

# An Examination of the Effects of Abandoning the Symbolic Definition of Gender Through Apparel in Accordance with Contemporary Gender Theories

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**Abstract.** It is now possible for individuals to have a larger degree of choice in selecting their wardrobe as a result of the advancement of civilisation. Gender, on the other hand, becomes a huge impediment to overcome when it comes to the process of shopping for clothing. The majority of people are of the belief that men should wear suits and women should wear dresses. However, due to the fact that individuals have their own perceptions of their gender, they choose to express themselves through the clothing that they wear. Individuals will be unable to perceive their own self-value in this kind of circumstance because of the traditional attitude and the stereotypes that are present in society for the most part. Research on the existing body of literature was the major method of investigation that was carried out for the purpose of this work. In light of the findings of the literature review, it has been found that people are now using their clothing as a means of contesting the social notion of gender and demonstrating their own sense of autonomy.

**Keywords:** Clothes; Gender; Self-Value.

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the fact that, despite the fact that there is a diverse range of clothing alternatives available in today's society, there is still a constant debate surrounding the appropriateness of apparel for individuals of different genders. This study is relevant for contemporary people who are interested in selecting clothing that is not constrained by the norms of society, with the goal of cultivating a sense of self-worth via the choices they make.

Within the scope of this study, the major objective is to investigate the societal influences that have an impact on the selection of clothes for individuals of different genders and to investigate the potential solutions to this conflict. In order to find and review relevant texts, a methodology known as literature analysis is utilised. This methodology is efficient in elucidating the effects that clothing has on individuals of different genders.

The primary focus of this research is on the cultural pressures that are placed on persons of different genders with relation to their clothing choices, as well as the potential solutions that individuals may have to this problem. It was determined that a method of literature analysis would be utilised in order to locate and examine relevant material and texts [1]. This method's strength comes in its capacity to properly assess the impact of clothes on various genders and societal conceptions of clothing in current society, which ultimately contributes to the enhancement of the study.

One of the ultimate goals is to inspire people to make more significant decisions regarding their clothing, with the end goal of achieving a sense of self-worth through their choice of clothing. Ultimately, the purpose of this project is to provide individuals with the ability to select clothing with a greater degree of autonomy, so aiding the process of discovering their own sense of self-worth. Following that, the subsequent analyses were carried out in order to make the accomplishment of this goal easier.

## 2. Background

In recent years, the diversity of clothing options has expanded, while concurrently, there are societal opinions advocating for distinct dressing norms for women and men. These voices can induce individuals to feel compelled to select certain attire. Nevertheless, an increasing number of individuals are opposing these perspectives, and Butler contends that apparel can dismantle societal constructs of gender [2]. Bari advocates for unisex apparel and transgender fashion selections. Apparel influences both external perceptions and our self-perception.

With economic expansion, the need for apparel and fashion intensifies. Fashion constitutes a system of symbols, wherein the significance of clothing derives not from its intrinsic qualities, but from its distinctions and interactions with other symbols [3]. Entwistle in "Fashion and Gender: A Social Theoretical Approach" critically asserts that in different era, certain fashion businesses perpetually reproduce conventional gender norms and reinforce gender distinctions through design, marketing, and media campaigns. But at the same time, social sounds and behaviors can also have an impact on the clothing choices of women and men.

## 3. Analysis

There are many people who believe that the selection of apparel has become more extensive. People have the freedom to select clothing that they believe is appropriate for them. It was discovered by Bari that the act of donning different garments has the potential to trigger a variety of state of mind and emotions. For instance, the act of wearing formal attire may boost our sense of professionalism and confidence [4]. The exploration of our personalities and the expression of our individuality can be facilitated by the clothing we wear. The purpose of this section is to investigate the various ways in which women oppose patriarchal institutions through their clothing choices and express their sense of self-worth through their clothing choices.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* presents one of the most powerful feminist analyses of womanhood by contending that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman." Key to her thesis is the concept that a lifetime of external expectations and internalised standards shapes femininity, therefore forming a socially created identity rather than a natural state [5]. She implies that how women pick and interact with clothes is intimately related to how they are trained to view themselves and how others view them.

A woman's connection to her clothes is seldom neutral; it is fraught with worry, pride, performance, and self-surveillance. She says that women "dress in such a way as to make themselves into pleasing objects," and this is not always a question of vanity but rather a reaction to the deeply ingrained societal function given to women: to entice, to be desirable, and to comply to the male gaze [6]. De Beauvoir claims that women do not just select clothing according on personal desire or ease. Their decisions, rather, are shaped by a want to satisfy others, to stay within social standards, and to compete with or differentiate themselves from other women. This creates a paradox: clothes can be both self-alienating and self-expressive.

Although a woman may show creativity or uniqueness via style, she usually does so within limits imposed by society's ideals of femininity—boundaries that are both constraining and silently enforced. Still, de Beauvoir does not completely reject beauty or elegance. She admits that some women dress to declare their identity or push back against particular conventions. But she maintains that even acts of defiance usually occur under a constrained framework set by male-dominated society [7]. A woman deciding not to fit is not free from the same set of criteria; she is still reacting to them. De Beauvoir believes that knowing women's relationship to clothing is crucial for knowing how patriarchy functions not only in institutions and laws but also in the most intimate aspects of daily existence.

Apparel, meantime, can facilitate self-expression. Apparel can also pertain to the gender experience. Editor Emily Spivack of *Worn Stories* posits that each garment serves as a touchstone for significant

life events, many of which are inherently associated with gendered experiences. The series illustrates the interaction of clothes with evolving narratives of identity, body, and self-expression through themes such as puberty, relationships, pregnancy, and ageing. Clothing awareness increases during puberty, a major gendered development. Greta Gerwig calls her cropped pants from her adolescence armour amid a time of change in *Worn Stories*. "They were my armour," adds, "the thing I put on to feel like the person I was trying to become." Her remark shows the awkward balance between internal identity and external appearance during puberty. This stage is about adjusting to a new physique, shifting expectations, and rising sexuality, which clothing can disguise or highlight. Clothing becomes a tool for experimentation and self-defence as young people learn gender roles.

Clothing also has emotional and symbolic importance in romantic, familial, and platonic relationships. Rosanne Cash recalls a shirt she wore on a date with her future husband. Although the blouse seems minor, its emotional influence is evident. "That blouse had the electricity of first attraction," she adds. "I kept it because it holds that moment. Clothing encases intimacy, vulnerability, and romantic excitement. The garments in the book belonged to lovers, parents, or close friends and often reflect shared experiences and the wearer's place in gendered and emotionally charged relationships. The book also shows pregnancy, a gendered and physiological event. Cindy Rowley recalls a white eyelet gown after her first pregnancy. "It made me feel beautiful when I didn't always feel that way," explains. The outfit was comfortable and a statement of grace and strength during a major body alteration. Maternity clothes are more than practical—they establish identity during a time when many women feel body-alienated. *Worn Stories* portrays these clothes as emotional artefacts of creativity, vulnerability, and growth, not just stretched fabrics. *Worn Stories* concludes with how ageing impacts people's clothing relationships. Simon Doonan keeps an old, outdated article of clothing for its deep personal connection, not for vanity or trend. "It's hopelessly out of style now," adds, "but it's still me—still part of the person I was becoming and still am in many ways." This feeling illustrates how garments connect past and present identities. Older folks have more difficult clothing relationships. Physical changes, cultural expectations, and interests affect how people dress, which can affirm or challenge age-related gendered assumptions. *Worn Stories* shows via these personal stories that clothes are never only about fabric and function. The item worn and recalled has particular significance, usually formed by the wearer's gendered perception of world. we wear may be both mirror and memory whether traversing the emotional rollercoaster of puberty, the delicate sensitivity of relationships, the transforming character of pregnancy, or the reflected process of ageing. unbreakable link between clothes and identity by means of which garments silently witness the most intimate aspects of our life.

#### **4. Discussion**

In summary, individuals' perceptions and use of clothes have transcended conventional preconceptions, deriving self-worth from it. However, some individuals maintain that both women and men continue to encounter some challenges.

In her work, Marion Braizaz emphasizes that women's clothing choices are deeply influenced by social expectations and internalized gender norms. She argues that dressing is not a neutral or purely aesthetic activity—it's a complex, daily negotiation of femininity. Women often choose clothing with an awareness of how they will be perceived in terms of attractiveness, professionalism, respectability, and social acceptance. Braizaz notes that women navigate a fine line: they are expected to be fashionable but not too provocative, confident but not aggressive, feminine but not frivolous. Braizaz claims that while clothing choices are influenced by a want to show uniqueness, they are also limited by society conceptions of what is "suitable" for women depending on age, body type, and environment. A woman, for instance, might wear a blazer rather than a dress for a job interview to show expertise even if the dress fits more closely with her personal preference. Braizaz emphasises that although this kind of self-presentation is sometimes unconscious, it shows how gender stereotypes are experienced and perpetuated by daily activities, including getting dressed.

Among the most notable challenges for males selecting apparel is the conflict between conformity and uniqueness. The suit is shown as a strong social status signal as well as a practical piece of clothing [8]. Although the suit is practically warm and protective, it is firmly rooted in social norms and often shapes how men are seen in both professional and social environments. The problem here is that the suit, in its conventional form, reflects a standard that males must follow to fit into professional settings or follow formal social conventions. Breward, on the other hand, suggests how these standards could limit males and make them yearn for a more individualised and laid-back style of expression [9]. Storey charts the development of men's fashion and emphasises how clothes have allowed guys to assert social standing as well as personal individuality. But the fast shifting of fashion trends presents a quandary: men are under continuous pressure to remain relevant by wearing the newest fashions, sometimes at the expense of their unique tastes [10]. Agins elucidates how the commercialisation of fashion has intensified the demand for "must-have" items, thereby compelling men to acquire garments that signify a specific image or social status rather than personal preference. This presents males with a significant dilemma: should they succumb to marketing pressures or choose attire that really reflects their identity? Men confronting this dilemma may prioritise external affirmation through their attire, resulting in a disconnection from their true selves and the image they project.

Nonetheless, The conflicts—whether rooted in societal expectations, traditional gender binaries, or commodified beauty standards—may be reconciled through a reorientation toward self-defined values. individuals will comprehend that clothing is intended for people, not for gender, circumstance, or market forces to dictate what attire is suitable for them.

## 5. Conclusion

According to the results of this research, the decisions that people make about their attire are a reflection of their sense of self-worth and act as a challenge to the norms that society has established. The conclusion that may be drawn from this is that clothing ought to be regarded as a form of personal expression, rather than being confined by gender, context, or commercial constraints of suitable apparel. Additionally, this study provides a multitude of useful references for future research in this field, particularly with regard to the ways in which individuals can be able to overcome gender stereotypes in clothing and embrace their own sense of values. With regard to understanding how individuals might destroy gender stereotypes and realise their own self-worth through clothing, this study provides a multitude of relevant references that can be used for future research in this field. To aid a greater number of people in recognising their own self-worth and overcoming stereotypes, it is recommended that future research focus on investigating the ways in which clothes can be employed in everyday life setting.

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