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## It's Not About the Clothes: Branding Strategies of American Heritage Brands Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren

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Sarah Templeton

TMD 540 Major Paper

May 6, 2013

## It's Not About the Clothes: Branding Strategies of American Heritage Brands

### Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren

#### INTRODUCTION

Branding is a major component of retail marketing. Every retail company needs to utilize branding in order to identify itself, connect with consumers, and stay competitive. The retailer's job is to make lasting connections with consumers in their target market, and they do this through branding. The importance of a brand goes well beyond simply a logo; the brand has to hold meaning to consumers, and meaning is created through branding methods involving semiotics, emotional branding, and storytelling. Branding is defined, according to Joseph Hancock, as "a competitive strategy that targets customers with products, advertising, and promotion organized around a coherent message as a way to encourage purchase and repurchase of products from the same company" (2009, 5). It is important to all retail companies, including one significant niche in the world of retail— American heritage brands. The success of heritage brands relies on their ability to utilize branding methods to identify themselves and communicate their unique image while building meaning in their products and creating an emotional connection with their customers.

I have examined two companies that can be categorized as American heritage brands: Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren. These companies are well-established brands with comparable positioning and target markets. Each prides itself on similar values, such as history, quality, and a classic image. American heritage firms, such as Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren, often link their brand image “to icons of American culture...each read[ing] the American cultural landscape differently: abstracting, re-appropriating, and inventing elements that resonate with the brand’s own vision and objectives” (Manlow, 2011, 88). In this paper I will examine the way in which these heritage brands utilize branding methods, specifically in their menswear departments, to create stories around an idealized American lifestyle in order to create meaningful connections with consumers and build a strong brand identity with significant equity.

This study begins with an overview of branding theory, including Aaker’s Brand Equity Model and a Heritage Quotient model. Next, branding methods including semiotics, emotional branding, and storytelling will be discussed. An overview of recent investigations in branding will be then be examined in order to ground the analysis of the case studies. Lastly, the case studies for Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren will include a history of the companies, information about quality standards, a discussion about American style, and a look at the use of branding methods by these companies, and why they are so successful.

Although much research has been done on fashion branding, little information is available about branding from the perspective of a specific retail niche, such as American heritage brands and menswear. This kind of research is important in order to see the similarities and differences in how heritage firms brand their companies and their clothing, and why

consumers react so positively to the images they present. Fashion branding can be defined as “the cumulative image of a product or service that consumers quickly associate with a particular brand; it offers an overall experience that is unique, different, special, and identifiable “ (Hancock, 2009, 4). Through a review of literature, this research seeks to examine two American heritage brands, and how they distinguish themselves through the use of branding. This knowledge will be helpful to retailers and consumers who wish to understand how retailers use branding to gain and retain a customer base. It is also helpful for future research on heritage brands and their influence on American consumers.

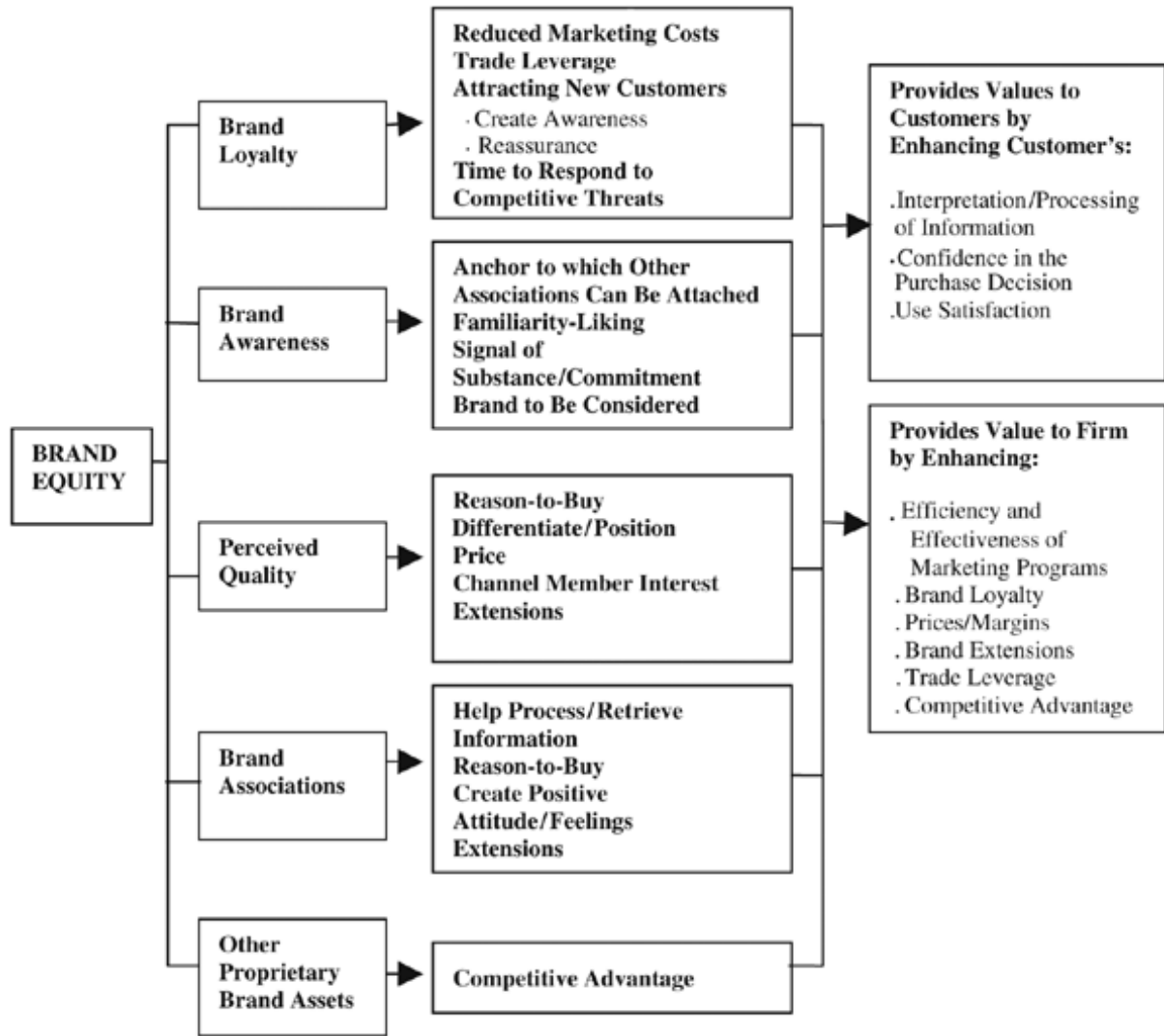
## BRANDING THEORY

### **Aaker’s Brand Equity Model**

In the competitive world of menswear, the goal of any brand is to have a strong brand identity with significant equity. In his book, *Building Strong Brands*, David Aaker (1996) examines what it takes to build a meaningful brand that consumers recognize and will choose over other competitors. Branding is important to building equity in a brand. Brand equity is defined by Aaker (1996) as “a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand’s name and symbol that adds (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm’s customers” (7). It generates value in a variety of ways. The dimensions of Aaker’s brand equity model, shown in Figure 1, include brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets (Aaker, 1996).

All of these components play a key role in building a brand's equity, which allows a brand to be competitive. The American heritage brands being discussed here, Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren, both have strong brand equity, or they would not be the highly successful retail companies that they are today. Each dimension, however, is important to a brand's success, and should be looked at individually to see how consumers are affected by branding.

Figure 1. Aaker's Brand Equity Model (Aaker, 1996).



### *Brand Loyalty*

Brand loyalty is the first dimension in Aaker's Brand Equity model, and has also been a major topic of recent research (Wood, 2004; Khan & Mahmood, 2012; Ulusu, 2011). Brand loyalty refers to the allegiance consumers have to a brand (Aaker, 1996). A study by Mehwish Aziz Khan and Dr. Zahid Mahmood in the "Impact of Brand Loyalty Factors on Brand Equity" explain brand loyalty as a powerful and unconditional commitment to a brand by a consumer. Findings in the study showed that "brand loyalty is influenced by willingness to pay more, perceived quality, and brand awareness, and has a positive direct effect on brand equity," which coincides with Aaker's brand equity model (Khan & Mahmood, 2012, 33). However, a study by Lisa M. Wood on the dimensions of brand purchasing behavior suggests that when looking at loyalty differences between age groups, the degree of brand loyalty may depend on the product category, showing that information on brand loyalty should not be generalized across target markets or product categories (Wood, 2004, 18). In other words, not every store can build brand loyalty in the same way; it depends on what they are selling and who their customers are. Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren may have similar target audiences, but their branding techniques might be different when it comes to successfully building brand loyalty.

### *Brand Awareness*

Brand awareness, a major goal of every retail company, can be defined as, "the strength of a brand's presence in the consumer's mind," and is measured according to how consumers remember a brand, ranging from recognition to recall (Aaker, 1996, 10). Brand awareness is a

topic of interest in recent research (Kahn & Mahmood, 2012; Kristensen, Gabrielsen, & Zaichkowsky, 2012). In a study by Kristensen, Gabrielsen, and Zaichkowsky (2012), results showed that a well-known brand name will greatly increase preference for an object, and therefore may increase value of the brand. Because “brand name may overpower other cues of quality attributes... brand name may be the only cue used by customers in choice” (Kristensen, Gabrielsen, & Zaichkowsky, 2012, 45). Both Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren are highly recognizable retail brands. Consumers worldwide are, for the most part, aware of the type of products these companies sell, and that they stand for value and high quality. This awareness makes these brands more valuable, and adds to their overall brand equity.

### *Perceived Quality*

Perceived quality is the consumer’s judgment about a product or brand’s overall quality (Aaker, 1996). Perceived quality can be the result of many factors, including price. According to Kristensen, Gabrielsen, and Zaichkowsky (2012), “price [of a product] can be A.) A measure of sacrifice and B.) A cue linked to other attributes” (45). It is informational, implied quality information, and can imply status (Kristensen, 2012). By charging the maximum that consumers will pay, companies are making a statement about their product, and consumers who purchase that product may be making a statement about themselves. According to Ubilava, Foster, Lusk, and Nilsson (2011), “consumers generally attribute higher price to higher quality” (63). It is not a secret that Ralph Lauren and Brooks Brothers’ price range is above what would be expected from a similar product at a different store. According to Hancock, “brands associated with high-quality luxury products and style can sell otherwise ordinary items at a higher price (Hancock,



2009, 6). For example, while the average pair of cargo pants at a typical mass apparel retailer might be priced around \$50, cargo pants at Ralph Lauren represented a higher price point at \$165 (Hancock, 2007). Likewise, at Brooks Brothers, “customers should expect luxurious cotton polo shirts priced at \$80, compared with the \$26.50 polos at the Gap” (Browning, 2001, 1). Images associated with the brand, lifestyle mythologies, and advertising campaigns all add to the perceived quality of the product, as “the actual garment itself has become secondary to the branding techniques used to sell it” (Debord, 1997, 28).

Willingness to pay is also connected to perceived quality and price. A study by Ubilava, Foster, Lusk, and Nilsson (2011) showed that there are links between consumer confidence, brand name, and perceived quality, and the “average consumers are willing to pay more for branded products” (69). According to Grant McCracken, “every product and service is made up of its physical properties, functional features, and cultural meanings” (McCracken, 2005, 175). Meaning adds value to products. When looking at companies that charge more for products, like Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren, it is clear that “a good deal of the price...comes from the meanings of the brand” (McCracken, 2005, 191). Therefore, as will be discussed later, the meanings behind the products are often worth more than the products themselves.

### *Brand Associations*

Associations a consumer makes with a brand are necessary for a brand’s success, according to a study by Sheena, Mohanan, and Naresh (2012). How a consumer makes associations with a brand has a lot to do with brand identity, which according to Aaker is, “what the organization wants the brand to stand for in the customer’s mind” (1996, 25). Associations to

a brand are “informational links of the attributes, benefits and attitudes about the brand in the memory of a consumer and it reveals the meaning of the brand to the consumer” (Sheena, 2012, 33). These associations, such as symbols, product attributes, or celebrity spokespeople help brands identify in the consumer’s mind and create a strong relationship between the consumer and the brand (Aaker, 1996). For Brooks Brothers, some current associations to the brand might be the Golden Fleece logo, suits and ties, Ivy League, *The Great Gatsby*, and Thom Browne. For Ralph Lauren, they might be the Polo player, high quality, rugby, Argentina, summer in the Hamptons, and Ralph Lauren himself.

#### *Other Proprietary Brand Assets*

The last category of Aaker’s Brand Equity model is other proprietary brand assets, which was added to provide completeness to the model (Aaker, 1996). It refers to “patents, trademarks and channel relationships, which can provide strong competitive advantage” (Moisescu, 2005, 215). Trademarks and patents help brands stay competitive by protecting brands from competitors that try to use similar names, symbols, packaging, and ideas. A history of brand performance allows a brand to control distribution channels, which is also an asset to the brands (Moisescu, 2005). By preventing direct competition, brands are protecting themselves from losing customers and diminishing brand loyalty, therefore affecting brand equity. Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren both work hard to protect their brand assets against eager competitors looking to get a piece of their success.

Recent research has focused a lot on the connections and intersectionality between these dimensions of brand equity, which are key to building successful brands, like American heritage

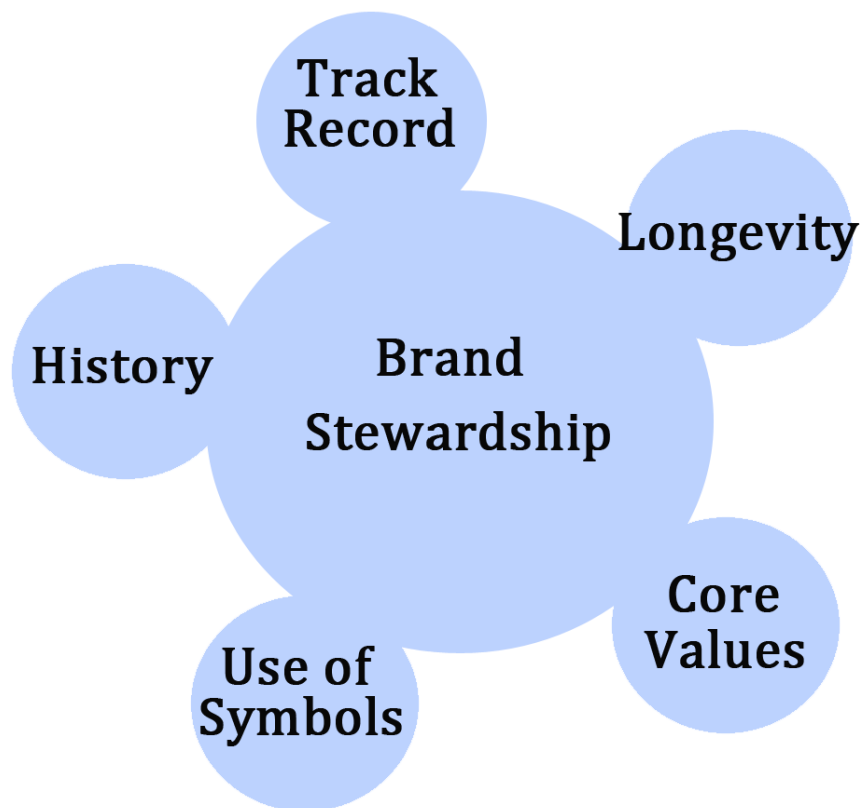
brands. However, little research has been done on what a heritage brand actually is and how it can best utilize these dimensions of brand equity.

## **Heritage Brands**

As “heritage brand” is a fairly recent term, no established definition is available. However, there are certain characteristics that help to develop an idea of what it means to be a heritage brand. Heritage brands often define themselves based on their historic roots, fine quality and value, a classic image, and a traditional American lifestyle (“American Classic,” 2013; “Ralph Lauren,” 2013).

Craig Higgins (2011) notes in his study on premium British menswear that “heritage” “suggests something that is passed on or handed down from generation to generation, inherited, a status that is acquired through birth, a birthright” (3). He also discusses the idea of heritage brands having a “Heritage Quotient (HQ)... [that can be] recognized by the presence of certain characteristics (Elements of Brand Heritage)” (Higgins, 2011, 6). In his study, he cites a conceptual framework for determining a brand's HQ, which hold “brand stewardship” in the center, and five elements of brand heritage (track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols, and history) surrounding it. Higgins (2011) states that, “the more one observes these characteristics within a brand, the higher its Heritage Quotient” (6). Figure 2 illustrates the framework for Heritage Quotient.

**Figure 2. Heritage Quotient** (Higgins, 2011).



Liebrenz-Himes, Shamma, and Dyer (2007) note that “heritage brands are seen to have status, character, social class, and a history... [and they] express their heritage in the form of a narrative, or a brand story” (142). Their story is equally as important to heritage brands as their qualities and traditions, as it allows the brands to evoke an emotional response in their customers (McMahon & Morley, 2011). Creating an emotional customer is only possible, however, if brands know their target audience, which will be discussed further in the next section on branding methods.

## BRANDING METHODS

There are a multitude of branding methods that are continuously used by companies in order to connect with consumers and stay competitive in the retail industry. For American heritage brands, the key methods that are often utilized are the application of semiotics, emotional branding, and storytelling. Creating identity and inventing tradition are also discussed as potentially important aspects of storytelling. For American heritage companies, these branding methods are essential to building a strong brand identity and significant brand equity.

### **Semiotics**

According to Joseph Hancock, “the main function of fashion branding is to provide a structure that uses images and language to impart meaning to retail products” (2009, 24). When brands use images and words to tell a story or send a message, they are doing so through the use of semiotics. Semiotics is the science of signs. In semiotics, there are two levels of the sign according to Saussure: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is a “word, a sound, or an image, but in case of fashion/dress studies, we often apply the sign system to objects and images” (Kawamura, 2011, 83). The signified is the meaning that is created by the signifier—the concept that is indicated by the word, sound, or image presented. Both the signifier and the signified must exist together to create a sign, and there is “no final meaning attached to a sign because it is constantly changing according to its context” (Kawamura, 2011, 89). Semiotics can be used to look at clothing and fashion and how, as items of culture, they can signify meaning.

According to Peirce, there are three types of signs: an icon, an index and a symbol (Baldaia, 2005, 171). An icon signifies through resemblance, an index signifies through cause or

indication, and a symbol signifies through a social convention— a shared code. The development of a code is similar to learning a language, and knowledge of the indicated code is necessary to interpret the symbol as a sign in a meaningful way. Signs are used to transfer meanings within certain contexts. Hancock defines context as, “the medium, circumstances, or situation in which the product and the message (the ad) are transmitted and received” (Hancock, 2009, 14). In order to understand the meaning of the sign, however, there must first be understanding of the code necessary to interpret the sign— a “framework from which cultural meaning may be drawn” (Baldaia, 2005, 172). Companies like Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren use images and words in their advertisements and catalogues that signify heritage brand ideals. Consumers are able to understand those ideals only if they understand the codes being utilized. Consumers who identify with the codes and contexts used by heritage brands may be more likely to also identify with their message and values.

### **Emotional Branding**

Through the use of emotional branding, a brand emphasizes its “personality and forge[s] an intimate connection with customers” (Holt, 2004, 21). Emotional branding is essential in creating brand equity, as it creates an attachment between a brand and its customers. This emotional attachment to brands is the result of “potent identity myths spun by the brand,” and cannot be built by simply provoking emotional reactions through artificial connections such as sappy advertising (Holt, 2004, 28). The emotional connection to a brand has to be significant if consumers are going to find meaning in it. Products themselves are no longer enough to attract consumers. The choice to buy a product and the price consumers are willing to pay for it are a

result of emotional reactions to the meaning behind the product (Gobe, 2001, xvi). Emotional meaning is created when consumers find value in the stories behind the products in helping them to create their own identity (Holt, 2004, 3). One way that heritage brands create emotional value for their customers is through storytelling.

## **Storytelling**

Storytelling is a means for creating an emotional connection to that brand. The power of the “storytelling process relies on a company’s capability to make an emotional connection through their brand and to build target markets” (Hancock, 2009, 6). A brand is more than a name and a logo; brands have stories behind them that give them meaning. Storytelling is an essential technique that brands use to create meaning and build brand equity. Stories are continually reinforced by “companies, the culture industries, intermediaries (such as critics and retail sales people) and customers,” influencing the meaning a brand is given, and in turn making a brand more powerful (Holt, 2004, 3). Storytelling is the “vehicle that communicates [a company’s] values [and messages] in a process that is easy for consumers to understand” (Hancock, 2009, 7). One way that a company can communicate a story to consumers is through advertising. The basic concepts of storytelling are message, conflict, characters, and plot. By using these concepts, advertising “is able to pique consumer interest while branding associations to their products and creating emotional meaning” (Hancock, 2009, 7). From an anthropological standpoint, expressed emotions in advertising are “grounded and linked to larger cultural outlooks, values, symbols, metaphors, practices, and processes, cultural phenomena which [are] also ethnographically evidenced in everyday life” (Sunderland & Denny, 2007, 141-142).

Advertisements have the ability to connect with consumers in a multitude of ways, and make people truly love a brand. Two aspects of storytelling that are critical for American heritage brands: creating an identity and inventing tradition. As will be shown, both Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren utilize narratives in such a way, especially in the service of creating identity.

### *Creating Identity*

Storytelling as a branding method not only creates an identity for the brand, but for the consumers as well. Identity is a key issue in contemporary fashion, according to Abby Lillethun, as “people manage their appearance in order to present identities they perceive as congruent with their objectives and goals” (Lillethun, 2011a, 190). Lillethun continues by explaining that it is often one’s occupation that shapes one’s identity, and one’s appearance at work can influence “perceptions such as status, competence, and appropriateness” (Lillethun, 2011a, 191). Quality and taste are often attributes sought after by those aiming to construct an identity that communicates a higher social status in the workplace (Lillethun, 2011a). The clothes, and often more important, the brands that people choose play a key role in forming their identities because “by opting for particular brands, a consumer demonstrates that he or she embraces particular values; hence, the brand becomes a tool of identity formation” (Asamoah, Selase, Chovancová, De Alwis, Kumara, & Guo, 2011, 6).



## *Inventing Tradition*

Another important aspect related to storytelling within American heritage menswear is the suggestion of tradition within the stories reproduced by a brand. Implying that heritage brands represent a tradition in American menswear can be seen as an “exercise in social engineering,” that is both deliberate and successful (Hobsbawm, 1983). Tradition can be defined as “a set of practices which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm, 1983, 1). However, traditions that appear to be old are often “quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (Hobsbawm, 1983, 1). According to Eric Hobsbawm, invented traditions,

belong to three overlapping types: a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior (Hobsbawm, 1983, 9).

American heritage brands are an example of a group that plays off of traditions, real or invented. Like other invented traditions, they are unspecific and vague concerning their focus on values and characteristics, which, as discussed earlier, they often cite as pertaining to history, quality, and a classic image. Heritage brands often utilize storytelling to invent their own traditions through “creation, dismantling and restructuring of images of the past,” and creating signs of membership that are symbolic and emotionally charged (Hobsbawm, 1983, 13).

Implying tradition in their stories legitimizes a heritage brand's relationship to status, as inventing tradition often evokes a sense of superiority of elites (Hobsbawm, 1983).

Storytelling is the “vehicle that communicates values in a process that is easy for consumers to understand” (Hancock, 2009, 7). Heritage brands reproduce stories, whether real or invented, through images and advertising to create emotional meaning for consumers. The next section will investigate the importance of these branding methods as identified in previous studies on fashion branding.

## INVESTIGATIONS IN BRANDING

There has been a considerable amount of research on fashion branding, some of which is helpful in this examination of branding by heritage companies. Fashion branding is not a new concept, and examining the way certain types of retailers utilize branding methods is helpful in understanding the branding techniques of companies like Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren.

### **Brand Equity**

Jennifer Mello's thesis, *Designer Brands at Mass Merchants and Discount Retailers and Their Effect on Brand Equity*, examines how brand equity of mass merchants such as Target, H&M, and Kohl's is affected when they offer collections from high-end designers. This study used focus groups, and discussion responses from the participants were coded and analyzed based on Aaker's Dimensions of Brand Equity Model. Results from the study showed that

“designer brands at mass merchants have a positive effect on brand equity,” and by having high-end designers in mass merchants and discount retailers, stores could attract new customers and be viewed more favorably than stores that do not feature collections by designers (Mello, 2009, 47). Mello’s study offered insight into the importance of brand equity for companies, as well as the effect that a designer brand name can have on consumers. Results showed that designer brands have higher perceived quality, which allows for higher prices, than store brands. Designer brands also carry more positive associations with consumers.

### **Lifestyle Marketing**

Building brand equity is the main concern of retailers, and many companies, like Ralph Lauren, have been successful in this by creating a lifestyle within their brand. An excerpt by Mark Tungate in *The Fashion Reader*, gives an example of how a successful British brand, Dunhill, was built through creating and advertising a fantasy lifestyle (Tungate, 2011). In the late nineteenth century, Dunhill created for itself an image of the “quintessentially British male” by making its name synonymous with the newly embraced automobile (Tungate, 2011, 509). The brand “cultivated an air of dashing refinement” by creating a product line of clothing and accessories for motorists when owning a car was still something only for the privileged (Tungate, 2011, 509). Through the use of advertising and celebrity endorsers, Dunhill produced an idealized image of the British male, and created a lifestyle that male customers longed to relate to. Along with their product line, Dunhill “underline[d] its brand values and lifestyle

positioning... [by] engag[ing] in sponsorship activities” that perpetuated their idealized image, such as prestigious golf events (Tungate, 2011, 510). And perhaps as one of the most extreme examples of lifestyle branding, Tungate describes Dunhill ‘s innovative creation of “Dunhill branded gentlemen’s clubs,” which aimed to “create the ultimate masculine universe” in cities all around the world (Tungate, 2011, 510). The clubs were not only a retail environment, but also included tailors, shirt makers, barbers, treatment rooms, bars, restaurants, and overnight bedrooms, all of which “encompassed the values of the brand: Britishness, quirkiness, and masculinity” (Tungate, 2011, 510). This study helps to illustrate the successful way in which lifestyle branding can be utilized by a company to create emotional meaning for consumers and build brand equity.

Teri Agins also examines the use of lifestyle marketing by retail companies in a case study of Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger in her book *The End of Fashion* (Agins, 1999). In the Chapter, “Bound for Glory: Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger,” Agins explores how, in the late 1990s, both of these designers were knocking off the American flag and finding a new use for it as a symbol of the redefining of American fashion (Agins, 1999). Tommy Hilfiger basically copied Ralph Lauren in his entire business model, and began a notorious “tug of war over marketing” (Agins, 1999, 82). What is essential about these American designers, as Agins points out, is that neither of them sketched, sewed, or actually designed any original clothes. They were, instead, the “haute couturiers of marketing,” and exemplified the way fashion in America had

changed. Fashion was no longer about the clothes, it was about the labels, the packaging, and the images evoked through the lifestyle stories created by these innovative “designers.” The success of these men came from “their ability to fulfill a deep-seated desire among all consumers: to belong” (Agin, 1999, 85). Gone were the days of the original and the exclusive couture, new fashion was “about inclusion, belonging to a world or lifestyle that feels good, looks good, and above all else, is accessible” (Agin, 1999, 85). By using the American flag as a symbol, and creating stories that captured the desires of people around the world, these designers successfully branded their way to greatness. This study was important to understanding the way that Ralph Lauren created an American heritage company through lifestyle marketing.

### **Branding to Men**

Lifestyle marketing is an important aspect of branding, as it can be utilized across different target markets. However, there are unique aspects of branding to men that must be examined. Branding in menswear is very different from branding in women’s fashion. The idea of menswear evokes images of anything from business suits to vintage washed jeans. How such items came to belong in menswear begins with questions of how gender is fashioned. Susan Kaiser’s book, *Fashion and Cultural Studies*, suggests that many ideas about what menswear is today stems from ideas of “euromodern hegemonic masculinity” and a “masculine renunciation of fashion”(Kaiser, 2012, 137). During the time of the French Enlightenment and American and French Revolutionary wars, the late 17<sup>th</sup> century to late 18<sup>th</sup> century, menswear went through the

process of becoming unmarked, gradually distancing itself from fashion and femininity. It did this by emphasizing “ ‘manly’ (heavier, darker, wool rather than silk) materials, cuts of clothing (gradually less shapely or form fitting and yet still streamlined), and subtle detailing” (Kaiser, 2012, 126). Being unmarked, but conscious of subtle detailing became a standard for masculinity in menswear, which Kaiser shows by saying,

This became the crux of being an unmarked man of style: modern and manly through a businesslike demeanor that thrived on tailored nuance rather than obvious fashion change. The business suit, in one subtle form or another, had endured more than 200 years as a dominant symbol of hegemonic (bourgeois) masculinity (Kaiser, 2012, 126).

By showing that the business suit represented masculinity, she illustrates one explanation as to how the business suit may have become a timeless staple in American menswear.

Also important in the theory of fashioning gender is the idea that a “masculine” man cares about what he is wearing, but does not blatantly show it. Similarly, a study by Kaiser shows that older men like to look current, without looking too young. These “this-but-not-that” reactions to fashion are what make menswear so complicated and underrated (Kaiser, 2012).

Mark Tungate also references this hot and cold reaction by men to fashion by saying that men often hide their desire for a good-looking article of clothing by referencing their appreciation for its functionality (Tungate, 2011). However, despite the difficult job of getting men to admit that they value looking good in the clothes they wear, the success of companies such as Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren, which both began in menswear, seems to show that men, as a target

market, are not as indifferent to fashion as they often like to seem. Enticing men to indulge in fashion can be successful by using appropriate methods of branding.

These investigations offer insight into the world of fashion branding, and specifically into how important the meaning behind a brand name is for consumers. Brand names of stores, brand names of designers, all conjure up images in the minds of consumers that define their relevance and their worth as brands. Value is added to brands based on the views of consumers. Therefore, creating emotional meaning for consumers, through storytelling— creating a lifestyle, is essential to the success of a brand. The following case studies of Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren will show the importance of these heritage brands in the world of menswear, and why these companies resonate strongly with consumers.

## CASE STUDIES

### **Company Histories**

Brooks Brothers was founded in 1818, as H. & D.H. Brooks & Co., by Henry Sands Brooks near the port in Manhattan just as “trans-Atlantic passenger traffic between New York City and England was starting to boom” (Tsuruoka, 1999, 1). His store started by specializing in ready-to-wear suits, and has grown to be one of the most respected retailers in the world today. The essence of American style, Brooks Brothers is a legendary brand that prides itself on its guiding principles, outlined in its mission statement, “to make and deal only in merchandise of

the finest quality; to sell it at a fair profit and to deal with people who seek and appreciate such merchandise” (Hogan, 2011; Palmieri, 2011).

In 1850, Henry’s three grandsons gained control of the company and renamed it “Brooks Brothers.” Also around this time, Brooks Brothers adopted its logo, the Golden Fleece, which was originally used by Phillip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, in 1430 when he founded the Order of the Golden Fleece. After that, it was used by European merchants who wished to identify themselves as wool traders. Over time, the logo would “effectively capture both the historic British nature of the brand’s early history and its authentic American roots” (Hogan, 2011, 2).

In 1946, Brooks Brothers was bought by Julius Garfinckel & Co., a specialty store chain based in Washington D.C. that ran the company without much change until 1981, when it was sold to Allied Stores Corporation, who then “shifted the company’s business focus to one of profit” (Hogan, 2011, 4). Quickly after that, in 1988, the company was sold again, and this time was bought by British retailer Marks and Spencer. The Marks and Spencer business plan was to modernize the Brooks Brothers product line. For Brooks Brothers, these were the dark days. M&S took away everything that the brand stood for in an effort to reinvent its image (Hogan, 2011, 4).

In 2001, the company was sold to Retail Brand Alliance, a privately held group owned by Claudio del Vecchio, at a bargain basement price of \$225 million (Hogan, 2011, 4). Under strong new ownership, Brooks has been working on restoring the “nostalgia we all felt for our father’s



Brooks Brothers while making the brand entirely relevant and modern” (Palmieri, 2011). In 2007, Brooks paired with innovative American designer, Thom Browne, for their “Black Fleece” Collection, which “produced elegantly quirky takes on classics like the oxford shirt, grey flannel suit and even Roosevelt’s aforementioned classic Navy cape” (Hogan, 2011, 4). Del Vecchio was slowly but surely bringing Brooks back to its once iconic position in American menswear.

Brooks, as it is affectionately called, had a rich heritage, where “experimentation was an integral part of the brands tradition” (Palmieri, 2011, 1). American menswear staples that today may be taken for granted, such as seersucker, the ready-made suit, button-down polo collared oxfords, the repp tie, and argyle socks, for example, were all introduced by Brooks Brothers (Hogan, 2011; Palmieri, 2011). Brooks Brothers created the classic conservative, American style and lifestyle and “patronage of Brooks was likely to be a family tradition,” according to an article in the *New Yorker* in 1938 (Maloney, 1938). It is a brand beloved by millions of customers worldwide, who often “have an emotional attachment to it and don’t want to see it change, even if they haven’t bought anything there in fifteen years” (Mead, 1999, 88-89).

Ralph Lauren has a very different history, but ironically has some Brooks Brothers roots. Ralph Lifshitz, who later changed his last name to Lauren, is the son of a Russian Jewish immigrant, and grew up in the Bronx, New York. In the late 1950s, after college, Ralph Lauren worked as a salesman at Brooks Brothers. In 1967 Ralph Lauren came out with his first original line of ties, which were wider than the ties that were popular at the time, and also more

expensive. He gave his line a sporty name, Polo, and in 1969 extended the line to menswear. In fact, Ralph Lauren had to buy the right to use the “Polo” trademark from Brooks Brothers (Hogan, 2011; Hancock, 2009). Polo, the team sport played on horseback, and sometimes called “the Sport of Kings,” was formalized and popularized by the British. So why would a young man with roots in the Bronx name his company Polo? According to Joseph Hancock, “by using the word *Polo* to define his total strategic brand concept, Ralph Lauren associated his brand to status” (Hancock, 2007, 94).

Ralph Lauren, which started with a tie collection, has grown to an internationally renowned lifestyle brand. The Ralph Lauren brand consists of numerous divisions, which for menswear includes Polo Ralph Lauren, Purple Label, Black Label, Rugby, Club Monaco, Chaps, RLX, RRL, RL Golf, and Denim & Supply. Ralph Lauren’s focus has always been on lifestyle marketing and association— putting practical garments in a luxury setting, which enables consumers to associate the brand with high-end status (Hancock, 2009). RL describes itself as a brand that stands for “providing quality products, creating worlds and inviting people to take part in our dream” (“Ralph Lauren,” 2013).

Today, Ralph Lauren’s business model is comprised of “three key revenue sources: wholesale, retail and licensing” (“Polo Ralph Lauren,” 2011). In 2010, 51% of Ralph Lauren’s profits came from the wholesale business, by selling the brand in department stores such as Macy’s and Nordstrom. The retail done through Ralph Lauren’s own stores, such as the flagship

store on Madison Avenue, made up 45% of revenue. Brand licensing of fragrance and beauty products bearing the Ralph Lauren name accounted for 4% of sales. The company also has a major online presence, where sales at ralphlauren.com were up 24% in 2010. By building a lifestyle brand, and through his attention to classic design, quality and the retail environment, Ralph Lauren has made himself a powerhouse in American menswear.

### **Quality**

Both Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren pride themselves on only selling products of the highest quality. Brooks Brothers, in an effort to once again produce garments as well as sell them, bought the Southwick Clothing Company in 2008 (Hogan, 2011). Southwick, located in Haverhill, Massachusetts, is an American suit-making company that has used hand-sewn techniques since the turn of the twentieth century. It had been a supplier to Brooks Brothers for years, and when Southwick was in danger of closing its doors and relocating to Southeast Asia, Brooks Brothers purchased the company and modernized its facilities, allowing Brooks to continue to offer American-made suits of the highest quality (“Southwick,” 2012). Brooks Brothers also owns a shirt factory in Garland, North Carolina. Owning these factories allows Brooks to control the manufacturing of their pants, suits, vests, and shirts, and by eliminating the middleman, it allows for better quality control overall.

Ralph Lauren does not own or operate any of its own production facilities, but instead sources both finished products and raw materials from over 350 different manufacturers

worldwide (“Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation,” 2006). Ralph Lauren has global manufacturing divisions headquartered in Asia, South America and Europe that work closely with suppliers to ensure that all products are produced according to their specifications. They have “production and quality control staff in the United States, South America, Asia and Europe who monitor manufacturing at supplier facilities in order to correct problems prior to shipment of the final product” (“Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation,” 2006).

Companies like Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren are able to guarantee the highest quality products by choosing suppliers with sterling reputations for being the best in the world (M. Templeton, personal communication, April 30, 2013). Company buyers choose vendors that have the best weavers, and the best yarn suppliers, in order to guarantee products of the highest quality. For example, a Brooks Brothers suit made in America by Southwick might use tweed from Lovat Mill in Hawick, Scotland, a world-renowned tweed manufacturer. Fabric and apparel buyers from both Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren have a responsibility to maintain the highest level of quality by only choosing suppliers who offer the best products available.

### **American Style**

Classic, American style in menswear is not easily pinpointed, as menswear in America has continuously been influenced by British men’s fashion. Trousers and jackets were working-class clothes for men in England, but were made fashionable in aristocratic circles after being adopted by royalty (North, 2011). The lounge coat and trousers, which became today’s business

suit, was first introduced by the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, in the 1840's (North, 2011). Even in the 1950s, the influence of British Teddy Boys was evident in mainstream men's suits (Webber, 2011). The idea that "status and fashionability in men's dress was expressed through the quality of the fabric and the cut" is a notion that developed in England and still applies in menswear today (Cooper, 2011, 70). Much of what can be considered classic, American style, actually began with the British.

However, Brooks Brothers, despite having been heavily influenced by British men's fashion in the beginning, was able to take those menswear traditions from England, and use them to cultivate a unique American style. Brooks contributed substantially to the ideal image of American menswear with their own innovations of timeless staples such as the ready-made suit and button-down polo collared oxfords. Brooks Brothers is also often "credited for having invented what is known as the 'preppy' look or the 'Ivy League' look" (Khatau, 2012, 1). This included button-down shirts, crewnecks, letter sweaters, and chinos. Ivy style adopted its name from the Ivy League, while "preppy" comes from preparatory school, which were traditionally boarding high schools for boys (Mears, 2012). These styles emerged in the early twentieth century and were widespread by the late 1950s. Preppy style can be distinguished as "a more youthful and colorful version of Ivy style" (Mears, 2012, 19). While Brooks was an originator of Ivy style, Ralph Lauren is also noted for his heavy influence, in that he "made a fetish" out of it (Mears, 2012, 19).

American menswear has also historically been heavily influenced by literature and film. Brooks Brothers contributed significantly to the American lifestyle described in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), as well as Sloane Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955). Fitzgerald was a lifelong customer of Brooks Brothers. He was one of the first famous Americans to wear Brooks' soft collared button-down shirt, one of the original "American fashion sensibilities" that Brooks developed (Hogan, 2011, 3). Therefore, it is not hard to understand why "Brooks Brothers is mentioned numerous times in Fitzgerald's writings as a representation of the ultimate gentleman's purveyor of fine clothing to the American man of distinction" (Mau, 2013, 1). A 2013 remake of *The Great Gatsby* drew upon the Brooks Brothers' archives to fashion the costumes for the men in the film. Some of the quintessential items from the 1920s, like the straw boater, were easy to acquire for the film, as they are still a part of the Brooks Brothers product line today ("Behind the Scenes," 2013). Also, in celebration of the film's remake, Brooks Brothers has created a limited edition Great Gatsby-inspired collection, featuring shawl cardigans, waistcoats, bow ties, and more (Mau, 2013).

Brook Brothers greatly influenced the Madison Avenue Look, iconized in the novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), which was made into a film starring Gregory Peck in 1956 (Webber, 2011). At this time, gray or charcoal wool flannel suits were very popular in menswear (Webber, 2011). The book, which was "dealing with issues of conformity in the workplace during the 1950s," illustrated that, "the standard uniform of the American worker was grey

flannel” (“Get Your Flannel,” 2011). The novel illustrated this in its description of “a lot of bright young men in gray flannel suits rushing around New York in a frantic parade to nowhere” (Brady, 1973, 1). However, within a few years of this film, the gray flannel suit was out. That is, until it made a comeback in 1973.

Brooks Brothers was regarded as “the most thoughtful curator of the gray flannel tradition,” and was ready for the revival of the classic menswear staple in the 70s (Brady, 1973, 1). Ralph Lauren, who was just 34 at the time but had already won two awards for his menswear designs, also spoke of the evolution of the gray flannel, saying, “today’s gray flannel isn’t the old sack, three button uptight uniform. There’s more individuality in accessories. Today you can wear a striped shirt with gray flannel. We’re not bringing back the button down” (Brady, 1973, 1). This quote speaks to the development of American men’s fashion, particularly for suits, as the styles do not seem to drastically change, but logically develop from preceding styles, as explained by the fashion process model of historical continuity (Lillethun, 2011b). However, this model cannot apply to menswear as a whole, as it does not represent the process for all menswear trends. It also does not accurately describe the process for Brooks Brothers, which preferred not to follow trends in fashion at all, stating, “We’re not in the fashion business. We’re in the clothing business” (Hogan, 2011, 3). Brooks has maintained this ideology from the beginning, and has continued to sell the tradition behind the “three-piece classical Brooks

Brothers gray flannel.” Ralph Lauren, at the same time, was reinventing the conventional, and creating a whole new way to sell it.

Clearly, Ralph Lauren has also had an immense impact on American style, but in a very different way than Brooks Brothers. Lauren built his brand on a story, a story that offered to all “the promise— the façade— of a particular American lifestyle: the WASP, the Ivy League, the country club, the socialite, the polo player, the successful businessman, the cowboy” (Manlow, 2011, 89). Ralph Lauren believes strongly that his company represents America (“Oprah Interviews,” 2011). Not only because he built it from nothing— an extraordinary example of the classic American dream— but because he was able to create the ultimate American lifestyle through his products. With looks suitable for any man, from cowboys to Ivy League scholars, the Ralph Lauren brand epitomizes ideals of the twentieth century Anglo-Saxon American establishment.

In addition to the styles of the English aristocrat, and the preppy or Ivy- League look, Ralph Lauren has also made popular another classic American style: Western wear. Worn-in denim paired with plaids, Navajo prints, and cowboy boots offer a rugged look suitable from the deserts of the Wild West to the streets of Manhattan. Ralph Lauren’s influence on American style is substantial, as he creates not only clothes, but lifestyles to live in.

The success of these two companies illustrates the importance of American heritage brands and their role in menswear. They have produced quality products, and through the use of



branding, created an ideal image of the American man. Looking at how these images are created, as well as why they work, allows us to see how Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren were able to become icons in American menswear.

### **Semiotics, Emotional Branding and Storytelling**

As discussed earlier in this paper, emotional branding and storytelling are vital branding methods that enable retail companies to make connections with their customers. Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren use the science of semiotics to signify heritage brand ideals. As mentioned before, “heritage brands are seen to have status, character, social class, and a history” (Liebrenz-Himes et al., 2007, 142). Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren pride themselves on their historic roots, fine quality and value, a classic image, and a traditional American lifestyle (“American Classic,” 2013; “Ralph Lauren,” 2013). The images and words produced in advertisements and catalogues emphasize these values, and create stories from which customers can identify.

Ralph Lauren featured images on its web page for fall 2012 that depicted a man in tweed on horseback, and another with two men standing next to a foreign sports car in the countryside (images accessed from [ralphlauren.com](http://ralphlauren.com), February 2013). Another image, for spring 2013, shows a man in a pink button-down shirt and seersucker blazer posing with a bicycle next to a building with shingle siding (image accessed from [ralphlauren.com](http://ralphlauren.com), April 2013). There is meaning behind these images, but consumers will only be able to understand the ideals being presented if they understand the codes being utilized. For example, the images featuring men in tweed on

horseback, and standing next to a foreign sports car in the countryside, have very English connotations of aristocracy. The English upper class would often wear tweed while hunting or riding in the English countryside because tweed is an exceptionally warm fabric. The car featured in the second ad is most likely a 1957 MGA (or something similar), an iconic British sports car. Both of these ads use images relating the clothing to ideals of British superiority, evoking the feelings of status, history, and tradition, all values emphasized by heritage brands.

The third ad is also based on idea of superiority or elite status, as the bicycle next to the building with cedar shingle siding is a quintessential image of New England and East Coast beach houses. Typically found in Rhode Island, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard, and the Hamptons, these homes are summer destinations for upper-class city dwellers and Ivy Leaguers on break. A classic image, it is representative of an elite social-class ideal, often associated with heritage brands. All of these ads represent an ideal of elitism, but they will resonate more strongly with consumers who understand the context of the ads.

A Brooks Brothers' advertising campaign for its fall/ winter 2008 line featured black and white photos of men, women, and children of different ages all donning Brooks Brothers ("Brooks Brothers Bench," 2008). The tag line is simple, "Brooks Brothers: Generations of Style." The first ad shows a line of generations, from young boy to adult, sitting on a park bench in Brooks Brothers suits and ties, some holding umbrellas. The umbrellas may be adding an English connotation, which contribute to a feeling of elitism in the ad. The message is clear:

Brooks Brothers has something for every age. However, the campaign may hold much more meaning to customers who are knowledgeable about the Brooks Brothers tradition. The ads are representative of the many stories of sons buying their first suit with their fathers, and continuing to be a customer for the rest of their lives because the quality is unmatched by any other suit (Mead, 1999).

The second ad portrays couples and young adults also sitting on a park bench, enjoying a spring afternoon in their more casual Brooks Brothers attire. Without a suit in sight, this ad depicts a certain lifestyle ideal, where Brooks Brothers is appropriately worn by everyone in the family. Both of these images illuminate Brooks Brothers' time-honored belief that "the old is as new as tomorrow, providing it is correct" (David, 1950, 1). These ads speak to the tradition and the history held within the Brooks Brothers brand, which is emphasized more by the ads being in black and white. They evoke a sense of nostalgia and tradition, values held by heritage brands, which are also meaningful to customers, while simultaneously portraying current styles. Customers who understand the context behind the images perpetuated by advertisements from Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren are much more likely to identify with the messages and values that the brands stand for.

Ralph Lauren and Brooks Brothers both create emotional meaning in their products through the images they portray and the stories they tell in their advertising. They use ideal images that relay to the consumer who they are and who they want to be. Through branding, both

companies seamlessly convey to consumers that by wearing the brands, it says something about who they are.

Ralph Lauren's 1979 marketing campaign is another exceptional example of how advertising can create a story and a lifestyle that people connect with and want to be a part of (Hancock, 2009). The campaign, by fashion photographer Bruce Weber, established Ralph Lauren as a lifestyle brand. By using small amounts of text and working with "non-models" instead of supermodels, the twenty-page spread gave the image that the clothes were part of an overall lifestyle, and it is still used as an example for lifestyle brand advertising today (Hancock, 2009). Ralph Lauren also depicts his immersion in the brand by being the face of the lifestyle himself.

Ralph Lauren tells stories about "aristocrats, Ivy Leaguers, and adventurers who ride horses on ranches, take safaris in Kenya, or yacht in Newport" (Agin, 1999; Kaiser, 119). He creates different worlds through advertising and even by manipulating space in department stores, such as when he convinced Bloomingdale's to put all of his products together in a boutique that was designed to look like a "gentleman's club with wood paneling, brass fixtures, and elite accessories such as walking sticks and antique alligator luggage. [which] stirred all kinds of longings in people, the dream that the upwardly mobile shared for prestige, wealth, and exotic adventure" (Agin, 1999; Kaiser, 119). Brooks Brothers, similarly, evokes certain images through the use of store space, especially the Madison Avenue store—"the birthplace of a

vestmental tradition that has become part of Americana” (Mead, 1999, 89). The stories and spaces that Ralph Lauren and Brooks Brothers create simultaneously give meaning to every product that they sell and generate further brand equity.

Ralph Lauren created a story for his brand based on a quintessential American lifestyle that never actually existed, and customers have never been able to get enough. Brooks Brothers, also, has aimed to make its brand part of a lifestyle since the beginning. For example, starting in 1926, Brooks Brothers published a monthly gazette called *Brook’s Miscellany & Gentlemen’s Intelligencer*, which “focused on social events around the northeast, sporting ephemera, jaunty political discussion and historical anecdotes dating back ... to the company’s origins” (“Miscellany,” 2012). By doing this, Brooks Brothers was connecting with the consumer through more than just clothing; it was integrating the company in the customers’ life, thereby becoming a household name. Today, Brooks has brought back this tradition with its new online magazine, *Miscellany*, which is described as “a repository for polite anecdote, notable occurrences, contemporary etiquette and other more frivolous concerns” (“Miscellany,” 2012). This magazine, undoubtedly, speaks to a particular kind of customer, one that might already be loyal to the Brooks Brothers brand. Therefore, it is a smart way for Brooks to target that certain niche in their consumer base, and add to their identity as a brand that is part of a lifestyle.

Brands that focus on creating an identity generate consumer value by “becoming consensus expressions of particular values held dear by some members of society” (Holt, 2004,

4). A brand cannot be successful if it does not connect with the customers in a meaningful way.

It's not about the clothes— it's about the value behind the meaning of the clothes, and what the customers believe is enhanced about themselves when they wear the brand.

### **Branding to the American Man**

By wearing either Brooks Brothers or Ralph Lauren (or both at the same time), customers aim to say something about who they are and who they want to be. They are able to create an image for themselves, which is based on the stories that the brands construct. For Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren customers, the key aspects that men identify with, that are continuously presented to them by these brands, and have allowed these brands to become so iconic, are ideas of tradition, status, masculinity, and a sense of belonging.

Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren customers are often very drawn to the idea of tradition. As discussed earlier, heritage brands are a group that can be described as inventing their own traditions, often by adapting and using old models for new purposes. According to Eric Hobsbawm, invented traditions create “emotionally and symbolically charged signs” (Hobsbawm, 1983, 11). These brands seem to do this in order to invent a past that represents their values. From the rite of passage represented by buying a first Brooks Brothers suit, to wearing a Ralph Lauren sport coat made from Scottish tartan, these innovators in American menswear generate their own invented traditions, which seem to resonate well with their customers. Customers react positively to the images and stories portrayed by these brands as being traditional, or part of a

tradition, because they evoke emotional reactions. The idea of “tradition” suggests a sense of nostalgia for the past, a dedication to quality products, and perhaps a personal preference for “classic” style. It also implies a relationship to status by evoking a “sense of superiority of elites” (Hobsbawm, 1983, 10).

Status—which is consistently represented by images relating to the English aristocratic roots of menswear, and the social elitism of the Ivy League lifestyle—is repeatedly utilized as a defining characteristic of these American heritage brands. These images resonate with Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren customers because they are ideal images of success. Everyone uses fashion as a way to represent who they are and who they want to be, and “people manage their appearance in order to present identities they perceive as congruent with their objectives and goals” (Lillethun, 2011a, 190). Therefore, since appearance can influence perceptions of status, and Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren are brands that communicate a higher social status, wearing these brands became the symbolic image of male high status.

In addition to looking successful, Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren customers may be drawn to the brands for the way that they portray American masculinity within the ideas of “euromodern hegemonic masculinity,” which includes being unmarked, but conscious of subtle detailing (Kaiser, 2012, 137). A “masculine” man cares about what he is wearing, but does not blatantly show it. These menswear ideals have been continuously emphasized in the product lines of Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren. Brooks Brothers specializes in the business suit,

which has been a symbol of masculinity for over 200 years (Kaiser, 2012, 126). Ralph Lauren allows customers to be “masculine and sporty while simultaneously aristocratic and elite” (Riello, 2010, 555). Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren portray quintessential images of the masculine male, which appeals to many male customers in America.

Also appealing to the American male, which Brooks and Ralph Lauren have both capitalized on, is the desire to belong. Men’s fashion today is about inclusion and belonging to a world or lifestyle that is accessible (Agin, 1999). Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren represent both superiority and accessibility, in that anyone can be a part of their ideal lifestyle when they buy their products. Menswear seems to be more about fitting in than standing out, and Brooks and Ralph Lauren offer a number of lifestyles that suit many different ideals.

By appealing to male desires to be successful, masculine, and part of an elite group that recognizes the value in tradition, these American heritage brands are consistently able to hook their customers and represent more than just clothing. These companies aim to represent the American man, and everything he is capable of being.

### **Heritage Quotient**

By representing the American man, these companies also represent what it means to be an American heritage brand. Brands need to have certain characteristics in order to qualify them to be heritage brands, as shown by Higgins’ heritage quotient model (Figure 2). The model is a framework for determining a brand’s heritage quotient. The degree to which a brand can be



considered a heritage brand is based on brand stewardship, the relationship between a consumer and a brand, which for heritage brands is defined according to five elements: track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols, and history. The heritage quotient is determined by the amount that these characteristics are observed within a brand.

Brooks Brothers can be considered to have a high heritage quotient, according to Higgins' model, because it has many characteristics that fit within these elements of brand heritage. Their track record is strong, as they have an impressive list of accomplishments in American menswear. They also have had a long duration of service, since they have been around since 1818. Their core values of fashion innovation, fine quality, personal service, and exceptional value in their products are also representative of heritage brands, while their use of symbols represent these values, and help define their image as a heritage company through a brand story. Lastly, Brooks Brothers' history is vast, and important to its image as a top American menswear brand. All of these elements add to Brooks Brothers heritage quotient, allowing the company to be a strong representation of a heritage brand.

Ralph Lauren also can be seen as having a high heritage quotient, as it too holds within the brand all of these characteristics. It has not been around nearly as long as Brooks Brothers, but has been consistent in its accomplishments in men's fashion since its beginning. It also holds similar core values as Brooks Brothers, namely quality products with American style. Ralph Lauren's use of symbols creates stories that invite customers into a different world, and its

history of success is unparalleled. You cannot talk about American menswear without talking about Ralph Lauren. These elements of brand heritage are characteristics that have defined Ralph Lauren as a company, clearly outlining its importance as a heritage brand.

The heritage quotient model summarizes the important characteristics held by Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren that have been discussed throughout this paper, and helps to establish their identity as strong heritage brands. These companies represent all that it means to be an American heritage brand, which is perhaps why they have continued to be so successful.

## **Conclusion**

Branding is an essential part of what makes a successful brand. Often, it is not about the clothes that are being sold, but the ideals that customers resonate with. These ideals are portrayed through the use of branding methods such as utilizing semiotics, storytelling, and creating emotional meaning. Ralph Lauren and Brooks Brothers are two examples of American heritage brands that have grown on the strength of their mythology and the emotional meaning that consumers are able to find in their products, such as ideas of tradition, status, masculinity, and a sense of belonging. Both of these brands have successfully “constructed a cultivated lifestyle, appealing to a nostalgic yearning for traditional values, authenticity, and stability in a rapidly changing society,” which has made them both desirable and unforgettable (Riello, 2010, 555). Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren represent a standard of excellence in American menswear, and the viability of these brands relies on the power behind the stories they tell and the lifestyles

they create. These companies rely on branding methods to build strong brand equity. Through an examination of branding methods and an in-depth look at Brooks Brothers and Ralph Lauren, I have shown the importance of branding for American heritage brands, and how the stories created of an idealized American lifestyle can build connections with consumers and result in a strong brand identity with significant equity.

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