New York Times Magazine* was the first job I ever had in fashion. In terms of fashion in the early 90s, men were discovering, designers were discovering, sexuality for men. Remember this is the period of Versace's Miami collection. Every campaign was photographed with suits with no shirts and men walking down the beach; all the fabric suddenly got flowy. Designers like Donna Karan got involved in menswear, and it may not seem unique now, when you realize it was a woman's sensibility in men's clothes; what she was talking about, what made her clothes so unique was that she has such an incredible eye and hand for fabric—it was how clothing felt against the body, not how clothing looked and how clothing fit, but how it *felt*.

This was a new concept for men to talk about feelings, sensation, sensuality, sexuality. The *New York Times* did not know what to do with this. This august body, which is now so liberated...remember it was a long time before they stopped using the word 'gay' as an adjective. They were fine as long as you photographed clothes that looked like they all came out of Paul Stuart. But there was Calvin, and Dolce & Gabbana, and, like I said, Versace, and Cavalli. And all these people suddenly discovering that men were objects. Men could be objects of desire too. And men like this. Women always worry about objectification; men don't worry about being objectified. We like this—especially gay men. The *New York Times* however, completely freaked out. To the point where if you had a photograph and two men were looking at each other, there was an issue. It wasn't that they didn't have a great appreciation for photography; they just didn't want to see men as sexual beings. I'm a gay man; I see all clothing as about seduction.

I'll never forget there was a photograph—it was done by Chris Witkin, who was a terrific photographer—and the idea was to show stretch in fabric, and so I had a lineup of men. They were moving in different directions, reaching, but from off the page there was a hand grabbing the shoulder of a man in a Donna Karan suit, and her fabric always had stretch in it. And it was gripping the arm and that person was pulling away. And my editor at the *Sunday Times Magazine* basically looked at it and said, "That picture looks aggressive. Can't you find a picture where the arm isn't there?" As a matter of fact no—I couldn't. Nor did I want to. Honestly part of me was furious, part of me was sympathetic. Again this was not a problem that was solely the fault or the *New York Times* okay, this was a problem at *GQ* at one point, this was a problem at *Esquire* at one point as well. But in terms of how I see a man, how I want a man to be seen, how fashion goes forward.

Now of course there's no issue; you open the *Times* and it's hard to even find a man in a suit. But back then I was told by the editor-in-chief of the magazine that 'maybe these were great clothes for gay guys who like to dress up.' It was always a struggle. It was always a struggle. Look I think even now in this day and age—and yes, DOMA's passed, and la-la-la, and everybody is just so damn open...when a guy looks in the mirror—guys want to look cool—but sexy and cool are not exactly the same thing. When a straight guy looks in a mirror there's still a wonder. A lot of young people, young guys gay and straight have no trouble with their sexuality, but there's always that remark about whether something looks too gay or not. ▼