GETTING RID OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN FASHION

Vitalie PRODAN[1*]

[1]*Universitatea Tehnică a Moldovei, Facultatea Textile şi Poligrafie, Design Vestimentar Industrial, DVI-201, Chişinău, Moldova*

*Autorul corespondent: Prodan, Vitalie, vitalie.prodan@dttp.utm.md

Summary. *It's not a secret for anyone that people always have been looking for different methods to express themselves. They were mixing fabrics, styles, colors just to obtain new looks, and they never stopped. In response to the development of fashion industry humans learned what the concept of fashion is and then, a „big style bang" happened. Becoming more and more interested in this, people realized that clothes are not just a piece of fabric, it's something they cannot exist without. Due the diversity of people, it's already clear that there are no people on our planet with the same taste and preferences. Undoubtedly fashion is art, and all people shouldn't be stopped from making it. Unfortunately, gender stereotypes in fashion just limit and destroy people's imagination. It happened because society always dictates us that „boys wear blue and girls - pink", but luckily some famous people prove that stereotypes and standards have no place in the fashion industry.*

Key words: *revolution, unisex, creativity, art, clothing, preferences.*

Introduction

Since ancient times, people have been looking for different methods to express themselves, because they didn't want to look like others. It all started with wearing animal skins, then with the beginning of the human evolution, the usual skins of animals were replaced by more attractive and comfortable clothes. Even though they were already walking around completely dressed, every year they added something new in order to diversify their looks. They were mixing fabrics, colors, styles and even started doing different hairstyles and using makeup to refresh their personality so that they can stand out against other.

This became especially visible with the emergence of fashion industry and in response to its expanding, different subcultures have already begun to form, and of course they caught people's attention because of their style and „freak" looks. Obviously, not everyone liked the appearance of those „different" people, but as we all know, everyone thought that their style is the only one attractive and correct. Anyways, no one can deny that it was a „big style bang" which will remain forever in fashion history.

It's no secret that the industrial revolution opened the door into another world, so people learned what the concept of fast fashion is, and considering that it's cheap and available for everyone, they started to express themselves authentically in different ways.

Let's just admit that we all are obsessed with the looks we create for ourselves. I'm not going to lie, we even carefully choose the clothes we like, their colors, we're mixing them to create different and perfectly matched outfits. We're not overthinking anymore when we're doing this, because this became an important part of our lives. For example, how do we pick clothes? We quickly analyze every detail of clothing then we're looking for in favorite colors and size.

Becoming more and more interested in this, I realized that clothes have already become an ordinary thing for us, but at the same time it's not only a piece of fabric that covers our body, it's something we cannot exist without, like food and water.

Sure thing, for someone it's enough to only have clean shirt and trousers, but for other people a whole wardrobe will never be enough. Definitely, all people are different and they all have different preferences, and it's not a secret for anyone that we have no rights to blame anyone for their choice! It's very important to understand that we all have different tastes and there are no people on this planet with the same preferences. Someone likes to dress colorful, someone else dislikes it. Basically, on this note, I want to start my topic, that is „getting rid of gender stereotypes in fashion". In this article I want to go through some of the most impressive events that have happened over the past centuries, as well I want to demonstrate that gender stereotypes have no place in the fashion industry, by using famous people and their remarkable achievements.

Girls wear pink, boys wear blue

Nowadays, „gender-norms" dictate that girls wear pink, boys wear blue, girls wear dresses, boys wear pants. But was is originally so? As a child, I always wondered why it is shameful for a girl to wear pants or sneakers, or even to hate pink, same for a boy, why if he wants to wear pink then he is judged. Now I begin to understand that all of us growing up in this society, unconditionally got that attitude, and now we might have misunderstood what is good and what is bad. Suddenly we became more toxic. Currently if you are a guy and you're wearing colorful things then you can be bullied for this because a „real man" would never wear „girly" colors, and if you are a girl, who never wore any dresses or never used make-up, then, accordingly, you are not a real woman.

But is it true that an ordinary piece of fabric makes us who we truly are? Isn't it the education we got from our parents? Or our behaviors and decisions we make throughout our life? I think it's not that hard to realize that a piece or textile does not define our gender, and no one should care what will you wear today or tomorrow.

Let the fashion revolution start…

One of the most revolutionary and genius personalities was Coco Chanel, a French designer who shocked the whole world with her ideas of fashion. Basically, she was the first person who proved that women don't wear only dresses. For many people it was a real shock to see this. First of all, because she was a woman, and we all know that back then, women didn't have the same rights as they do now. Therefore, Chanel became an inspiration for everyone who fought for equality and getting rid of stereotypes in fashion.

Chanel's first triumph was her innovation of using jersey fabric, that was traditionally related to the production of underwear, however she used this fabric for cardigan jackets and pleated skirts. Her suits were designed to be more practical than beautiful. In 20s Chanel presented her tweed suit which was completely inspired by male suits [1]. Also, one her most iconic innovation were trousers for women. Although during the war, women often had to wear trousers to do traditionally male jobs, she made this item permanent and necessary in women's wardrobe. Coco Chanel was a genius; she was one of the first who borrowed men's clothing to create women's clothing [2]. Certainly, Chanel remains the most influential designer of all the time, on her example, we can already understand that the concept of fashion is deeper than we actually can imagine, there are no limits and nothing can stop you from creating art.

Another exceptional person is Jean Paul Gaultier. At the beginning of his career as a designer, everyone criticized him and no one believed he would become so successful. He is clearly one of the prime examples of non-standard in the fashion industry. This man created art out of nothing. During the fall shows in London and Paris in 1984, Jean Paul Gaultier presented his line of skirts for men, it was a real breakthrough in men's fashion and caused some controversy [3]. Later he started to include only unisex collection that followed his idea of fluidity of the gender, because his main inspiration was mixing types and genders.

All types of clothes are for all types of people

Considering that gender is currently being discussed at the forefront of fashion, obviously, the classification of clothing seems to be very outdated. Sex and gender were never binary, so why do we have different fashion standards? These attempts to completely separate men's clothing from women's clothing exclude the non-binary persons who don't share gender restrictions [4]. Allowing this separation in the fashion industry means – limiting the expression through clothing.

To be honest, I am very glad to see that more and more famous brands are no longer prisoners of stereotypes. With each passing season, designers push the gender binary of women's and men's closer to a gender unity. Givenchy, Gucci, Celine, Louis Vuitton, Versace all are going unisex [5]. I think this is another great reason to finally understand that stereotypes have no place in the fashion industry, at least because they make everything look a little tasteless and basic. However, unisex dressing won't be just a passing trend because it opens doors into new world that falls somewhere between two sexes. It's good to admit that dressing androgynous is not a problem as it's your body and your choice, also it's a piece of fabric it's not hurting anyone. We need to mention that it's not only about women in pants or men in skirts, it's even more, it's about the way we express ourselves and how we make fashion industry unique.

I do believe clothes have no gender and people should feel free to wear whatever they want to and whatever makes them happy. Dressing up is a form of self-presenting and no one should feel pressure about it because of social norms. We all should wear what makes us feel confident and beautiful. As for whether let's say should a guy wear skirt/ dress or should a girl wear pant I think it should be up to them to decide. It's okay for people to have their preferences it's like preferring certain genre of music over another but that doesn't mean the other music genre is bad or the one you like is good, those just are perspectives. We shouldn't forget that the separation of feminine or masculine clothes is different for each person and this division of clothing kills fashion, it keeps creativity from expressing itself.

I consider that it would be better if clothes were differentiated by body shape, not gender, because not all the women have hourglass body shape and not all men have a triangle body shape. Let's not forget that clothing is literally fabric and everyone can wear whatever they are comfortable with and I hate how we have to gender pieces of clothing when we actually don't need to do this.

Abolish gender norms. Be free

Also, I noticed that it's funny how a big majority of people still thinks that girls should look like princesses and boys like fighters. You should be the only one who decides what to wear, and no one should dictate you what you can wear by arbitrary rules, when you can have freedom of expression. I think most important thing is wearing whatever you like and don't be so quick to judge other people's style just because it's different from yours. We just can't deny that what's masculine or feminine today, won't be masculine/feminine forever. We can see today women are wearing pants and suits, but some centuries ago its wasn't feminine to wear it, also in some countries it was feminine for men to wear pants. Fun fact, crop tops and heels were originally invented for men, a crop top was created to show off men's abs, heels were created to make them look taller.

So, I think we can agree now that "masculine and feminine" clothes are constantly changing and we should acknowledge that. If you feel confident in the clothes, you're wearing then it's all that matters. Personally, I have some items from "girl section" like t-shirts or sweaters, I prefer them because they are different from men's clothing. They're colorful and they have cooler designs, meanwhile in the men section it's all basic and black, because some people are still stuck in the 50s with the idea that colorful items are for girls only. Nowadays fashion is meant to be fun and represent who you are, because nothing is for men and women only, gender, itself is fluid, so it makes no sense for fashion to be so strict.

To be honest I think that clothes are only gendered in stores to create an increased profit of a specific gender and this lie is used to make more money. It's okay to break fashion stereotypes, but it's not okay to judge people by their preferences. Also, why if a man's wearing a skirt (even if somewhere it's a men's traditional piece of clothing) would be weird for some, meanwhile girls are always wearing men's clothes like loose pants or big sweaters or even suits? Isn't it sexist or homophobic? because I don't remember clothing saying male or female, clothing is made for humans, not for a type of human. Clothing is for everyone.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to say that nowadays we actually don't need stereotypes in fashion, because everyone deserves to express themselves without being judged, and it's harmful not to let people create art. It's sad that today's fashion is based only on heteronormativity and it's incredibly toxic to say that something, completely gender neutral like clothes, should only belong to a certain gender, and let's not forget that many people are not even cisgenders (people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth [6]). Stereotypes just put people and their creativity in a box and it's already evident that the complete elimination of stereotypes normalizes self-expression and encourages people to be themselves, obviously by promoting only positive attitude. Undoubtedly it will free everyone from labels and ultimately will make fashion more interesting.

References:
1. Coco Chanel. Wikipedia [online]. 2021. [accessed 22.02.2021]. Available: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coco_Chanel
2. Eleanor Dunne for Wonderland magazine [online]. 2013. [accessed 22.02.2021]. Available: https://www.wonderlandmagazine.com/2013/09/04/seven-wonders-how-coco-chanel-changed-the-course-of-womens-fashion/
3. Jean Paul Gaultier. Wikipedia [online]. 2021. [accessed 22.02.2021]. Available: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Paul_Gaultier
4. Ruby Staley for Fashion Journal [online] . 2020. [accessed 16.02.2021]. Available: https://fashionjournal.com.au/fashion/fashion-gendered-2020/
5. Alex Hawgood for Departures [online]. 2019. [accessed 16.02.2021]. Available: https://www.departures.com/fashion/designers-escaping-gender-norms-fashion-week
6. Cisgender. Wikipedia [online]. 2021. [accessed 24.02.2021]. Available: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cisgender.