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Deconstruction of Gender Stereotypes Through Fashion

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the role of fashion in the context of the deconstruction of gender stereotypes. Expectation of society and culture related to the biological structure of the individual carries some roles and this role also carries many gender stereotypes in it. But the individual can be use the clothing style to express his or her gender identity which may not match the expectations of the community and society. In the context of big role of the clothing, stereotypes could be deconstructed because clothes are the visible expression of gender identity of the person. And fashion is a big part of this structure because fashion is a pioneer of what people wear. Nowadays fashion has also mean about expressing identity independent of whether you were born male or female. Many fashion brands prepare their collections in the concept of 'gender fluid' by deconstructions. The representations of gender fluidity through fashion help bring a sense of normality to people who are trying to find the self-confidence to express who they want to be. And the results are showed that the numbers of collections about it are increasing and fashion sector takes this issue into consideration.

Keywords: fashion, gender identity, gender stereotypes, deconstruction, gender fluid

Introduction

Stereotypes are the common beliefs and values of the group, culture or religions and the gender stereotypes are fixed ideas about men's and women's traits and capabilities and how people should behave based on their gender. For example

common gender stereotypes about the color blue and pink for boy and girl. In fact these stereotypes could lead also to discrimination. But clothing for both men and women is culturally defined by the society. Cultural norms and expectations are related to the meaning of being a man or woman and are closely linked to appearance means clothing, because the clothing is the most important point of representation of the identity. At this point the clothing has a big role. When the concept of clothes is concerned, the concept of fashion is emerging. And the essence of fashion is transformation and innovation and Deschamps has come to the conclusion that fashion is global. Three of Deschamps' twelve vector fashion devices are gender, society, and norm.

So, the relationship between gender and fashion is an important point, even with different parameters. It means that if society changes, norms change and if the norms change, fashion changes or vice versa. And also these changes can come out with the changes of perceptual perspective.

In this research the stereotypes in the perception of form and color appearances about clothing has been tried to examine. Then, the gender stereotypes which are deconstructed at fashion scenes have been explained over the examples. The role of fashion in the adoption of change by society has been tried to explain through examples.

The Roots and Construction of Gender Discrimination at Fashion

The common of the society has unspoken rules about gender dressing codes. The stereotypical masculine or feminine qualifications are not personality characteristics of individual men and women but socially constructed representations of gender, on the basis of what society expects of each sex (Condor, 1987; Lloyd & Duveen, 1993).

As dress can be used as a communication tool to communicate information such as one's gender or status, it can carry some stereotypes according to the culture, religion or society. Before 1649 – Puritan influences on dressing after King Charles I was dead – there were no significant differences between sexes in their way of dressing. Both sexes would wear decorated costumes. One's class determined with the colours and shapes of the gowns, not one's gender. The aristocrats and bourgeois superiors, used to show the abundant lace, rich velvets, silks, decorated shoes, elaborate hats, wigs and plenty of perfume (Davis, 1992). A pink, silk suit with gold and silver decoration was seen as entirely masculine. The clothing was the signifier of social class and the more elaborate it was the higher the social class.

But later it had changed year by year. Instead of Macaroni's floral, colorful garments, Dandy's slim, less colorful and less embroidered garments started to become popular for men's wearing. The Macaroni were aristocrats who tried to distinguish themselves from the growing middle class with too quirky and weird clothes (Craik, 1993). The Dandies are the movement introduced by Beau Brummel in London, a socially ambitious man, who tried to join the higher social circles. It was continued by

Beerbohm and George de Maurier. With simple, plain clothes he tried to create the new aristocrat style. He wore starched white linen shirt with cravat and black pants, black vest and tight waisted wool coat and breeches. Everything fit perfect, was clean and crisp, and he was proud for the cleanliness. He wore soft yellow gloves and used a black walking stick with ebony handle. He was the forerunner of the modern business suit and tie (Entwistle, 2000) (pic.1).

As Flügel's description (1930) it's the great male abandonment, the most important event in the history of dressing in which men are no longer interested in "beautiful" appearances and want it only to be useful. It won't be wrong to say that it was the important period of the concept of "wearing just like a man" and "wearing just like a woman", had accepted by the society.

As Hunt (1996) and Kawamura, (2016) said fashion has been feminized in the 19th century and has become more powerful than the representation of the social class representing the gender gap in clothing.



Picture 1. Left:Macaroni Look- <https://unframed.lacma.org/2016/06/08/styling-macaroni-male19.06.2018>

Right: Dandy Look- <http://www.messynessychic.com/2011/04/05/who-is-the-dandy-man/> 19.06.2018

Gender Stereotypes which are Deconstructed at Fashion Scenes

Since 1920, pants for women began to be tolerated in sports and some limited activities such as cycling and horse riding (Sawyer, 1987). In 1949, Richard Curle unleashed a damning indictment of women who revolt against traditional forms of femininity; calling them "sour spinsters". Earlier, in 1939, the fashion designer Elizabeth Hames argued that women were not yet ready to wear trousers at work. It took a world war to remove their corsets; will need another one to accept the trousers (Arvanitidou, Gasouka, 2013). During the 1960s society reflected the rising wave of gender politics and the sexual revolution. The 1960s and 1970s are seen to be the era where in gender stereotypes were questioned and dismantled, a time where in feminist and gay rights movements were gaining a voice, and the fashion industry reacted to these movements.

While we've seen gender stereotypes challenged and occasionally defeated in fashion and popular culture throughout history such as David Bowie, the Disco era; these breakthroughs were not necessarily about removing the labels within gender, but about crossing and breaking those boundaries. In 1966, one of the most important revolutions for woman dressing had come into the scene with YSL, the collection called 'Le Smoking' (Pic. 2). In the same period, jean pants which were the term unisex and had a counter stance about gender discriminatory, spread in the United States, also in Europe. It has been the symbol of the liberating of the body from rituals and social roles.



Picture 2. Yves Saint Laurent (YSL), Le Smoking Collection, 1966.

<https://www.designer-vintage.com/en/masterclass/article/masterclass-yves-saint-laurent-s-le-smoking>, 19.06.2018

Those periods were another important points at fashion not about the construction of gender stereotypes but about the deconstruction of gender stereotypes. Because they were the first steps of the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and basis of today's fashion styles. As Waquet and Laporte (2011) said that the development of the form, use and color of a garment over time; the social change of women and men wearing these clothes reveals change of own society. Nowadays the bridges between gender roles are becoming progressively more narrow, not only in the fashion industry but throughout society, mainstream media and politics.

The clothing style that looks like the shadow of the otteritan is disappearing. On the one hand, socialist social struggles, on the other hand, the unisex approach of the developed market system, as well as the evolving democratic human rights consensus, abolished gender discrimination (Anger, 1998). New approaches, new concepts, new terms emerged such as gender fluidity, gender free collections, mix gender shows.

Today's fashion revolutionaries are not interested in feminising men or emasculating women, rather they are aiming to blur the masculine/feminine divide and eliminate those labels. And it means gender fluidity in fashion. From the runways, through to the high street, the emergence of genderless fashion is slowly beginning to distort the line between traditional gender roles in the industry. As seen at picture 3, Calvin

Klein's collection is for women and men to wear virtually interchangeable clothes, in restrained, minimalist androgyny at New York Fashion Week.



Picture 3. Calvin Klein by Raf Simons Spring 2018

https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-nt5eT6d89kA/WbYOWWkxx3I/AAAAAABi0I/kH-t9Beb2mchsWgaLk1VwG0r_E2o0Xv1QCLcBGAs/s640/CK_4_Fotor_Collage.jpg
20.06.2018

Then it won't be wrong to say that the speed of this situation will increase with a high speed time by time with the influences of fashion shows. Traditionally, men's and women's collections are shown at different times—in fact there are two separate biannual fashion weeks, one dedicated to each sex. But especially at last two or three years fashion shows have been started to arrange for both sexes. Starting in 2016 September, Burberry and Bottega Veneta combined their men's and women's collections into one show, held on the women's show schedule. Bosse Myhr who is the director of Menswear, Selfridges, said "The key point of interest for me is a new sense of fluidity and freedom in the industry. All formats are relevant now. There was a point when people thought fashion shows would be a thing of the past in the digital age. Flexibility and new ideas can only bring new and expanded opportunities" (Abnett, 2016).

If we talk about the "color": of course color is one of the most well-known stereotypes about clothing as Martin (1998) says "When clothing genders the body, the color of clothing is an important element in that gendering process". But it changed nowadays because men have started wearing vivid colors as never before except Renaissance and Rococo periods. But also gender stereotypes about using color on clothing have been started to deconstruct.

For example Gucci's mostly colorful collections are absolutely deconstruction of gender stereotypes through fashion not only about the color but also forms (Pic. 4). Gucci followed suit with a collection of loose silks, floral prints on suiting and shorts and bows and embellishments – all of which could, and more importantly were worn by all genders. Gucci's creative director, Alessandro Michele stated: "It seems only natural to me to present my men's and women's collection together. It's the way I see the world today. If the clothes are beautiful, what does it matter who's wearing them?" Michele's explanation also can be supported with Bourdieu's enunciation at

“masculine domination”. “Bourdieu’s main concern was to create any kind of effect that would heighten the unequal relations between the sexes” (Maton, 2005).



Picture 4. Gucci Catwalk, 2016
https://media.gq.com/photos/5703c96b99ca77a949c75f2e/master/w_800/gucci-unisex-runway.jpg 20.06.2018

Another example about deconstruction of gender stereotypes through fashion can be given above leopard design because we are used to seeing leopard patterns in more women's collections. It is often found to be unusual for men. But leopard patterns were seen in male fashion anymore as Dolce&Gabbana fashion show (Pic. 5),



Picture 5. Dolce&Gabbana, Spring/Summer/2017
<http://www.brandlifemag.com/2017-ilkbaharyaz-erkek-modasi/> 20.06.2018

Michele’s ideas and other designers’ ideas that create unusual looks, mixgender shows, new concepts like gender fluidity, gender free collections, can be also supported with Derrida’s deconstruction theory. According to Derrida (1981) every element of the system will change all connectivity, so every element will change again and again. In this direction, the deconstruction must be considered as a two-stage radical critique. The first stage is disruption, the second stage is rebuilding. The structure of meaning of the subject is disrupted at the first stage. In the second stage, the subject is rebuilt in a completely different context. Instead of imposing itself as a truth claim, the re-establishing process that emerges in the second stage leaves the

endless meanings into new possible chains of meaning as a trail in the chain. In this respect, deconstruction is not a mere demolition. It is a structure that operates to keep the possibility of constantly building new constructions alive.

It can be said that the functions of fashion is very important at those points. Fashion makes an unusual styles - I mean outside the norms of the society and the style which is surrendered with stereotypes- visible. Then fashion has a big role about adaptation of people to them and has a power on normalizing them.

Of course it is still hard to see exactly the same looks that we have seen at catwalks, on streets. But it can be said that it has started with small steps on streets. For example high street hero H&M; who have pioneered genderless collections before, are doing it again with a fashion forward denim line that truly blurs the lines of feminine and masculine clothing. Offering a laid-back range of stylish separates, those are actually super wearable (pic 6).



Picture 6. H&M are changing the face of fashion with gender fluid denim line

<http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/fashion/hm-changing-the-face-of-fashion-with-gender-fluid-denim-line-484269> 20.06.2018

Conclusion

The existence of the gender concept in the fashion sector in the context of discrimination has been created in the past by power relations, social structure and sociological reasons. But especially nowadays, it has become a situation that is being tried to be removed again. At this point, this research shows how fashion takes a part in society about the deconstruction of gender stereotypes. The research shows that the role of fashion is making visible some situations about this subject and deconstructing norms about forms, colors which had been adapted to person from childhood by the society. And I won't be wrong to say that today's fashion revolutionaries are not interested in feminising men or emasculating women. Fashion wants to eliminate those labels. This means fashion wants to deconstruct gender stereotypes in the context of wearing styles. Also this means that the fashion is aiming to blur the masculine/feminine divide because of idea which argues that garments have no gender.

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