

Fashion and gender identity essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In this photograph by Pablo Roversi, the young girl's outfit is constructed of garments, textures, accessories and colors that send out feminine messages. Soft pastel colors, pearls, butterflies, purple eyeshadow, a beautiful velvet hot pink bow backgrounded with satin are all undoubtedly considered feminine in our society and by surrounding a young girl around these things gender socialization is being reflected on. The matureness of the make-up and jewelry seem extreme and contradict the child-like piggy tails held with pastel pink hairties and the butterfly stuck on the girl's face. This could indicate that society has begun to teach girls to be women from an early age. The child's body language and facial expressions seem nonexistent. This forces the viewer to consider that maybe pink and pretty is not what all girls want, maybe the girl does not identify herself with what she is dressed in. The age of the girl, the ultimate feminine codes that her outfit sends out and her body language all put together indicate that this photograph reflects on gender socialization, implying that through this socialization individuality and uniqueness are being taken away from the individual. INTRO:

This essay will explore the feminine gender role and reflect on how our society's set gender codes work to limit both individuality and self-expression. After visiting the roots of gender and gender socialization, fashion's role in constructing gender identity in the modern world will be explored by reflecting on ideas from the books *Fashion as Communication* by Barnard, *Fashion, Culture and Identity* by Davis and *Men and Women: Dressing the Part* by Paoletti and Brush.

Being the basis of social identity, gender identity is a person's private sense and experience of their own gender. Gender socialization refers to the learning of behavior and attitudes considered appropriate for a given sex. Society has an inevitable affect on the formation of gender identities, which can be noted as the definitions for femininity and masculinity, change culturally and historically (Barnard, 2002: 118). In the western culture it is the males role is to be active, to be the gender that observes, that surveys, the opposite gender. The role of the woman is to be more or less passive, to be observed or surveyed by the opposite sex (Barnard, 2002: 119). With the help of gender codes all around us, enforced by media and advertisements, these are the roles that we are socialized into starting from the day we are born. The feminine and masculine roles in western society have always revolved around the idea of women being more delicate than men, because of their task of giving birth to babies given by nature. Costume historians have noted that prior to the industrial revolution the gender distinction in clothing was not as strong as it is now.

The eighteenth century, for example, was dictated by the higher social class, and both men and woman of aristocracy wore lace, rich velvets, fine silks and embroideries (which today are all strong indicators of femininity). As the result of the industrial revolution men's clothing changed to more practical garments to work in. Women's role in society remained the same so their wardrobes did not need changing. This was the start of heavily coded gender distinctions in dress. (Davis, 1992: 36-39). Reflecting rebellion against fixed gender roles Paoletti and Kidwell suggest that " changes such as women adopting trousers can only take place after women's roles in society have

altered” (Paoletti and Kidwell, 1989: 134) and state that, ” When potent symbols of one’s gender are adopted by another, the public reacts as if basic gender conventions are being threatened.”(Paoletti and Kidwell, 1989: 133).

For example, androgyny pushed by the modern fashion world has allowed females to adapt masculinity in to their dress, but only has it been accepted by society when the social role changes. In the 50’s it started to be socially accepted for woman to adopt masculine garments in to their everyday wear. So as women began getting rights in society the restrictions of feminine dress were altered to fit this role and therefore widely accepted, just as masculine dress codes were reconstructed after the industrial revolution. Amongst other attempts of the fashion world to blur gender lines in clothing -Jean-Paul Gaultier had men in skirts coming down the runway for his fall 1984 show (Davis, 1992: 34). The reactions to this were on the lines of Paoletti and Kidwell’s idea of the feel of ” gender conventions being threatened”. **CONCLUSION:**

The evidence of society’s holding on to strong opinions regarding the gender codes trapped in to specific garments indicates that the constructs of femininity and masculinity are tattooed by sozialization in to our brains. The historically and culturally changing of the symbols of masculinity and femininity show that they are constructed by society. Fashion is subjective and fluid, and trends change more frequently than accepted definitions of masculinity which shows that fashion truly knows no age or gender. Fashion provides a platform to express individuality, but our society, by setting restricting gender rules, starts to make that platform invisible to us from the <https://assignbuster.com/fashion-and-gender-identity-essay-sample/>

day that we are born by restricting what is suitable for a female or male to dress themselves in.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Barnard, Malcolm. (1996, 2002) *Fashion as Communication*. Routledge.

Oxon, New York Davis, Fred. (1992) *Fashion, Culture and Identity*. University

of Chicago Press. Paoletti, Jo B. and Kidwell, Claudia Brush. (1989) *Men and*

Women: Dressing the Part. Smithsonian Institution. Washington, DC