Androgynous Fashion

MANDEEP KAUR
Assistant Professor & Head
Department of Design, BBK DAV College for Women, Amritsar (Punjab) India

INTRODUCTION

A historical prospective:

Examining dress historically gives us prospective on how the relationship between dress and gender has changed. During the 20th century up through 1950s, men followed a restricted code for appearance, limited to angular design lines, neutral and subdued colour palettes, bifurcated garments like pants for the lower body, natural but not tight silhouettes, sturdy fabrics and shoes, and simple hair and face grooming. This simple, restricted code helped them to focus on work and accomplishments rather than appearance. Their attire did not tend to impede their physical activity except perhaps for the necktie. In sum, men dressed for an agonic role in society. It is also assumed that men in our society typically dress to conceal aspects of their identity, which is not always true of women.

Women, in contrast, had an elaborate code of appearance up through the 1950s. They could wear some of what men wore, and a lot more. Their unlimited option for fabrics, colour, design lines, and silhouette gave them a useful bag of tricks for attending to their hedonic role, emphasizing pursuit of beauty and physical being. Their tight or flowing skirts, high heels, and nylons did not facilitate emphasis on physical activity, however. Women were encouraged to spend a lot of time on clothes, hair, weight control, and makeup to render themselves beautiful for men. Women's engrossments in appearance, along with attending to men and children, could easily distract them from pursuing a full time career.

Since the late 1960s, the pendulum has swung from men and women wearing distinctively different styles to an interest in so-called unisex and androgynous styles. Androgyny is defined as a mixing of masculine and feminine qualities in one person's appearance, while unisex refers to a style of clothing that could be worn by either men or women. For example, women have adopted some amount of androgyny in business dress. According to McCracken, business women in the United States avidly appropriated the business suit and its corresponding masculine body form in the early 1980s. The motivation was a striving for women to be similar to their male counterparts in business settings, with shoulder pads, conservative fabrics, and a focus on the upper torso and head through contrasting shirt and tie. By mid 1980s, however, women in business were increasingly moving away from a completely masculine look to a mix of feminine and masculine styling Along with many business women softening their image, some U.S. men are showing less concern with a traditional masculine physical image, particularly in casual dress. Many men now wear soft pastel colours in shirts, in addition to jewellery, cologne, and skin products that were previously worn exclusively by women. Today the measures of appearance are rapidly being reevaluated according to social perceptions of gender, particularly as traditional social roles for men and women change. Men in United States are now beginning to experiment with the torments of vanity, the prior domain of women leaving them not so different today in their obsession with appearance.

Androgyny:

Androgyny is a term that originates from Greek word áíÞñ, which means man, and ãõíÞ, meaning woman. It is referred to combination of male and female characteristics. Androgynous is a person who does not fit in gender categories of masculinity and femininity, culturally defined and determined rules of how male and female should behave in the certain society and culture. Many androgynies identify being mentally in between man and woman, gender-neutral, non-gendered, anti-gendered, inter-gendered, gender-queer, multi-gendered or simply gender fluid.

Considering this, it is impossible not to connect androgyny with diversity of sexual identities, although it is wrong to equate androgyny with homosexuality or bisexuality at first, because androgyny overcomes frames of sexual identities exclusively.

Androgyny entered the mainstream in 1972 when David Bowie launched the cult album 'The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and Spiders from Mars'. Bowie presented his alter ego- Ziggy Stardust, paleface alien with strong make-up and prominent cheekbones. Androgynous look remained popular through eighties and nineties when glam rock lost its popularity androgyny survived through other forms. During XX and beginning of XXI century, androgyny was mostly promoted by persons from fashion industry and pop culture:

1930 Skirt-pants entered the fashion mainstream; Hollywood celebrities use their influence to promote androgynous style; Hollywood actress Marlene Dietrich shocked public opinion when she appeared in men's suit with hat

1950 Fascinating pianist called Liberace entertains people dressed as queen of France

1960 Unisex way of dressing becomes mainstream in London

1970 David Bowie entres the closer dressed as bisexual at his concert and accepts the identity of Ziggy Stardust; Andy Warhol, who created an image of Ziggy Stardust, encourages the trend

1990 Kathryn Dawn Land at the cover of Vanity fair dressed as a man and shaved by supermodel Cindy Crawford

1997 Denis Rodman entres the public dressed in the wedding dress showing a slight tendency to bisexuality

2010 Andrej Pejic, androgynous model, conquers fashion industry

In the broadest sense androgyny implies existence of masculine and feminine principles. Not just a persons, but nations and cultures can be defined as androgens, if they don't have specifically expressed male or female characteristics but their combination. We can discuss phenomenon of androgyny in different areas of today's world: business world, entertainment industry, arts, and in particular fashion industry.

When we think about the connection between fashion industry and androgyny there are two things that get in to our mind. First is referred to a common fact that designers are supposed to have male strength and female sensibility, in order to make good, creative and innovative work, which results in a certain kind of inner androgyny. The other is about androgynous way of dressing that is a result of a certain social situation, especially influenced by gender equality movement starting in the 60s. Until that period fashion designers used to produce clothes that were in accordance with gender roles: women would wear skirts, and men suits. In the 60s situation changed, inspiring designers to adapt to the innovative fashion trends influenced by social and political mutations: model Twiggy, cuts her hair and popularizes boyish hairstyle; men belonging to hippie movement let their hair grow and dress more similar to women and rock stars wear tight pants and bright colors.. In 1977 Woody Allen films a movie ''Annie Hall'' in which the main female character wears man's shirt, tie, galligaskins. This movie took part in making new fashion style, called New Yorker style, which wasn't seductive, but opened to new experiences setting unisex clothing as a mainstream. In the 80s wide shoulder straps give women a new strength, look was feminine, but with big male's influence. Unisex trend was not popular during the 90s, but in the new millennium it became inevitable and very influential. Famous brands such as Burberry, Martini, Gucci underline that the greatest use of androgyny in fashion is seen through female suits what clearly highlights gender equality. A well known fact, which we never should underestimate, is a great influence of fashion industry on modern world as well as our perception of reality, value and quality.

Famous and established designers use their positions in fashion industry to promote and impose certain conceptions constructed through discourses that are shaped in the fashion world through various channels. These conceptions mostly regard to identity questions, sexuality, distribution of power and formation of various social and cultural discourses.

In the last couple of years fashion industry entered the phase where androgens principle became pretty important. This time concepts overcame mixing male and female garments, female collections inspired by masculine principle as well as femininity in male designer's collections. Step beyond is made by Jean-Paul Gaultier, when he expressed his fascination for androgyny through his creative work. He used fashion shows, advertising campaigns and certain kind of public speech and behavior to promote certain discourses and identities.

In fall-winter 2011/2012 Gaultier's fashion show, androgynous model Andrej Pejic participated in both shows both as male and female. At the male show inspired by ultimate symbol of masculinity and machismo - James Bond, Pejic wore man's suit, and in the second appearance he presented more feminine Bond, dressed in coat and high heals with golden accessory. At the female fashion show, Pejic was 'honored' to wear the most important piece - wedding dress. In this case Gaultier consciously plays with the fluidity of male and female principles and identities. Although this fluidity stems out of transformation of male and female social roles seen in the last couple of decades, Gaultier significantly exceeds social part of the problem and use it to play with sexual identity. Another message he sends is the annulment of the feminine attributes of the body, what stems out of his decision that male should present a wedding dress- the ultimate female garment.

Jean Paul Gaultier's ways to blur lines of gender identities and produce something innovative and new, what is essential in fashion world, are evident. Meanwhile, in this way, he consciously promotes alternative sexual identities. The biggest problem regarding this theme is the huge influence fashion industry and media campaigns have on young people and teenagers. It can be very negative because of manipulation and imposition of taste and attitude of powerful people in media and fashion industry. They create certain discourse that becomes the rule that is followed, and can affect young people's choices, future, identity and relation to others and themselves.

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