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The Evolution of the NBA's Culture

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The Evolution of the NBA's Culture


by

Trey Jones


Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master Art in Digital Marketing
at Lindenwood University

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The Evolution of the NBA's Culture

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the College of Arts and Humanities
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master in Fine Arts
at
Lindenwood University

By

Trey Jones
Saint Charles, Missouri
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ABSTRACT

Title of Project: The Evolution of the NBA's Culture

Trey Jones, Master of Communications, 2023

Thesis Directed by: Dr. Andrew Allen Smith

This project focuses on the National Basketball Association's dress code problems from 2004-2005 to the 2022-2023 NBA season. Highlighting how a predominantly black athletes' association, run by white men, changed in multiple ways to respect the fashion and culture of its community over this 20-year period. The community that was most represented on the court, and those who support the league at home. Doing so through the influence of the media, player opinions, race, fashion, time, and executives. Showcasing how a prominent business, such as the NBA, can change its brand to be acceptable and successful.

Keywords: [NBA, Dress Code, Basketball, Fashion, Race]

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Introduction

A bad boys' basketball club, riddled with drugs, alcohol, parties, and subpar basketball turned into a united national association, with prestige and exciting games. Protecting this newfound image, the National Basketball Association (NBA) would squash anything that could threaten its glorious come up. The National Basketball Association has gone from bad to decent to "where amazing happens" over the course of 50 years, rising in power and influence in many ways: through play, practice, business, popularity, and more. The Association went from an organization that was not willing to embrace the culture of its most prominent demographic, to full-on embracing the culture through its style, apparel, and shoes. However, in 2005, when the NBA first established its dress code requiring players to dress business casual, the requirement was seen as a direct opposition to popular players such as Allen Iverson and Carmelo Anthony who would wear a baggier style of clothes. When looking at the NBA today, and how relaxed it has become, even changing its code, where was the turning point? Can one pinpoint where the Association allowed its players and coaches to "dress down?" When did the NBA fully embrace and take advantage of the culture of Black Americans, its predominant demographic? How can other businesses and leagues learn from the NBA's evolution in the branding and marketing world?

Fans of the National Basketball Association tend to develop a love for the players within the league. Players come together to make a team, the team is the driving force of an organization, and the different organizations make up the league. Ultimately, the NBA's "biggest sell" is the players. Knowing who the players are is a huge part of NBA knowledge, but having allegiance to players in being a player's fan is different than supporting one team alone. The NBA has rightfully taken advantage of the popularity of the players by putting them at the

forefront of its marketing efforts. Once the dress code was created and exposed as targeting the game's popular players, by changing their style and image. It now becomes a conversation on how the NBA was attempting to change its brand, how the world sees them, and what type of business they are. This research paper will answer the question of how a professional sports league, dominated by men of color, has evolved to respect the fashion and cultural changes of its community.

Literature Review

Before its image was a major issue, the NBA was at its peak due to the stardom of the man seen as the best basketball player in the world and the world's greatest athlete, Michael Jordan. When Jordan was drafted, the shorts length of NBA players was the only controversial issue between the league and the players.

“The 1990's saw shorts, shoes, jerseys, jewelry, haircuts, and body art all make visible impressions on the league's image. But it was the league's inconsistent response to these fashions that raised questions about an NBA faux pas. As the longer and baggier NBA shorts grew in style and acceptance, the league marketed the larger sizes, while simultaneously fining "several players for wearing shorts too far below their knees." The league seemed to afford greater tolerance for throwback jerseys, shoes, jewelry, hair styles, and tattoos. But a line has always been drawn in the sand, as restrictions existed as to the color of shoes (must match the uniform), the type of jewelry (not loose during games)” (Bandsuch).

While the issue of the length of shorts quieted through the decade, Michael Jordan spearheaded the color of shoe issue. The NBA's policy on the color of shoes stated that the shoes had to be 51% white (Hird). The shoes had to be in unity with what the rest of the team was wearing. The NBA enforced a 5,000 dollar fine on Jordan every time he wore the shoes. “Nike welcomed the controversy, agreeing to pay each fine. The company's investment in the polarizing sneakers grew in publicity and transcended into a statement of going against the establishment, according to Kunkel. “Expressing individuality through a unique style and not conforming to norms tends to resonate with people,” Kunkel said. “It's the perception of being a rebel and the anti-establishment Air Jordan 1 grew in popularity instantly.” Nike capitalized on

the controversy by producing a commercial about the NBA's ban on its sneakers (Temple University). The NBA was framed as the bad guy for attempting to throw the world's most popular shoes out of the game; however, they received publicity. Whichever way this is viewed, all publicity is good publicity. Along with the domination of Jordan's Bulls on the court, and his celebrity ascension of the court, the association was in the best place it has ever been since the rise of Magic Johnson and Larry Bird in the early 80s.

Jordan, being a great influence on the popularity of the league, his retirement had a great effect on the business in more ways than one. Television ratings were down 29% for the 2005 NBA finals. Corporate sponsors, owners, and the league office pinpointed what they believed to be the reason why. The NBA was a trailblazer in terms of its marketing of Black players—such as Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan—and its efforts to sell "Black culture" to "White America." In the early 1980s, the NBA started to embrace rap music and other aspects of hip-hop style. The league was destined to be known as the "hip-hop league," with Stern in charge of marketing its ties with urban culture. Present-day advertisements for everything from clothing to deodorant and soft drinks include Black faces and Black bodies. The musical soundtrack used to accompany the game in arenas and on television, as well as slogans, are mostly inspired by modern Black urban culture (Lorenz et al.). By the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, there was a growing sense that the NBA might have gone too far in this direction, to the point that the league 'was becoming too ghetto'. Then the line was drawn for then NBA commissioner David Stern.

“. . . on a November night, the infamous brawl between the Detroit Pistons and the Indiana Pacers in November of 2004; nicknamed the “Malice at the Palace,” players from both teams engaged in a fight that involved players assaulting fans and vice versa for over ten

minutes on national television. Ron Artest received a full-season suspension for punching fans, and he along with four other teammates were charged with assault and battery. Five fans who berated players with racial slurs were also charged with assault and battery” (Graham).

The league had serious issues and needed to take some kind of corrective action. NBA commissioner David Stern decided the league’s image needed to change. Literally! Right before the start of the 2005 NBA season, the commissioner at the time, David Stern, instilled a dress code into a major professional sports league. No other league has seen something in this manner. The NBA is a business, the players work for the NBA as athletes. It is completely normal to establish a dress code policy in the workplace. Normally in a regular office-style workplace, one would not wear sleeveless shirts, shorts, t-shirts, jerseys, sports apparel, and headwear. But this dress code not only prevented players from dressing in a non-business casual manner but also prevented wearing chains, pendants, medallions, sunglasses, and headphones. The style in this period was to wear a baggier style of clothes, and the desire for even longer shorts became prevalent. But by enforcing business casual attire, as well as preventing players from expressing themselves through accessories, people began to catch on that this new policy was meant to target Black athletes. The NBA Dress Code is intended to change unfavorable misconceptions that society holds about specific African Americans and their clothing. Instead, the NBA Dress Code stigmatizes those accessories and the people who use them by forbidding chains, headgear, and throwback jerseys. One of the most common criticisms of the NBA Dress Code is that it panders to the preferences of a wealthy white class of owners and fans who dislike certain characteristics of the NBA players they employ and admire. The NBA Dress Code's "excluded items" raised questions about deeper prejudice and the league's racism while also presenting a

hint of hypocrisy because it now forbade aspects of urban and hip-hop culture that it had previously loved and encouraged. (Bandusch). Being told what you can and cannot wear did not sit well with the players. Allen Iverson was seen as this new policy's main target.

“Allen Iverson has plenty of ways to describe the NBA's new off-the-court dress code, portraying it as unfair, wrong, fake, and "just not right." None of that comes as a surprise. Iverson, the preeminent representative of the hip-hop culture of the NBA, is a primary target of the league's desire to direct the appearance of its players toward the mainstream by requiring them to wear "business casual" clothing. ‘I feel like if they want us to dress a certain way, they should pay for our clothes, I don't think it's good for the league. I really don't, because it kind of makes it fake. The whole thing is fake. You've got all these guys with different personalities. Tracy McGrady is different from Kobe. Kevin Garnett is different from Tim Duncan. And I'm different from those guys. Everybody has their own style. It's just unfair when you take that away from people. Basically, they're saying, ‘Don't dress hip-hop,’. What does a chain have to do with your outfit? A lot of guys wear chains with their religion on them or personal things. I have chains with my mom's name on it, with my kids' names on it, and a chain with my man that passed away on it, and I don't think that's right for people to say that I can't express it. I think they went way overboard with it’” (Juliano).

It was not long before other players began to give their two cents, and the media had to follow suit, and it became a race issue. There are legitimate issues regarding prejudice raised by the NBA's dress code. In particular, players are not allowed to wear "headphones anywhere" (other than on the team bus, plane, or in the team locker room), "sunglasses while indoors," "chains, pendants, or medallions over [their] clothes," or "sneakers, sandals, flip-flops, or work

boots" (David). The guidelines raise questions about the forced compromise of one's racial identity as a negative impact of the dress code and the possibility of a more deliberate discriminatory demeanor on behalf of the league because the items mentioned have some stereotypical correlation with minority attire. Many NBA players voiced their opinions, describing the policy as at best blatantly racist and hypocritical (Bandusch). Players such as Jason Richardson and Marcus Camby said things like "it's kinda racist" and that it "targeted black players" (Graham). Paul Pierce and Stephen Jackson said, "I dress how I feel" and "Some nights, I might just take the fine" (Cunningham). The NBA hoped to improve its image among the powerful group of White supporters and advertisers who seemed increasingly uncomfortable with the league's affinity for street fashion and urban Black style. The league has a right to feel the urge to protect or even shift its image. With star players like Allen Iverson and Carmelo Anthony having criminal backgrounds and being "street-influenced" many players being hit with scandals, rape accusations, and failed drug tests, the league felt its bottom line was at risk (Andrews et al.).

Iverson, one of the NBA's top stars, has a large fan base and a devoted following, as his jersey was frequently ranked in the top five NBA jerseys in terms of sales. The NBA, which is always mindful of marketing and merchandise, relies on its most well-known personalities to advertise the sport. The league is worried about its crossover appeal since today's players are from a different generation than prior stars like Michael Jordan or Magic Johnson. Iverson, one of the NBA's hip-hop icons, best exemplifies the contentious contrast between white society's celebration of race and hip-hop culture's offering of an alternative identity for African Americans. Although as gifted as past NBA stars, Iverson and his peers represent a new black aesthetics that has redefined how the game of basketball is played (Brown). As a member of the

hip-hop generation, Iverson has been influenced by its art, culture, and outlook. Inner-city youth's dissatisfaction with a society that did not listen to their concerns or attempt to solve their problems gave rise to rap music and hip-hop culture.

“As an inner-city youth, Iverson identified with many of the themes articulated in rap music because his life experiences paralleled those of many rappers such as coming from an impoverished background of a single-parent home and living in a poor neighborhood in Hampton, VA. Not surprisingly, many of his generation listen to and have embraced rap music and hip-hop culture as part of expressing their cultural identity. Iverson is associated with hip-hop culture through its various signifiers such as cornrows, tattoos, baggy clothes, stocking caps, baseball caps, jewelry, music, and use of the vernacular. In fact Iverson's cornrows, while a trendsetter, represent a sign of racial difference. Iverson's role, I think, was to help society see that it's OK to dress differently and talk differently and still be a great athlete and still be a good person” (Brown).

Because of how Black culture is seen, and recent events within the league, the language and excluding items of the dress code were seen as racially charged. Some of the excluded items included headgear and could be assumed to be targeting du-rags specifically. It's listed chains and medallions, not “necklaces”, so it is clear to the players by the language of the code, that Black players were being targeted. From the start of the 2005-2006 NBA season, the league was headed in a brand-new yet controversial direction.

League commissioner, David Stern was at the head of the rebranding, and received backlash as well. Through this movement, he received the moniker of being identified with those who felt many Black athletes are just bad boys with great potential, but just need to be tamed by white men (Cunningham). Most people see the NBA as not only entertainment but a business as

well. Meaning the players are the employees, while the owners and league office are the employers. While these employees are ones who make millions of dollars, and from a business standpoint, whether one makes millions or minimum wage, an employer can have authority over its' employees' appearance.

“Each CBA addresses, to varying degrees of specificity, the commissioner's powers, when those powers are exercisable, and how they are procedurally invoked. 6 The team owners of each league have also granted their respective commissioner the extensive authority to act in the best interests of the game. For example, the NFL commissioner may exercise his disciplinary powers against violent or criminal conduct that is unacceptable and constitutes conduct detrimental to the integrity and public confidence in the National Football League. The NBA has also empowered its commissioner with the authority to punish players guilty of conduct that does not conform to the standards of morality or fair play. The NBA and other employers often respond that the union either consented to such changes or waived the right to negotiate over it” (Bandusch).

If anyone within the league claims that the commissioner exercised too much of his power, abused it, or possessed too much, they could be counted in the number of those who gave him this power. Although David Stern admitted that the dress code was meant to improve the NBA's reputation, he framed the problem as one of business and professionalism rather than race. ““We need to have our players look more professional to show more respect for the game and consumers,” he said. ‘That’s just part of what we’re trying to do to let the public know that our players are good people’” (Lorenz et al.) Stern later told the public he believed that Allen Iverson wrongfully received much attention for the dress code implementation when Steve Nash and his “baggy snowsuit” style pants were his main frustration (Glasspiegel). “Iverson said he

had not heard that Nash was actually the impetus for the dress code and said that he and Stern became “so close” after his playing career ended. It’s difficult to believe the version of events that Nash was just as much in Stern’s mind as Iverson when he made this rule, but perhaps that was the way Stern saw it in his own mind as his relationship with Iverson blossomed in the latter years” (Glasspiegel).

Outside of race, there was left the standpoint of fashion. Trends come, go, rise, and fall all in the same season. When one realizes a look or style is in, the next minute it is out. When looking back on the styles of the early 2000s, one is puzzled by what people were thinking. We can all stand a little style improvement.

“The whole country is too casual. Basketball is a professional sport, and the players don't look professional. Visual -- what people see first -- is 55 percent of how you are perceived. The question really is what message are these players sending to their fans by dressing like hip-hoppers? Players are media stars. They are extremely well paid and they owe it to their business owners to represent themselves and their teams responsibly. The N.B.A. is first and foremost a corporation -- a business. Asking players to dress in preferred Business Casual attire should not have created this huge media brouhaha” (PR Newswire).

The style of wearing loose clothes too big for one’s body originated in prison. Baggy clothes without belts were distributed to deter suicide and the use of them as weapons. Rappers and their music videos helped the trend catch on throughout the world, from the ghetto to the suburbs. Indeed, by the summer of 2007, the act of wearing baggy pants low enough to reveal one's underwear had become regarded as such a clear-cut "badge of delinquency". Therefore, it seems that the need for a fashion revamp standpoint leads us right back to where we started, race. “If you dress like a thug, it shouldn’t be too much of a surprise when you’re treated like a thug.

Isn't it hypocritical to demand respect for who you are when all we can see is a personal style made infamous in prison and among ex-convicts? (Lorenz et al.)” But in the same breath, we are teaching our children, the adults of tomorrow, the rulers of the future, not to judge a book by its cover.

Methodology

When looking at the NBA of today, no one would be able to tell that this was ever a problem or situation if that person had not witnessed it happening back in 2005. It almost seems as if the dress code has disappeared with the way athletes express themselves through apparel and style of the modern day. In researching on how and when the NBA began to shift in its culture, it is evident that the NBA was not willing to embrace the culture of the African American community in 2005. Many NBA players are black, the same can be said for this in 2005. In 2023, 40% of NBA fans are Black (Gough). What changed from 2005 to 2023 in NBA culture, and when did it occur? That is what needs to be identified. This can be done by gauging how policies, rules, and regimes change with the times.

Results

When the Miami Heat guard, Dwayne Wade, began his career in 2003, the league was in peril. No Michael Jordan, Malice at the Palace and other player behavior issues were at the forefront. David Stern's dress code came into play, and he saw it as an opportunity.

“Wade went as far as to credit David Stern's dress code for his fashion sense. ‘It was like, OK, now we got to really dress up and we can't just throw on a sweat suit,’ he said in a 2014 interview. ‘Then it became a competition amongst guys and now you really got into it more and you started to really understand the clothes you put on your body, the materials you're starting to wear, so then you become even more of a fan of it’” (Graham).

This was the start of a change, a forced acceptance for some, while others embraced the opportunity. When players begin to see top players like Dwayne Wade (who went on to win a championship very early in his career) dressing up, it causes other players to want to dress like the best. NBA stars have a lot of money at their disposal. Many people use clothing to represent the star lifestyle. Their appearances can be anything from a mix of common high fashion to sheer inspiration, and occasionally they're just sewing together hot garbage and calling it fashion. But because of how these players are idolized by so many fans, and they see them wearing it, it has the potential to sell and become a trend! “The fashion and the music industries have always been partners. The sports industry is now a part of that mix. Today NBA players have their own fashion lines and brand associations. The everyday consumer has more access to their superstar. Even if the consumer cannot afford the high-end clothing, they can afford the accessories. It's a win-win for everyone” (Graham). As time goes by, athletes began making more money, which results in receiving more freedom to wear many different things. Keeping up with the trends or starting their own. Fashion companies began giving these sponsored athletes more freedom in the

design of their sponsored apparel. In the end, players had the opportunity to make more money by adhering to the dress code.

The wave of high fashion began to enter the NBA shortly after the dress code was established in 2005. The next year the players began to find ways to push their limits and express themselves on the court if they could not do so off the court. “With Lakers star Kobe Bryant and others wearing long tights under their shorts, the league considers banning them but allows a loophole for players who claim a "medical need" for them. Players throughout the league quickly produce a doctor's note, and soon tights become entrenched as part of the NBA's standard look.” (Lukas). In 2009, Dwayne Wade, a fashionista off the court, had a customized band-aid on his face that donned his last name. It was banned the following day. The next year, Rajon Rondo of the Boston Celtics wore his NBA regulation headband upside down! This was also banned. Dwayne Wade again attempted to wear tinted goggles during a game after suffering a migraine. The league stated it could give Wade an unfair advantage, blocking opponents from seeing his eyes. In 2014, players began to wear black masks after suffering a broken nose or facial injury. LeBron, being one of the first was asked to switch to a clear mask. In 2017, players such as JR Smith and Kelly Oubre wore compression sleeves that dawned the large Supreme logo as well as the NBA logo. Because the NBA did not have ties with the popular Supreme brand, they banned accessory (Lukas). JR Smith responded by receiving a “Supreme” logo tattoo. The final accessory banned was before the 2019-2020 NBA season. The limit was once again tested by the rise of a new “ninja” headband style. A style that became popular by the influence of Mike Scott and Jimmy Butler.

“The ninja-style headwear is not part of the NBA uniform and hasn’t been through the league approval process. Teams have raised concerns regarding safety and consistency of

size, length, and how they are tied which requires a thorough review before consideration of any rule change. It's interesting that individual teams brought this to the league's attention. But is it really a safety issue? In a tweet last Friday, Scott said he was told the headbands were 'unprofessional'" (O'Shaughnessy).

Despite receiving ban after ban, restriction after restriction, the unique style and fashion of NBA athletes were recognized by the league. In 2015, the NBA hosted its first fashion show during all-star weekend. It was dubbed the "NBA All-Star, All-Style Fashion Show. "A troupe of judges was led by TNT's *Inside the NBA* commentators Charles Barkley and Kenny Smith. The contestants walked the runway to show off their looks, which LeBron James and comedian Kevin Hart discussed after each display" (Silver).

Players were constantly prevented and told what they couldn't do, and what wasn't allowed. Though they gave the players minor allowances and recognition here and there. For the first time ever in league history, before the 2018-2019 NBA season, the NBA finally caved after 33 years! They began allowing players to wear sneakers of any color during NBA games. This was a part of their initiative to better allow the players to express themselves on the court. A number of alternate jersey designs were added to the last season, Nike's first in which it produced uniforms for all 30 teams, while the customary white-based jerseys worn only at home were eliminated. The choice of home and away jersey colors was left up to the individual teams; the Chicago Bulls, for instance, decided to wear red for all home games. In accordance with the eight-year, \$1 billion contract the Swoosh has with the NBA, Nike has been aggressive in enhancing the appearance of clubs and players all throughout the league. Last season, around 67 percent of players wore shoes made by Nike or its Jordan Brand affiliate (DePaula). The same brand they fought with, whose representative athlete they consistently fined, for violating this

same rule. Years later, due to their influence and power, they changed because of their uniform business deal. The Jordan brand on its lonesome brings in 3 billion dollars in revenue, annually. Better late than never one could guess. With the many different jersey options and a variety of colors at their disposal, players were finally to able have fun with their shoe creativity not only off the court to sell to fans, but on the court as well. “As players have continued to ramp up their penchant for wearing flashy sneakers all season, the league is looking to offer up some additional freedom. Last season, LeBron James wore 51 different versions of his Nike LeBron 15 model” (DePaula). The shoe industry has become a synonymous part of the game, along with apparel in general.

Fashion has played a major part in change that has taken course in the NBA for the past 15-plus years. In 2023, NBA players are modeling at New York’s fashion week. This is an expected turn of events, especially when players have begun treating their pre-game tunnel entrances as a runway rather than a box pre-fight entrance. The fashion wave that began in 2005, now had a platform!

“...the tunnel walk, the basketball world’s answer to the red carpet. Formerly a mundane, unnoticed shuffle from the arena entrance to the locker room, that short distance is now during finals a splashy catwalk in its own right, with fresh-from-the-runway designer goodies, rich and powerful men, screaming fans, and the flash of paparazzi bulbs. Why can’t they love fashion? The way you dress affects the way you feel. While much of the time they are in uniforms, these short tunnel struts allow us to see a glimpse of their personalities” (Berlinger).

NBA games are where amazing happens, but anyone with their eyes fully open can see that there is action going on before and after games as well. “Fashion and basketball are a

mutual-admiration society that makes sense,” says Kesha McCleod, a celebrity stylist who has dressed everyone from James Harden and Chris Bosh to Rosie O’Donnell. “It’s a business, and looking good is part of the game,” says McCleod, who has previously worked with NBA rookies, giving them a crash course in style as part of the league’s onboarding. “You’re not going to get the Coca-Cola deal or a brand ambassadorship with the look that basketball portrayed back in the day.” McCleod is referring to the baggy clothes, du-rags, and chains-over-shirts popularized two decades ago by former Philadelphia 76er Allen Iverson, which then-commissioner David Stern targeted, in 2005, with an NBA dress code requiring players to wear business-casual attire at all league-related activities. It was a controversial attempt to make the game more marketable and led to a lot of ill-fitting suits as well as accusations of racism, given the dress code was largely targeted at hip-hop style in a league of mostly black players” (Silva). It is amazing to see how far the NBA has come and transformed on the heels of fashion. Now it is seen that one would not be able to score endorsements if they did not show these companies that they can dress up in high fashion. This leads us to assume that if NBA players in the vein of Allen Iverson, went against the grain, attempting to bring back the old style, it would not resonate well with anyone. More importantly, it would not be beneficial to the player’s pocketbook.

During the 2019-2020 NBA season, the Coronavirus pandemic shut down the world of sports. The league found a safe way to resume play in an interrupted season, through what was called “The Bubble”. Guidelines, rules, codes, and policies were all flipped on their head within the bubble. COVID-19 demanded its own set of rules and regulations. “. . .bubble fashion will be less about flexing than about keeping safe: McCleod wants to make sure her clients are simplifying as much as possible to cut down on packages coming in and out of the bubble” (Wolf). The league is following the way fashion has changed over the past 15 years: Business-

casual dress codes are now the norm at most offices around the U.S. (different surveys will tell you that's true for anywhere from 50% to 79% of workplaces), and even the famously suited-up Goldman Sachs let its bankers ditch the suit in 2019 (DePaula). Stringent dress codes are even less important in the Orlando bubble, which is already asking a lot from NBA players who are forced to be isolated for months potentially. Coaches were no longer forced to wear their signature sports coat and collared shirt which was mandated in 2010 (DePaula). Players were given the freedom to wear what they wanted while walking from the team bus to the arena locker room. "Players can wear a variety of "relaxed" items from their own wardrobes upon arrival that are "clean and neat in appearance," including presentable shorts, according to a league spokesperson. However, players not in uniform at games must be wearing pants while seated on the bench. The league has also "removed the requirement" that players seated on the bench wear a sport coat" (DePaula). This rule continued to remain in place after the bubble season ended. These may seem like minor adjustments, but in a league whose impact on menswear has been enormously controversial and strict, even minor adjustments can feel significant.

Acts of police brutality and injustice against people of color led to a major surge in the Black Lives Matter movement. The league began to have discussions on allowing players to change the names on the back of their jerseys to ones that are relevant to "social justice issues," and eventually granted the players this right (Wolf). Instead of witnessing the last names of James, Butler, and Booker alone, fans saw "Say Her Name". Fans saw words like "Justice" and "Equality". The pandemic had a huge effect on the NBA. The final stop on the constant bans and allowances.

Analysis

Rebranding, image changing, and marketing shifts come in the sports industry often, because the sports world is fast-paced and constantly. According to Williams of *Sports Marketing Quarterly*, a change in marketing aesthetics and market positioning are two aspects of re-branding. Evolutionary and revolutionary rebranding are the two different sorts. Revolutionary rebranding involves a significant change, while evolutionary rebranding involves only a slight revision to positioning and marketing aesthetics. The advantage of using evolutionary rebranding was that the logo could be minimally changed to satisfy brand needs while also limiting any changes to the brand image because of the small modifications connected with the logo. However, when a business such as the NBA in 2005, dealing with what they saw as an image issue, attempting to change an existing bad brand image or connotation, a revolutionary makeover may be the correct move.

It grows increasingly hard to make changes in the business world, though businesses always manage to stay relevant by keeping pace. They are aware of how they could be affected by not moving with the trends of the business world. “The changes buffeting marketers in the digital era are not incremental—they are fundamental. Consumers’ perception of a brand during the decision journey has always been important, but the phenomenal reach, speed, and interactivity of digital touch points makes close attention to the brand experience essential— and requires an executive-level steward” (Edelman). The CEO of today is faced with a difficult dilemma. The cost of change is rising daily, but the cost of staying the same can also be even more expensive. A company's marketing strategy must exhibit the internal constancy of a goal and an external consistency of image even while adapting to change. According to John D. Louth of *McKinsey & Company*, one must consider what the customer wants, research the current

market, advance to newer technologies, consider utilizing test marketing for risky changes, participate in field selling, and maybe expand their market to a global level. Changes can come through many different mediums and these changes can occur for a variety of reasons. Fan engagement, relocation, merchandise sales, or modernization of the brand. As the NBA made this change, it was easy to see they could be doing this for the benefit of the product, for the benefit of the fans, or to even modernize the association. But it is easy to see they chose to change to better affect their bottom line. No business in the world has ever been worried about this bottom line more than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While there are changes in what players can and cannot do from 2005 to 2020, the biggest change came in 2020 during the pandemic. The Bubble has protocols to deal with the virus, but it also affected the dress code. A relaxed dress code is what was adopted, and it has yet to be tightened as of the 2022-2023 NBA season. Due to the influence of Adam Silver, it can be assumed that his emergence within the league's front office has had a great effect on the now normalcy of the association. While Adam Silver was approved unanimously by the league's owners to succeed David Stern in 2014, he had worked as the Deputy Commissioner directly under Stern for eight years. 6 years into the job, Stern made it known that his support was behind Adam Silver to take his place once he retired. Before working as his right-hand man, he had worked within the NBA front office since 1992, holding the positions of "Senior VP & COO, NBA Entertainment; NBA Chief of Staff; and Special Assistant to the Commissioner" (NBA.com). With Adam Silver at the helm, the NBA has changed and progressed tremendously from the beginning of the post-Michael Jordan era to what we see today in 2023.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the NBA truly dropped the ball on the establishment of the dress code. It was clear that they were not happy with the image of their league and panicked about how much worse it could get with the popularity of Allen Iverson on the rise. Desperation and racism oozed out of the 2005 dress code, but the fashion industry managed to swoop in to cover up and smooth over all the bad. Players began to express themselves in ways we have never seen before and have continued to do so to this day. The NBA moved the needle little by little in what they were willing to allow, but also consistently adding restrictions or reinforcing its position. The pandemic came into the lives of us all and changed the world as we know it; changing it so much so that the NBA has not chosen to fully revert to what it once was. Much of this evolution comes during the ascension of Adam Silver into power as league commissioner. This story began with the NBA in an injured state, but time can heal all wounds. In currency, gold is the most valuable, but to the NBA, Silver is the most coveted.

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