

Jock or nerd? Clothes can make the man

By Rochelle Chadakoff

Men mystify most women. Even gift-giving, despite the elemental pleasure of shopping, presents a quandary. Most women lump men into two categories: They either care too little or too much about clothes. (There's also an overlapping category of men who should learn to pick up their clothes, but that's another issue.) Before women wear themselves out shopping for gifts for grooms, grads and dads, they should head for the

bookstore. Required reading: "Jocks and Nerds: Men's Style in the Twentieth Century" (Rizzoli, \$45).

"Jocks and Nerds" is neither sociological treatise nor a fashion manual. Instead it is a proposition about the way men dress in the 20th century," explain the authors in the book's introduction. Studded with photos from Hollywood studios, everyday life and magazine layouts, "Jocks and Nerds" provides inspiration, history and an inkling of men's taste in clothes.

Authors Richard Martin and Harold Koda were well-suited to this project. They are administrators at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology where Martin is dean of graduate studies and executive director of the Shirley Goodman Resource Center and Koda is curator of the Design Laboratory.

Recognizing that categories exist between the polar opposites of jock and nerd, the authors also define the workman, cowboy, rebel, military man, sportsman, hunter, businessman, Joe College, man about town and the dandy. Martin notes that the classifications of jock and nerd helped structure the book because "those terms once made men the most uncomfortable and then gained acceptability."

Post-war fabrications, jock and nerd as types can be traced back to the '50s. Think of a Charles Atlas cartoon with weightlifter and 98-pound weakling. Campus lingo punned the word jock into conversation when football players were nicknamed "jockstraps." It's harder to pinpoint when nerd came into play. Plausible

roots include the '20s slang expression nerds, a polite twist on nuts; or nerd could have been put in our mouths in the late '30s when ventriloquist Edgar Bergen introduced his dim-witted dummy Mortimer Snerd.

By the '80s, jock and nerd evolved into more desirable images. Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan may be the epitome of the monosyllabic pre-"Rocky" jock, but Sylvester Stallone collects art and Arnold Schwarzenegger makes executive decisions without breaking a sweat. Personified by Jerry Lewis, Alfred E. Neuman, Woody Allen and now Pee-wee Herman, the nerd has made an indelible mark on society as ballpoint ink leaves on a white shirt.

That white shirt can be found in most men's closets. As this book illustrates, some items have wide wardrobe appeal, even if they originally belonged to one classification. Baby boomers can thank rebel heroes of the

'50s for raising the stature of T-shirt. Marlon Brando wore T-shirts to rehearsals of "A Streetcar Named Desire," and soon it became his character's costume as well. In "Rebel Without a Cause," Jimmy Dean slips a leather jacket over his white T-shirt. It broke the rules, but it also exposed a manly vulnerability.

Protection was the initial function of another 20th century creation: the trench coat. Khaki and water repellent, the coat was worn by British soldiers in World War I.

Another regulation outfit was also developed more than 60 years ago. International champ Renee Lacoste invented his soft-collared, long-tailed tennis shirt when men wore long pants, starched shirts and ties on the court. Lacoste, 21, knew about style. He had been dubbed Le Crocodile by the press after winning a bet involving an alligator suitcase. Lacoste, who wore an embroidered crocodile

on his blazer pocket, put a smaller version on his cotton pique shirts when manufacturing them in 1933. More than 200 million petite crocodiles have been sported by men since, and it's a good bet that many Lacoste shirts were gifts to men who never play tennis.

Not only does "Jock and Nerds" define wardrobe basics, it also prompts intriguing observations. According to Martin, most readers consider the elegant '30s images of Fred Astaire, Gary Cooper and Cary Grant to be contemporary and arresting. Martin reports that Alexander Julian's menswear design group has dubbed "Jocks and Nerds" their bible of men's looks. He adds, "Women admitted that they may be attracted to flamboyant types — cowboy, dandy or rebel — but they would probably marry a nerd or businessman. But most men, like women, blend their look."

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DO JOCKS always get the girl? Olympic swimming champ Johnny Weissmuller, shown here in 1926, makes a good case.

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