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Examining Gender Stereotypes within the Fashion Industry

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Abstract

This paper is a review of the literature of gender stereotypes. It examines the deconstruction of gender stereotypes through clothing in settings such as academia and the workplace, magazine and pop culture, and shopping behavior and consumerism. It is found that attire has a profound influence on traditional gender norms in the workplace, and shown that men use clothing to signal their sexuality and their social status. Gender portrayals within children's and men's magazines often form stereotypes, which can be damaging to one's development of identity - pop culture does the same when contributing to societal gender norms. This paper investigates how internalized homophobia can affect the shopping behavior of gay men, and reviews how young people's clothing choices are closely linked to self-expression in determining personality and congeniality. Fashion psychology plays a role in everyone's life and has the same impact as other branches such as social, abnormal, or child psychology may have.

Introduction

Centuries ago, fashion used to serve as a communication tool to address one's gender or status. In the 1600s, the Puritans' social class and status were determined by the colors or shapes of gowns; the more elaborate the clothing, the higher the social class. Back then, cultural norms and expectations were also linked to gender and still are to some extent. Fashion today is about expressing who you are, regardless of whether you were born male or female. A lot of men's and women's clothing is culturally defined by society. Because cultural standards and expectations are closely linked to what it means to be a man or woman, this can affect one's self-expression as clothing serves as an outlet for expressing one's identity. For example, when you see a piece of clothing that is blue, one can automatically associate it with boys and pink with girls, which can be considered discriminatory. Our clothing can also lead us to make judgments about a person, such as their gender or sexual orientation. The traits that are typically associated with men or women have socially created representations of gender based on what society expects of each sex rather than the personality traits of the specific sex.

When society evolves, so do the norms, and when the norms change, so does fashion or vice versa. We're slowly starting to see a trend where designers are shifting towards gender fluidity, defined as when a person's gender identity or expression shifts over time. Identity is viewed in a less binary way than it once was, and the fashion industry has begun to adapt to this to the point where it has begun to deconstruct gender norms by creating collections that are exclusively genderless or including gender-fluid clothing in their selections (Kulaga et al., 2022). Millennials and Generation Z have begun to investigate the part that Instagram influencers and celebrities play in dismantling prejudices and popularizing genderless clothing. The significance behind fashion has evolved from century to century, and more research needs to be done on how

fashion psychology plays a role in the industry. This paper examines gender stereotypes within the fashion industry.

Attire in the Academia & Workplace

Clothing is a potent nonverbal indicator of self-expression and communication, and gives hints about our personalities, credibility, and social status, among other factors. Sutter (2018) found that attire is seen as a communicative tool in the business environment, especially when representing the company's image. This adds to the idea that clothing plays a significant role in organizational culture and how it is conveyed to the market. A study by Richmond et al. (1991) found that women who violated traditional gender norms by dressing in a masculine manner were judged more harshly than those who adhered to the norms. Such attire can be seen as a form of self-expression but may lead to negative reactions such as social stigma and discrimination. These women were perceived as less competent and less trustworthy. The same could go for men who are seen to wear more feminine clothing in the workplace, which could lead to the same response: judgment.

There can be double standards through fashion implemented in the workplace too. For example, women may have long hair, but they must pull it back, while men must have short hair; women must wear makeup and men cannot; facial jewelry is not permitted on men but is fine for women. Although, this could differ from company to company depending on policies. Moreover, this shows that when an individual's attire does not align with conventional gender roles, it can lead to discrimination and unequal treatment. It is important to remember that cultural perceptions of gender non-conformity are evolving, and many people are starting to embrace and encourage people who express themselves in authentic and genuine ways.

In addition to women being seen through a professional lens, there is also a difference between how men see themselves versus how they think others see them. The study by Noh et al. (2015) looks at how college men use clothing to avoid being seen as feminine or gay and found that they use clothing to signal their social status. These men made an effort to wear attire that does not project identities that are seen as unconventional or non-conforming. In many cultures, some men may experience pressure to display themselves in a more conventionally masculine way through their wardrobe choices because there is a social stigma associated with seeming excessively feminine or gay. This can include avoiding clothing that is perceived as feminine, such as brightly colored or fitting clothing, or wearing clothing that is seen as more masculine, such as athletic or rougher apparel. The study also found that these college men would make clothing choices motivated by the desire to fit in. Similar to any other age group, college students are influenced by societal norms, trends, or social groups to try and blend in with the particular environment to avoid judgment from peers. This reveals that college men, along with many others in the newer generations, may consider what society expects of them when forming their style.

Gender Stereotypes in Magazines & Pop Culture

Stereotypes are often perpetuated through images and language used in magazines and other forms of media, especially gender representation. Magazines and media can often perpetuate negative and inaccurate ideas of a group of people. For example, the representation of men being viewed as strong, powerful, and confident while women being portrayed as weak and dependent are stereotypes that can limit how the public views themselves and others. A study shown by Signorielli et al. (2009) found that stereotyped information regarding gender roles was prevalent in MTV advertising. They had come up with five hypotheses relating to how

frequently female characters would appear, how to fit their bodies compared to the men's, rated on attractiveness, how often they were seen in provocative clothing, and how often they were to be the object of the male gaze. All these hypotheses the researchers made were true when analyzing the demographic makeup of characters in MTV commercials and music videos. In comparison to male characters, female characters appeared less frequently, having more desirable bodies and provocative apparel - they typically garnered more notice. The results confirmed the concept that female characters received a lot of visual attention, and also proved that pop culture contributes to societal gender norms. The way that people comprehend and internalize gender norms and expectations can be significantly impacted by these stereotypical representations in the media. It can also support the continuation of the power dynamic between men and women and support prejudice and discrimination based on gender.

Similar to MTV advertisements, magazines often feature articles and images that reinforce prevailing gender stereotypes, such as promoting traditional gender roles and expectations of men and women. A study by Nam et al. (2010) found that Western men and women were more likely to be wearing revealing clothes or almost nude, whereas Korean men and women wore more refined clothing. This demonstrates that Koreans were less susceptible to following female-driven stereotypes in pop culture. Pompper (2007) discussed gender norms and body image and how they played a major role in self-esteem. College men characterized the "ideal" male body as tall, muscular, broad-shouldered, strong, healthy/fit, well-proportioned, and good/tanned skin - these expectations were instilled from magazine standards. Their "ideal" body relates to self-identity, which was a major theme found in Noh et al. (2015). Social norms and cultural factors play a big part in creating and maintaining gender and fashion expectations.

These standards can range significantly between societies and even between various subcultures within one community.

Spinner et al. (2022) split their study into four themes: food, fashion, homes, and jobs. The themes of food, fashion, and home occurred more frequently in the girls' magazines than both the boys' and gender-neutral magazines; the theme of jobs occurred more frequently in the boys' magazines than both the girls' and gender-neutral magazines. This expands on the notion that gender representations are socially constructed depending on societal expectations of each sex. In a sample from three different generational groups, Markova et al. (2019) study found that 76% of respondents agreed that both men and women should be able to wear gender-neutral clothing shown in advertising. They also confirmed that the media is, in fact, biased toward particular stereotyped gender roles, which has an impact on their understanding of and beliefs of androgyny - where one possesses both masculine and feminine characteristics regardless of biological sex, gender identity, or gender expression.

Self-expression through Shopping Behavior & Consumerism

Young people's clothing choices are closely linked to their self-expression as a means of evaluating the people and circumstances, and in general, the environment they encounter. A study by Piacentini et al. (2006) aimed to discover how teenagers express themselves using symbolic properties in clothing and brands. They found that young people are closely bound to their self-image, and they use that as a means to judge their environment. As a result, clothing can be found situational. For example, one can tailor their outfit to look their best at a dinner party, and this can look different depending on the location - whether it is downtown in a city or at a ranch. Clothes were highlighted as an important aspect of the many facets of the individual wearing them, such as music taste, social class, extracurriculars, and more. One boy in the study

admitted to not choosing friends based on their clothes but rather making judgments on one's music taste based on their style. From this, it was agreed by researchers that clothing was a good initial determiner of personality and interest in potential friends. A study in Glasgow, Scotland found that boys wanted to achieve a high-class position in the status hierarchy, therefore focusing on achievement and success, while girls wanted to preserve relationships to improve self-esteem (Piacentini et al., 2006). The results showed that there is a performative aspect to clothing and fashion choices, connected to the themes of cultural standards and expectations.

Within interviews, there were discussions on conforming to the expectations of a community. Clothes were weighed to be seen as material symbols of economic, social, and cultural importance. The use of clothes indicated the affluence of children at a private school and their family's economic status. Buying branded clothes was an important aspect of conformity to group norms. Researchers also found that people use clothing to communicate their gender to others, and this communication is a part of how gender is portrayed. For instance, Hu and Jasper (2004) discovered that women often plan their purchases, and would take into account subjective and objective information; whereas men tend to make impulsive, utilitarian purchases favoring objective information over subjective. Women would want to know why others have purchased the product beforehand while men are interested in forming their own opinion. Clothing shopping has found gender differences in both men's and women's shopping behaviors, confirming gender roles.

A person's sense of self-worth may also influence their shopping habits. For example, someone with higher self-esteem may want to express that strength through a particular appearance or consumption pattern, whereas someone with lower self-esteem may be hesitant to express themselves through purchases or even enjoy the visible behavior of shopping.

Researchers asked 123 ethnically diverse men about their most popular shopping venues and found that as self-esteem rises, one's enjoyment from shopping decreases. IH (internalized homophobia) was weakly and positively associated with credit card debt; attitudes towards others homosexuality were weakly and positively associated with shopping in a thrift store; attitudes towards revealing one's homosexuality to others were weakly and negatively associated with shopping in a discount store (Reilly et al., 2006). These men are willing to step out of traditional gender norms by owning their sexuality and in doing so through their shopping habits. Our natural psychological need to identify with a social group is related to our consumerism. Gender differences can affect a consumer's decision-making skills and approaches to buying a product.

Conclusion

From teenagers to gay men, fashion psychology plays a role in everyone's life. The way one dresses can be an outlet for individuals to express their gender identification, even if it differs from what the community might expect. Society needs to be more open-minded about the idea that gender stereotypes and fashion should not dictate how people are perceived, judged, or treated. Above all, everyone should be respected for their individuality and who they are. Many fashion companies prepare their collections by deconstructing the idea of "gender fluidity." People who struggle to find the confidence to express who they are gain a sense of belonging through the portrayals of gender fluidity in fashion. As individuals are progressing, influencers are joining social media and are playing a big part in dismantling gender stereotypes by promoting genderless fashion, while providing confidence to their audiences (Kulaga & Cedrola, 2022). People should be free to dress however they feel comfortable and express themselves,

regardless of their gender identity. To make these conversations known, there needs to be more research done on fashion psychology.

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