



The Construction of Masculinity Reflected through Fashion in *The Wild One* (1953) Film

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explore the traits of the characters in The Wild One film as well as the construction of masculinity reflected through dress or costumes in the film. The findings of this study reveal that there is a symbol in The Wild One that has a sense of masculinity based on the Greasers' outfit. The author implies the traits of the characters and the concept of masculinity established via the fashion of the Greasers in the film The Wild One, in which masculine men like the Greasers are emblems of world masculinity. They must have a well-built, strong body and an attractive appearance, and they must always appear daring and brave. All of these criteria are concepts owned by the Greasers culture. According to the findings of this study, the construction of masculinity in popular culture refers to the Greasers' concept of masculinity. The presence of a hidden message in the film The Wild One, where the attire of the Greasers, who embody the image of masculinity in the modern period, produces the concept of consumerism and materialism, was also discovered.

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the characteristics of the characters in the film *The Wild One* as well as the concept of masculinity as portrayed in the film's wardrobe or clothes. According to the conclusions of this study, there is a symbol in *The Wild One* that has a sense of masculinity based on the Greasers' costume. The author emphasises the features of the characters and the concept of masculinity produced by the fashion of the Greasers in the film *The Wild One*, in which masculine men like the Greasers are emblems of world manhood. *The Wild One* is a 1953 noir-style crime film directed by László Benedek and produced by Stanley Kramer. This film is noteworthy because the main character, Johnny Strabler, played by Marlon Brando, wears a motorcycle outfit complete with a leather jacket, captain's hat, and boots while riding a motorcycle, and his persona became a cultural symbol in the 1950s. *The Wild One* is widely regarded as the first film in the bad biker genre, as well as the first to investigate and introduce American motorcycle gang violence that year via the prism of biker fashion.

When *The Wild One* was released in 1953, it spawned a subculture known as Greasers, which consisted of working-class and underclass youths and adults in the United States who were influenced by the film. When it first appeared in the 1950s, working-class fashion was linked with Greasers. Moore (2017) notes in his book *Street Style in America: An exploration* that "greasers" are a subculture of working-class young people in the United States following World War II, the majority of whom are male, white, and have a strong interest in culture. He enjoys hot rods and motorcycles, as well as rock and roll music. Grease is also associated with hairstyles that involve hair oil or jelly, as well as leather coats or denim jackets and boots. The Greasers' overall combined appearance is consistent with the aesthetics of 1950s motorcycle rider dress (Moore, 2017).

The researcher chose *The Wild One* because of its theme regarding the lifestyle of young people, specifically Greasers, who entered the category of subcultures in the 1950s. Greasers are a young lifestyle shown through a rebellious lifestyle followed by sentiments of disillusionment with American popular culture, both as a result of the absence of a post-World War II economy and the marginalisation imposed by the overall domestic shift towards homogeneity in the 1950s. *The Wild One* is a film that tells the life of the Greasers subculture in an instant, as well as how to care about how they look to refer to masculinity for males. There is a reading of signs through the meaning of fashion as a representation of the Greasers subculture in *The Wild One* that reflects masculinity, which will be studied with cultural studies from that is more focused on how the costume and fashion are building the concept of masculinity in popular culture refers to the Greasers' concept of masculinity.

Fashion has been actively present in every culture, with the urge for fashion increasing with each generation. Of course, fashion as a sort of communication tool transmits signals that might be interpreted based on society's experience and culture, including emblems of masculinity. The younger generation strives to show their individuality through their image of society through movies. His clothing style is one image that reveals his identity. Film, according to Nurudin, is a mass medium that represents a particular reality and point of view (Nurudin, 2007). As previously stated, cinema, as a form of mass communication, elevates certain public viewpoints, including the point of view of the fashion style depicted in the film.

The researcher commenced a comprehensive literature review, drawing from scholarly publications and theses to inform the study's exploration of the representation of masculinity through fashion. Among the diverse references consulted, a synthesis of key findings emerged. First, Berek (2014) investigated identity formation within the street punk community in Semarang, emphasizing the role of clothing, environment and lifestyle in maintaining group cohesion. The research underscores the importance of dress as a marker of group identity, using Roland Barthes' theory as the main analytical lens (Manghani, 2020).

Second, Sari's thesis explores the representation of metropolitan teenage girls in fashion advertisements, using Barthes' semiotic approach to dissect the signs embedded in print media. Although

focusing on print advertisements, this research is in line with this study which explores the representation of masculinity through Greasers fashion in the film "The Wild One", in the context of cultural studies in film analysis. Third, Yuliyanti et al (2017) explored the semiotics of masculinity depicted in POND'S Men television commercials, using Barthes' semiotic analysis to unravel the meaning of denotation, connotation, and the underlying myths of masculinity. Despite having the same methodological approach, this study differs in terms of focus and subject matter.

Further enriching the discourse on masculinity representation, Yunita & Setyowati's (2020) research on masculinity in the Disney film "Moana", although thematically similar to this investigation, this study offers a different focus on the Greasers' fashion as a representation of masculinity in the film "The Wild One". Despite thematic similarities, these studies differ in terms of their objects of analysis, thus enriching the broader discourse on the representation of masculinity in various cultural contexts. While each study offers unique insights and methodologies, collectively they contribute to a diverse understanding of representations of masculinity, spanning a wide array of artifacts and cultural contexts.

METHODS

The qualitative approach adopted in this study is essential to investigate the multifaceted nuances of masculinity as depicted in the movie "The Wild One" (Pham, 2018). By avoiding numerical data in favor of qualitative sources such as imagery and textual analysis, the researcher aims to capture rich and complex descriptive signals that support the construction of masculinity in the film's narrative. This methodological choice is in line with the main objective of this study, which is to uncover the multiple layers of meaning embedded in the Greasers' fashion choices and their implications for the portrayal of masculinity. Through qualitative analysis, the researcher aimed to move beyond mere statistical correlations and instead engage deeply with the cultural and symbolic dimensions of the film, explaining how notions of masculinity are communicated and amplified through visual and narrative elements.

Central to this research is the application of cultural studies theory, specifically that described by Stuart Hall, an important figure in this field. Hall's critique of traditional communication research, which often favors quantitative methods and ignores the complexity of media-society interactions, underscores the importance of adopting a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach (Hall & Whannel, 2018). Using cultural studies theory, the researcher attempted to uncover the hidden meanings and power dynamics inherent in the Greasers' fashion choices, thus illuminating the broader social and cultural significance of masculinity as depicted in the movie. This theoretical framework serves as a guiding lens to analyze and interpret the complex interplay between fashion, identity, and social norms in "The Wild One."

The roots of cultural studies theory can be traced back to the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, a pioneering institution in the field of cultural analysis. Founded by Richard Hoggart and

later led by Stuart Hall, the Birmingham Centre played an important role in advancing critical scholarship on subcultures, marginalized communities, and popular culture phenomena. Through landmark studies on topics ranging from youth culture to media representations, researchers at the Birmingham Centre demonstrated how seemingly peripheral aspects of everyday life—such as fashion, music, and sports—can be powerful vehicles for expressing and challenging dominant ideologies.

Nurrachman's emphasis on Raymond Williams' contribution underscores the enduring relevance of cultural studies theory in contemporary scholarship. By engaging with Williams' extensive body of work, scholars gain insight into the complex interactions between culture, power and ideology, thus enabling a more nuanced understanding of cultural phenomena across a range of historical and social contexts. The application of cultural studies theory in this study not only enriches our interpretation of the film "The Wild One" but also contributes to a broader scholarly tradition that seeks to uncover the complexities of culture and society through rigorous analysis and critical inquiry (Rahmiaty et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fashion and costumes in film can certainly represent elements of masculinity. According to the study's background, the following are the problem statement for this research.

How does The Wild One film construction the concept of masculinity?

This chapter describes data analysis as the final step in the research to conduct this study. It includes an analysis of how The Wild One film construction the concept of masculinity.

The researcher has understood the ideological form of the concept of masculinity in the film The Wild One. A small ideology about the concept of masculinity is formed in the film The Wild One, following the Greasers cultural concept of masculinity. Where the figure of Greasers defines the perfection of frightening masculinity. Moore stated that, originally, they were simply working-class men who cared about their appearance; their origins made them a symbol of masculinity. Because of their background, working-class white ethnicity men who like motorcycles, dress masculinely (leather jackets, denim pants, boots), and have a strong, tough body have become a symbol of manhood. The overall look of the greaser is synonymous with the aesthetics of 1950s biker fashion (Moore, 2017).

The Wild One, as a research object, is not a film about the history of fashion, which is linked with masculinity. However, The Wild One is simply a noir genre picture about the lives of the Greasers motorcycle gang, but many indications or symbols of the concept of masculinity are impacted by the dress styles used by the film's protagonists. Because the characters are greasers, the researcher sees this film as an object of the concept of masculinity. The Greasers subculture is a representation of male masculinity, particularly in

terms of fashion. Films have a tendency to emphasize physical appearance, notably the Greaser members' dress style.

When *The Wild One* was released in 1953, it spawned a subculture known as Greasers, which consisted of working-class and underclass youths and adults in the United States who were influenced by the film. When it first appeared in the 1950s, working-class fashion was linked with greasers. Moore notes in his book *Street Style in America: An Exploration* (2017) that "greasers" are a subculture of working-class young people in the United States following World War II, the majority of whom are male, white, and have a strong interest in culture. He enjoys vintage cars and motorcycles. Grease is also associated with leather coats or denim jackets. The Greasers' overall combined appearance is consistent with the aesthetics of 1950s motorcycle rider dress (Moore, 2017).

Entering the digital era has the characteristics of a society that exhibits a higher social class because there is a clear difference between lower- and upper-class society: luxurious lifestyle, independence in acting, workaholic generation, showing masculinity for men, which goes hand in hand with people's lifestyles changing as a result of technological advances. Different masculinity ideals have arisen as a result of the evolution of masculinity values in each culture over time. Since males are portrayed as not only physically manly but also trendy, paying attention to beauty, and learning about various body treatments, advancements in the current era have had a tremendous influence on the meaning of fashion for a person (Nugroho and Fauziyah, 2018). In the film *The Wild One* itself, there are several attributes in the form of costumes or important objects belonging to the Greasers characters that build the concept of masculinity, so fashion in this film represents masculinity through film studies. Here are some important items:

Leather Jacket

Leather jackets are a choice of clothing that is often used by many people for style and practicality. Despite the many man-made alternatives available, leather jackets remain in high demand due to their durability, sturdiness, and the natural beauty of the leather material itself.

According to Flusser (2002), leather jackets are popular clothing and are often used in various situations. Here are some common uses of leather jackets:

1. **Fashion:** Leather jackets are often used as part of fashion trends. They have a stylish and classic look. Leather jackets can be worn by both men and women on various occasions, such as formal or casual events.
2. **Winter:** Leather jackets are often used as a warm clothing option during the winter. The natural leather used in this jacket provides good insulation and protection from cold temperatures and wind.

3. Riding: Leather jackets are often chosen by motorcyclists for their durability and good protection. They can provide a stronger protective layer in the event of an accident or bad weather.
4. Personality and identity: Leather jackets are often used as a symbol of identity or certain groups, such as leather jackets worn by bikers, rockers, or certain communities. They can reflect an individual's personality and interests (Flusser, 2002).



Image 1. Johnny wears leather jacket (00:29:50)

Discussing leather jackets cannot be separated from the history of their appearance. According to Snodgrass (2015), leather jackets originally appeared as pilot jackets, better known as bomber jackets. The manufacture of leather flight jackets began during World War I (1914–1918) with the aim of keeping pilots and flight crew warm while they were thousands of feet off the ground. In early 1915, pilots in the Royal Flying Corps, namely aviation services in France and Belgium, began wearing long-sleeved leather jackets, and the era of the leather flight jacket trend began (Tomjack, 2018).



Image 2. Royal Flying Corps Air pilot worn leather jacket
Source: digital.collections.slsa.sa.gov.au

In the 1950s, leather jackets appeared in cinema, namely in the film *The Wild One*. The popularity of leather jackets among motorists skyrocketed in the 1950s thanks to the appearance of Hollywood artist Marlon Brando in the 1953 film *The Wild One*. *The Wild One* is a 1953 noir-style crime film directed by László Benedek and produced by Stanley Kramer. This film is famous because there is the character Johnny Strabler as the main character, played by Marlon Brando, wearing a motorcycle suit complete with a black leather jacket while riding a motorcycle, whose persona became a cultural icon in the 1950s.



Image 3. *The Wild One* (1953)

Source: wikipedia.org

Marlon Brando, as the character Johnny Strabler in the film *The Wild One*, looks fashionable and charming on a motorbike while wearing a black leather jacket. From there, the leather jacket immediately became a cool symbol for the younger generation of that era.

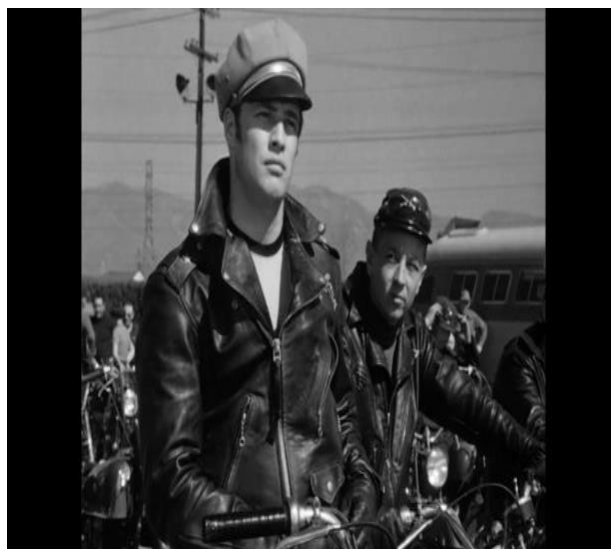


Image 4. Johnny wore leather jacket while sat on his motorcycle (00:07:32)

Marlon Brando's portrayal of Johnny in *The Wild One* film became an important image. According to Trotman (2019), the film influenced the punk band the Ramones to wear leather jackets. The guitarist's initial name was Johnny, just like Marlon Brando's character, Johnny Strabler (Trotman, 2019).

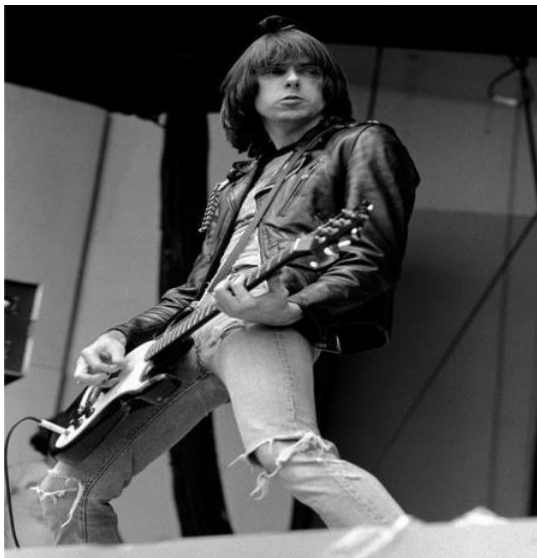


Image 5. John William Cummings (Johnny Ramones)

Source: Morrison Hotel Gallery.com

The Ramones are an American punk rock band that is usually considered the first punk rock group. They have had a great influence on the development of this music. After being founded in Forest Hills, Queens, New York, in 1974, they finally disbanded 22 years later, in 1996. Three of their original members, Joey, Johnny, and Tommy, died of various types of cancer, while Dee Dee died due to a heroin overdose.



Image 6. The Ramones

Source: Wikipedia.org

The Ramones' loud, quick, and simple musical style was influenced by pop music from the 1950s and 1960s that the band members grew up listening to. The Ramones' art and visual imagery

supplemented the topics of their songs and shows. The members had their hair long, wore leather jackets, T-shirts, ripped jeans, and trainers. This style emphasised minimalism, which had a strong influence on New York punk culture in the 1970s, and echoed the band's short, uncomplicated compositions.

Then, in 1990, a drama series appeared in the United States entitled *Twin Peaks*. According to Nguyen (2017), Michael Cera played Wally Brando in *Twin Peaks*, who dressed like Johnny Strabler and impersonated Marlon Brando. Michael Cera makes an appearance as the cleverly titled character in the fourth episode of the season. Wally Brando is the adult son of *Twin Peaks* Sheriff's Department receptionist Lucy (Kimmy Robertson) and deputy Andy (Harry Goaz), born on April 3, the birthday of Marlon Brando.

According to Childs (2016), in popular culture, leather jackets are often depicted as worn by male characters who have strong personalities, such as rock singers, action actors, or heroines in films and television series. Later, these leather jackets became popular among motorcyclists, singers, actors, citizens and men who engaged in other masculine activities, such as urban men or members of certain subcultural groups. In addition, leather jackets are often associated with attributes that are considered masculinity, such as courage, toughness, and virility.



Image 7. Michael Cera as Wally Brando in *Twin Peaks* (1990)
Source: IndieWire.com

Motorcycle

A motorcycle is a motorised vehicle that is controlled by a rider using two wheels. A motorcycle has several main components, including the engine, frame, wheels, suspension system, brake system, and propulsion system. Engines on motorcycles usually use internal combustion engines that use fuels such as gasoline or diesel.



Image 8. Johnny Strabler rode a motorcycle (00:08:32)

Motorcycles are the evolution of conventional bicycles that were first discovered. In 1868, Michaux ex Cie, the first company in the world to produce bicycles on a large scale, began to develop a steam engine as the driving force for bicycles (Abdo, 2012).



Image 9. Michaux ex Cie Company

Source: DocPlayer.info

However, this effort was still unsuccessful and was then continued by Edward Butler, an English inventor. Butler built a three-wheeled vehicle with an internal combustion engine. Since the discovery, more and more experiments have been carried out to make motorcycles and cars (Abdo, 2012). As time goes by, motorcycles are becoming increasingly sophisticated and up-to-date. Of course, motorcycles

cannot be separated from people's lives. Even in the world of film, motorcycles are often featured as an attribute in films.

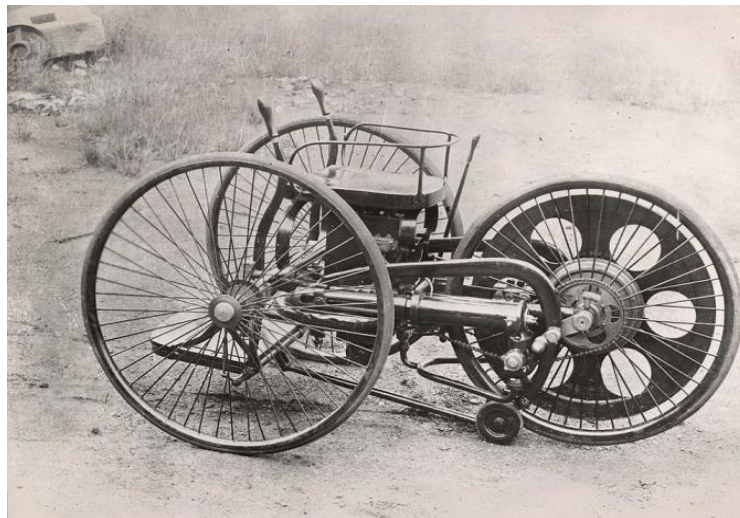


Image 10. Edward Butler's patent velocycle in 1887

Source: Wikipedia.org

According to Levinson (2011), James Dean purchased a Triumph TR5 Trophy motorcycle to replicate Johnny Strabler's own Triumph Thunderbird 6T motorcycle, which he utilised in the film. *The Wild One* is one of the films that popularised the use of motorcycles. Motorcycles became popular when the film was released in 1953.



Image 11. Johnny and his motorcycle club, Black Rebel MC (01:15:36)

The story of *The Wild One* film represents the lives of young people who existed in the Baby Boomer era among motorcycle clubs and gangs in the late 1940s in the United States. The rise of these youth-member motorcycle clubs or gangs was attuned to feelings of disillusionment with American popular culture, whether due to the lack of a post-World War II economy or the marginalization imposed by the general domestic shift toward homogeneity in the 1950s. Even so, these characters pay attention to appearance as a form of self-image, such as how they dressed while riding motorbikes in the past decade, so that it became an attraction for research on the culture of the Greasers' fashion style, which reflected how masculine they were on the film.

According to Levinson (2011), James Dean purchased a Triumph TR5 Trophy motorcycle to replicate Johnny Strabler's own Triumph Thunderbird 6T motorcycle, which he utilised in the film. James Byron Dean or James Dean was a well-known American actor. He is considered as a cultural figure of youthful disillusionment and social estrangement throughout a five-year career, as conveyed in the title of his most acclaimed picture, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), in which he acted as unhappy teenager Jim Stark.



Image 12. James Dean and his motorcycle
Source: Artsy.com

Many famous male figures in history, such as Marlon Brando in the 1953 film *The Wild One* and James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), iconically wore leather jackets. At that time, their appearance in leather jackets and motorcycles gave off the image of troubled and rebellious men, which in turn contributed to the perception that leather jackets and motorcycles were a symbol of masculinity (Childs, 2016).

Motorcycles are often associated with speed, strength, and courage. When a person rides a motorcycle that is strong and fast, it can give off feelings of courage and strength, which are considered masculine attributes. In popular media and culture, motorcycles are often depicted as the vehicles of heroes or "bad boys". This is related to the image associated with a man who is tough, brave, and maybe a little rebellious. Many advertisements, films, and popular media portray bikers as individuals who have an aura of courage, toughness, and physical agility. This image creates the perception that riding a motorcycle is an activity suitable for men who want to express their masculinity (Gill, 2007).



Image 13. Rebel Without A Cause (1955)
Source: Wikipedia.org

Starting from leather jackets and motorcycles, which were popularised by the film *The Wild One*, public figures have been influenced in droves, such as the Ramones band, Michael Cera, James Dean, and the researcher himself, indicating that there has been a metrosexual male phenomenon where it is part of the characteristics of masculinity. The phenomenon that exists in the 21st century is the appearance of something distinctive, and the longer the last male symptoms last, the more new terminologies are created. Since homosexuality has developed since the 1980s, even male terminology is now familiar with the term "metrosexual", "No sissy stuff" (no femininity), "be a big wheel", "be a sturdy oak", "give 'em hell", "new man as nurturer", "new man as narcissist", "macho male nature", "violence", and "hooliganism" (terrible), and metrosexual men who uphold clothing models are among the eight groups (Beynon, 2001; Yuzar et al., 2023).

According to Beynon (2001), the characteristics of masculinity can be grouped as follows:

1) The New Man as Nurturer: men have tenderness as fathers, for example, to take care of children, involving the full role of men in the domestic arena.

2) The New Man as Narcissist: Men show their masculinity with a flamboyant and elegant yuppie lifestyle, and men increasingly like to indulge himself with commercial products such as property, cars, clothing, or personal artefacts that make him appear successful.

3) Macho masculinity, violence, and hoganism: men build their lives around football and the world of drinking, as well as sex and relationships with women, prioritise leisure time, have fun enjoying life freely as it is with friends, watching football, drinking beer, and making jokes that are considered demeaning to women.

4) Metrosexual men prioritise fashion, maybe similar to the masculine type that existed in the 1980s or maybe even the same as metrosexual men; they are people who care about an organised lifestyle, like details, and tend to be perfectionists.

The researcher also found several types of lifestyles that are usually applied by metrosexual men, as seen from their tendency to use their time and interests.

The automotive lifestyle: apart from taking care of their appearance, these metrosexual men also buy, collect, and maintain their vehicles. They often spend time dressing up their vehicle, whether it is a motorcycle or a car. Men with this type of lifestyle are usually members of an automotive club, which usually has characters that are good at adapting, perfectionists, and brave (Wahyuningtyas, 2017). James Dean and the researcher were inspired to buy a motorbike because the film *The Wild One* and then taking care of the motorbike indicate that we are metrosexual men.

With a trendy and artistic lifestyle, these metrosexual men tend to spend their time shopping at fashion stores to take care of their appearance. In addition, they are often involved in an activity that smells like art (Wahyuningtyas, 2017). The Ramones and Michael Cera are artistic figures who wore leather jackets inspired by *The Wild One* movie characters and follow an artistic lifestyle. In addition, the researcher, who wore a leather jacket, was also inspired by the movie character *The Wild One*, who followed a trendy lifestyle. Even though they have an interest in choosing different lifestyles, these two categories have something in common: they both really care about their appearance in public.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of the film "*The Wild One*" through the lens of cultural studies reveals significant insights into the representation of masculinity and its associated cultural messages. Through an exploration of the Greasers mode as a symbol of masculinity, rooted in studio film theory, it becomes clear that popular culture's depiction of masculinity aligns with the cultural traits of the Greasers. The movie subtly conveys a hidden message of consumerism, where the Greasers' identity is embedded with the products they consume, especially menswear products such as leather jackets.

In addition, the portrayal of Greasers as tough, adrenaline-fueled individuals serves as a global reference for masculinity, perpetuating the ideal of manliness associated with a tall, muscular figure. Not only does this portrayal influence society's perception of masculinity, but it also impacts individuals' self-confidence and social status, contributing to a culture of materialism. The influence of cultural practices on individual lifestyles, as argued by Raymond Williams, underlines the material nature of culture and its pervasive influence on everyday life. Ultimately, the fashion portrayed by the Greasers in "The Wild One" embodies a form of cultural expression that reflects and perpetuates societal ideals of masculinity, consumerism and social class.

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