

School Of Critical Cultures

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FASHION

A FASHIONABLE PARADOX

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I declare that this Critical culture Research Project is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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I would like to thank my father for giving me his time and patience. I admire his determination and belief in himself and me .

Table of Contents

List Of Illustrations	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 : Protection	5
Chapter 2 : Isolation	11
Chapter 3 : Fashion And Paradox	19
Conclusion	25
Appendix	28
Bibliography	36

List Of Illustrations

Fig. 1 : Artist. Unknown, *Plague doctor*, Jstor. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.28565796> [Accessed January 2022].

Fig. 2 : Enfield, L., 2020. *How The Gauze-Cotton Mask Should Be Worn*, Wellcomecollection. Available at: <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/XwMmcBQAAGwR9GY8> [Accessed January 2022].

Fig. 3 : The Health Service Executive, 2020. *Safe use of masks*, HSE. Available at: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/preventing-the-spread/when-to-wear-face-covering/> [Accessed January 2022].

Fig. 4 : Linder, M. & Wyatt, C., 2017. *Fundamentals And Technical Aspects Of Lipreading*, Say What Club. Available at: <https://www.saywhatclub.org/la-technique-of-lipreading/> [Accessed January 2022].

Fig. 5 : Flores, S., 2020. *An anti-mask protester holds up a sign that reads "My Body, My Choice" at the Texas State Capitol on April 18, 2020 in Austin*, nbcnews.com. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/covid-19-mask-mandates-wisconsin-elsewhere-spark-my-body-my-ncna1235535> [Accessed January 2022].

Fig.6 : Masolino, 1425. *"Virgin and Child," by Masolino*, Jstor. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.11663108> [Accessed January 2022].

Fig.7 : Evans, W., 2015. *Shoppers, Chicago 1946*, Bloomsbury Fashion Central. Available at: <https://bloomsburyfashioncentral.com/encyclopedia-chapter?docid=b-9781474232388&tocid=b-9781474232388-chapter2&st=sunglasses> [Accessed January 2022].

A fashionable Paradox

Introduction

In 2021 a savage virus called 'The Coronavirus' struck the world, changing everything we have known to love about our home, we call earth. As Covid-19 stilted the world into a frenzied lockdown, the human race beings became isolated, segregated and utterly thrown into the midst of the unknown. It seems for the first time human beings were not the indestructible animal on top of the food chain. Human beings did not have the undeniable strength that they once believed we had in numbers. In an effort to protect the species, humans were forced to live through a period of unnatural isolation. However, it was through this isolation they found themselves forming new communities. Once again the species began supporting each other, the government, the front line workers and the earth as we know it. One community I have researched and happened to be a part of first hand is the surgical mask wearing community.

Through out my experience of lockdown in Ireland, I saw many people from all different social backgrounds, genders, ages and races come together to form a community through the simple act of wearing a surgical mask in public spaces. This even included my dad, a profoundly deaf man living in a world of able-bodied man. By the action of us all wearing a mask, we showed our support in protecting one another and to our government. The wearing of the mask itself was community stance to say loudly we will pull together to overcome this global pandemic. It is times like that it is evident we see the mask is a sign of protection.

While there is a clear case for the protective application of the surgical mask, I believe the act of wearing one creates a paradox. Paradox can be defined as "a situation or statement that seems impossible or is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite or characteristics" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). The mask is an item of clothing that protects and segregates us a humans . The surgical mask as an item of clothing that "enables

paradox” (Bloomsbury Fashion Central , 2021). My theory is that the surgical mask not only unites us but also segregates us, something that came to the forefront of my thesis research by way of a personal experience with my hard of hearing father .

One experience that emphasised the power of this item of clothing, was on my twenty first birthday in 2021. We had stayed in Dublin for the night as a family and decided to go shopping the next day to find a piece of jewellery, as a keepsake to mark the special birthday. We had split up from my mum and my sister and made our way in and out of jewellery shops all across Dublin. I began to feel ill all of sudden due to a migraine and had to go into a pharmacy to get a strong pain killer. I became so ill I needed to sit down and my dad had to go to the till and pay for the pain killers by himself. Yet, as he went to pay for the painkillers he became very aware of his disability when the woman refused to pull down her mask and tell him the cost of the pain killers. My profoundly deaf father relies heavily on lip reading and expression , as he never learned sign language. For the first time he felt it was apparent that “he was a deaf person in a hearing world” (Appendix 1.1, 2022) . This was the moment I realised how much power an item of clothing can have in society. I became very passionate in researching the the protection of masks, as well as the unintended isolation of masks and garments that create a paradox.

The yearning and demand for community-wide protection, coupled with the compulsory nature of having to wear a mask - bolstered by the law - forced my dad to become a disabled member of community marginalised by the law, something he had worked his whole life to prevent. Thus, I feel I have a personal obligation to investigate the mask, and the paradox created through its widespread usage. How do masks protect us and our community? Can masks encourage a sense of isolation amongst certain communities ? Is fashion in all its glory an undeniable paradox of day to day life? It seems “by separating

these two roles into two different identities, the mask preserves the purity of each.”(Bloomsbury Fashion Central , 2021). These are the questions I hope to answer through my subsequent research.

Chapter 1 - Protection

The History Of Surgical Masks

The earliest recordings of a surgical mask date all the way back to the bubonic plague or Black Death pandemic which occurred in the years 1347 to 1351 all across Europe (The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2021). The surgical masks were constructed rather differently than the mask we recognise today as the surgical mask. The mainstream mask during the bubonic plague was shaped like a beak. These beak like masks were worn by doctors and other health care professionals of this time in order to protect themselves from the highly contagious plague. This type of masks served the purpose of protection by way of masking the smell of the ill and rotting, this was done by filling the masks with aromatic herbs (Matuschek et al., 2020). The shape of the beak like mask and predominately black clothing worn by doctors of this time made them become a symbol of death. This mask encouraging this idea of death is possibly the first time we see masks carrying out a role of protection while also isolating them from the majority of the population, due to the scaremongering of local myths surrounding the pandemic (Matuschek et al., 2020). Even the first iteration of a protective mask created a paradox for those who wear them.

Although it is thought masks were commonly used by doctors during the bubonic plague there was still little understanding of disease causing microorganisms. It was not until the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century masks were seen as an item of clothing that carried out a vital role of protection during medical procedures (Antonelli and Fisher, 2017). The surgical mask entering the mainstream thanks to French microbiologist Louis Pasteur's research and findings. According to an article in the book *Items* published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the introduction of the modern surgical mask “made visible change in scientific and public thought” (Antonelli and Fisher, 2017), a quote that embodies the experiences of a mask wearer in the twenty first century.



Fig. 1 (Artist. Unknown, *Plague doctor*, unknown)

Although surgical masks were an item of vital practice in surgical theatre, it was not until 1918 when The Flu pandemic hit that masks as a clothing item became part of the daily ritual of getting dressed (Antonelli and Fisher, 2017). The casual use of masks enabled the idea of personal and community protection but also performed “optically for a world terrified by the threat of infection” (Antonelli and Fisher, 2017). From my research findings it seems a relief that many other people before have experienced mask wearing and its vital role in communities and as individuals. It seems there is a sense of reassurance in the knowledge that others have not been oblivious to the stance that masks do aid a persons protection in many ways, but also can leave many individuals feeling vulnerable .



FIG. 29. — How the gauze-cotton mask should be worn. (Chapter VII.)

Fig.2 (Enfield, 2020), Wu Lien-teh developed a mask from layers of gauze enveloped in cotton

The Protective Qualities Of Masks

As corona virus struck the world in 2020, Humans in societies across the world became no stranger to rules and guidelines made by the government in order to protect its population. Such regulations that saved lives, while also allowing the population to try to carry with their lives as close to normal as would enable us to be safe. Wearing masks in public spaces became one of these protective rules enforced by the law in Ireland. It was soon understood that it became “an offence for a person not to wear a face mask without reasonable excuse in respect of which a Garda may issue a fixed penalty notice of €80.”(Department of Health, 2020). As masks became a common garment of protection, the government released a publication highlighting all queries around masks and mask wearing, it became known as ‘The Public Information Booklet’. ‘The Public Information

Booklet became an essential part of our knowledge in protecting ourselves and others. The publication clearly brought understanding of the types of masks and their protective qualities to the foreground of public knowledge (Department of Health, 2020). It seems the handbook allowed the mask to become a symbol of safety, safety in numbers. Such numbers became known as the mask wearing community, a community who believe its use will protect them.

One aspect that the 'The Public Information Booklet' highlighted that many people found rather intriguing, were the types of masks available for use and how the level of protection each different type offered varied. The masks suggested by the government to ensure the greatest protection from the Covid-19 virus include; the cloth mask, the surgical mask and FFP2 (or N95) mask. Masks have developed dramatically in their ability to protect since the beginning of Covid-19 to the current state of the pandemic in 2022. It does not seem so long ago when most of the population in Ireland had to resort to a sort of "make do and mend" (Norman, 2013) ethos in terms of masks. Due to a "global shortage of medical grade masks" (Whiley et al., 2020), most of the Irish population became resourceful in order to protect themselves and each other. Therefore out of desperation, handmade fabric masks became mainstream in terms of Irish society and fashion. The homemade fabric masks became a quick solution that encouraged the comfort in protection from the virus. Fabric masks even began to find their way on the catwalks of many luxury brands in 2021, some include , Balenciaga, Rick Owens and Marni (Cary, 2020).



Fig. 3 (The Health Service Executive, 2020)

By way of living and experiencing the pandemic first hand, it was clear that fabric masks played a vital part in the idea of community welfare at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. However dependence on home-made fabric masks was short lived, as was others. With the common wearing of fabric masks came skepticism around their effectiveness. After researchers studying the effectiveness of cloth face masks during the pandemic, it was discovered that “while there have been numerous studies on the ability of surgical masks and N95 respirators to filter out particles, far less is known about the ability of cloth masks to provide both inward protection to reduce the wearer’s exposure and outward protection for source control.”(Pan et al., 2020). According to an article where

scientists used a gram-positive bacterium found in the respiratory tract called “aerosol of staphylococcus aureus” in the evaluation of the Bacterial Filtration Efficiency of the comparison of medical and cloth face masks, fabric face masks demonstrated a 50% viral filtration efficiency (Whiley et al., 2020). However this percentage of efficiency is thought to decrease or increase the yield of viral filtration with the amount of layers of fabric compressed in the mask, for example ; “cotton–silk, cotton–chiffon, cotton–flannel” (Whiley et al., 2020).

The world became more accustomed to the nature of uncertain events during a global pandemic, and personal protective equipment (PPE) became more readily available. Two types of masks in which the Irish government advised people to wear in order to ensure a high level of protection from the virus include; the blue surgical mask and the FFP2 (N95) masks. In my household the blue surgical mask became an everyday essential, as it was lightweight, affordable and offered a “greater protection than cloth masks”(Department of Health, 2020). The blue surgical mask became a popular choice of mask among the mask wearing community, as they were subject to considerable scrutiny and scientific examination in order to uncover their true efficacy, given the importance of their use. The surgical mask is commonly made out of thermoplastics such as polystyrene, polycarbonate, polyethylene, or polyester, these “non-woven fabric” ensure a more efficient filtration of bacteria and airflow than woven cloth masks (Sherman, 2021).

The surgical mask itself has been proven to be 50% or more efficiency with regard to viral filtration (Pan et al., 2020), because of this it is clear to see why it became a nations favourite. Judging by the masks worldwide popularity during the pandemic, it is apparent that a person feels the need to wear a mask as an intervention strategy for “reducing community transmission of disease” or protection in simpler terms (Whiley et al., 2020). It is an intriguing insight that we rely on a garment for protection that only protects us from

the virus upwards of 50%. In researching the efficiency of masks further, it soon became apparent that there is protection in numbers. One article's findings concluded that if "80% of the community in New York wore masks in public, and the masks were 50% effective, this could prevent 17–45% of projected number of deaths." The same study found that even masks that are less effective could significantly reduce the number of deaths in areas with low transmission rates. For example, if 80% of the community in Washington wore masks that were only 20% effective this could still reduce the number of deaths by 24–65%."(Whiley et al., 2020).

In conclusion, it is evident that masks have served the purpose of protection from the bubonic plague until now. Although design has changed for more efficient filtration, the same feelings of safety and protection are still associated with the mask. In mask wearing statistics show that there is strength in numbers in combating the virus and in supporting each other. The mask played a vital role in saving lives all through history, and the Covid-19 pandemic was no exception to the protection of the garment.

Chapter 2 - Isolation

In March of 2020, the World Health Organisation declared that we were in fact living through a global pandemic (Lang et al., 2021). In the United States alone “the total number of confirmed cases surpassed 20 million and the total number of recorded deaths from COVID-19 approached 350,000 on January 1” (Lang et al., 2021). In order to protect populations from this virus Covid-19 safety measures were put in place in every country across the world. There was a common understanding that all able bodied person had the responsibility to social distancing, to undergo regular antigen testing and wear surgical masks in public spaces. My family and I adhered to all these safety regulations throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Like many I sought after the illusion of protection that masks safety measures held in society.

As the timeline of pandemic sprawled over years, the mask became a part of the daily ritual of getting dress. However many avoided to question the repercussions that mask wearing had in other communities. This level of ignorance allowed for a break in communication with other communities struggling to abide by the same laws. I became intrigued by masks, no longer in admiration for the garment but with curiosity. I had a buried deep-rooted toward the mask. As I had lived with my deaf father through a global pandemic, I became accustomed to seeing the masks as more than just a garment. I regularly observed my father obey protective mass wearing guidelines . The mask no longer became a garment of high nobility and protection, but rather a garment of isolation. In this chapter , I believe it is necessary to explore the idea that the mask is a garment of paradox. Living with a profoundly deaf father who believed undoubtably in mask wearing for protective purposes, both personal and to his fellow man. There is a responsibility to understand communities consisting of individuals who have also felt isolated by the mandatory wearing of the surgical mask, for example the deaf community.

Masking Feelings Isolation

To get a better understanding of the paradox created by wearing masks, I started my research for this chapter by conducting an interview with my Father. During the pandemic of 2020 my father became a supportive member of the mask wearing community, while also being part of the deaf community in Ireland. His hearing loss story begins when he was sixteen, the age he noticed dramatic reduction in hearing quality due to an accident he had when he was younger. Such hearing loss caused my father to fall behind in school and led teachers to believe he was a poor student. This lack of communication and understanding of his severe disability made him feel isolated and 'different' from his other class mates . In conversation with my father this miscommunication was overcome "by the teacher being aware and me triggering the difficulties if I had any."(Appendix 1.1, 2022).

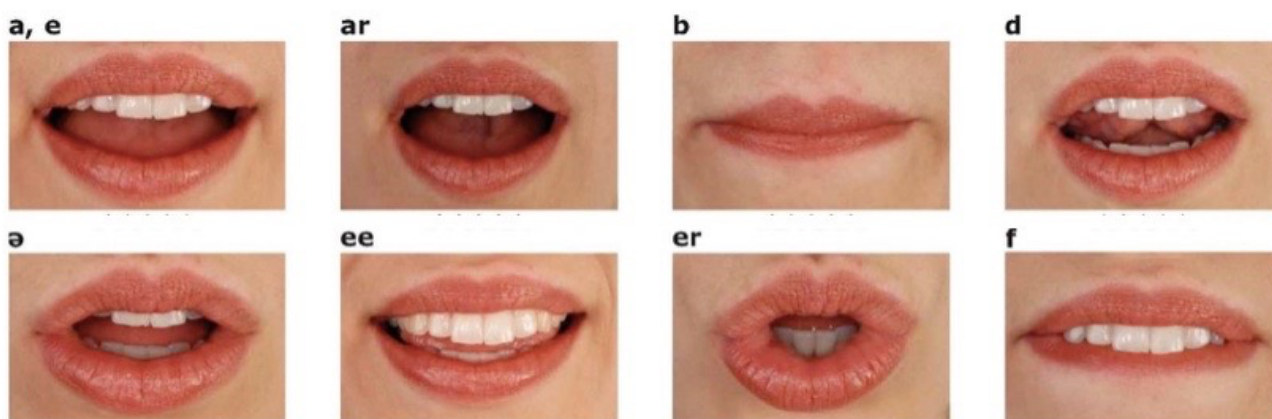


Fig.4 (Linder & Wyatt, 2017), Note importance of mouth shape in pronouncing certain letters

When my Father reached the age of 17, he was presented with the choice to either continue his formal education through sign language or continue to integrate into mainstream society by technique of lip reading. It was my grandmother who encouraged

him to learn how to lip read so he could pursue his dream career, to pursue a partner outside the deaf community. My Father stated that learning to use a combination of lip reading and hearing “ it was more to do with my parents wanting me to go to normal school, so that I would be able to integrate with normal hearing people and live in the hearing world. Rather than just be restrained to or restricted to communicating with deaf people or hard of hearing people.” (Appendix 1.1, 2022).

Despite the obstacles he was presented with, my Dad integrated into mainstream society with relative ease. He owned an opticians, he met my mum (who is not part of the deaf community) and went on to have two fully hearing daughters, my sister and I. My Father was a man who believed in appreciating the opportunities life has to offer, therefore took every opportunity to travel the world to enjoy experiences from all cultures . It is evident my dad has never let his disability put him in a box and restrict him, yet it transpired that such a simple item of clothing would have so much power, as the mask did just that. Through the wearing of masks my dad “found that particularly difficult because [He] could not lip read” (Appendix 1.1, 2022). The mask isolated my father from the rest of the masked world, a world he struggled to communicate with. He lost the most effective medium with which he could communicate through and understand the world around him.

As the pandemic has not yet come to an end, neither have the feelings of isolation surrounding the mask. When I am with my father I am thankful that people are understanding and “generally speaking, people would either volunteer to remove their masks or they would speak louder and clearer; or a combination of the two”(Appendix 1.1, 2022). However, there has been unfortunate experiences where there has been a severe lack of patience toward his disability that also exists by those that do not understand his struggle, exemplified even further by mask wearing provisions escalated during the

pandemic. There has been instances employees of vital services not wants to pull down their masks or refusing to speak louder when asked to do so. In this situation my father has to “then ask them to write down what I haven’t been able to hear.” (Appendix 1.1, 2022). The basis of communication have been inhibited by the mask. Lip reading becomes impossible, therefore such an individual may lose their independence. According to an article studying the effects of ‘hearing loss and universal masking in the Civid-19 era’, “mask wearing causes a low-pass filter effect attenuating the higher frequencies of the speaker’s voice with decibel reduction ranging from 3 to 4 dB (medical mask) to nearly 12 dB for the N95 mask (respirator/FFP).” (Ten Hulzen & Fabry, 2020). For people with hearing difficulties and individuals who rely on “non-verbal cues”(Grote & Izagaren, 2020) masks cause a dramatic barrier in communication. Masks encouraging such loss in communication puts marginalised communities at risk of becoming isolated and thus having a detrimental impact on one's mental health(Grote & Izagaren, 2020). For the Irish government and the majority of able mask wearers, it seems as though ignorance really is bliss.

In researching the isolation caused by masks for proudly deaf individuals, I discovered that a more substantial issue around the world than I had previously thought. Recently, this problem came to the foreground of conversation in Ireland when it became mandatory for children above the age of 13 to wear masks in schools (Department of health, 2020). New guidelines sparked fear that Deaf and hard of hearing children in school “will be left behind by the requirement because it will leave them unable to lip-read” (McDermott, 2021). Parents are told to expect their children to suffer “socio-emotional challenges” if mask wearing continues (McDermott, 2021). Despite the overwhelming evidence that points to the struggles faced by those in the deaf community, the lack of action on creating a mask suitable for those in the community means they have no choice but to remain marginalised

in order to protect themselves and those around them. My father believes the key to making the mask friendly to people with disabilities is to “design a clear mask that, should be masks that have a clear, transparent area around the mouth.”(Mortimer & Mortimer, 2022). With “six people in the UK live with hearing loss, and in people over the age of 70 an estimated 70% have hearing loss” it is unacceptable that today there is no transparent mask alternative of high filtration ability to be used in healthcare environments (Grote & Izagaren, 2020).

Unmasking Isolation

It is quite evident to me that even a garment as simple as the mask, has had such a negative impact in certain communities. It has caused a gap in basic methods of communication, pushing individuals like my father into isolation. To prove that the mask is a garment of paradox I wanted to explore another community the mask has left feeling isolated. The community I decided to research is the anti-mask community. As I am a person who supports mask wearing, I found the effect of choosing not wearing the mask rather intriguing. Once again the mask, or lack of has left many individuals feeling isolated and excommunicated from the rest of the world. In order to understand the choice of not wearing a mask and the isolation that comes along with that choice, I decided to direct my research to seek an understanding of why this group bestows so little trust in the mask, how they formulated these beliefs, while also shedding a light on the repercussions that come with their refusal to comply with mask wearing rules and regulations during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

In recent conversation with friends it is clear there is an awareness of effects of not wearing masks in public. In one particular instance a friend made it known to her peers

that she had a medical exemption from wearing a mask. Despite this medical exemption she makes the choice every day to wear a mask as failure to do so leads to fear of isolation and discrimination by pro-mask wearers. This was the first time an issue like this and really came to my attention as I had only ever surrounded myself with other pro-mask wearers with similar views. I had began to wonder why many members of society feel so strongly in their views in mask wearing. The answer being they strongly in science, and they surrounded themselves in a curated echo-chamber. The term echo chamber means “similar-minded users form their own clusters or communities of individuals adhering to the same set of beliefs. Others like have argued that opinions of vocal minorities can become amplified on Twitter by use of verbal aggression such as toxic language.”(Singh et al., 2021).

Echo chambers allow extreme opinions on the mask to circulate, dividing the mask wearers from the anti-mask wearers. Due to the fact that anti-mask wearers are a minority, they were forced into an isolated echo chamber of common extreme views. “Individuals have engaged in wide-spread discussions related to COVID-19 across social media platforms” and it is believed that such platforms play a large part in ones political and social views, such as the mask (Singh et al., 2021). It is thought that social media platforms allow for such behaviour to spread virally as such platforms are very “simplistic” in design (Du & Gregory, 2016). It is very common for users of social media applications to follow and be followed by others with similar opinions, and if you do not agree with someones views, they can be erased with the click of a button. Unfortunately this is not real life. When one is stuck in an echo chamber it may be hard to identify as we “tend discuss issue with like-minded users” with nobody challenging them on such issues (Du & Gregory, 2016). Outside communication is drained from ones perspective, which leads to extreme right or left wing views and extreme anti-mask wearing.

The discussion of anti-mask stance became headline news when the U.S government presented their views anti-mask wearing and ignored the 'Centre of Disease Control's' advice on "officially recommending the use of face masks as a safety precaution."(Lang et al., 2021). The actions of The White House the mask became a garment of political significance. As the public were not seeing masks being worn "at Trump presidential campaign rallies or on the floor of the U.S. Senate" (Lang et al., 2021), in support of president Trump the lack of mask wearing became something of an extreme right wing symbol. An extreme right wing community shows us the perfect example of echo chamber occurring around the mask. This group in particular became so ignorant to the views of outsiders that they became mocked and broadcasted on television all across the world.



Fig. 5, (Flores, 2020), An anti-mask protester holds up a sign that reads "My Body, My Choice" at the Texas State Capitol on April 18, 2020 in Austin

Through researching both, the profoundly deaf community and the anti-mask wearing community , it is clear that the mask can cause extreme feelings of isolation. The masks is a perfect example of a garment that's symbolism contradicts itself depending on the wearer, or non wearer. This is a simple piece of clothing that represents a great paradox. A paradox in clothing enables different opinions, which ultimates allows for human expression and freedom of speech not the subject. This freedom of speech is necessary to allow for education of people and development in design.

Chapter 3 - Fashion And Paradox

A paradox is “ a statement or situation that may be true but seems impossible or difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics” (Cambridge University Press 2022, 2022). It is apparent through my research that ambivalence and paradox is a true “constant through shifting visual cultures as well as social, political, cultural, and temporal contexts.” (Mackinney-Valentin et al., 2017). In the lives of many people examples of paradox can be found in daily rituals, one example of this is the custom of wearing a mask. Clothing that we wear expresses what a person “ perceives and [how they are] perceived “ (Gill-Brown et al., 2015). Such statement shows that a paradox is a natural part of life and individual opinion. A paradox in fashion can be found in the daily choices people make, choice is surrounded by paradox. The mask protects people, but also may isolate people of certain beliefs and within certain communities. In proving there is a paradox in the clothing all around us it is necessary to research more items of clothing that are believe express great ambivalence by way of symbolism. Two other examples of paradoxical fashion are, The veil and The Tinted sunglasses. Each item expresses it own contradictory message, in wearing it or not. The veil is an item of clothing that is thought to conceal and reveal, while the The tinted sunglasses enables power and vulnerability through the simple act of wearing.

The Veil - Conceal

Fashion is a “paradoxical endeavour that relies in part on shifting ideas of beauty, status, social standing, culture, sexuality, and gender.” (Mackinney-Valentin et al., 2017). The veil as garment has is own role in paradoxical world of fashion. The veil has two functions “that of creating an interaction between clothes and body, a function common to almost every type of covering, and that of exhibiting nakedness through concealment.” (Calefato et al.,

2004). In other words the veil can both conceal and reveal a persons sexuality, status and outward gaze. In many religions across the world a veil conceals a woman's intimacy. In many religions across the world, the gaze between male and female is prohibited and therefore concealed. Gaze may be concealed but " it is evoked by the fascination of what is hidden" (Calefato et al., 2004).

In my own catholic religion, veils are worn only by women of the faith. The veil derives from the Virgin Mary, as some of the earliest depictions of Mary reveal she favours a blue veil. The colour blue was thought to represent heavenly grace, good health and servitude to God (Eicher & Lindholm, 2010). Veils are commonly worn by a girl making her first holy communion, a bride during a marriage ceremony and by nuns who devote their life to God. Greek and Roman brides also wore veils, as interestingly "the Latin word *nubere* meaning 'to veil' also meant 'to marry'" (Calefato et al., 2004). For brides being concealed by the veils provides safety, modesty and Chasity. The veil portrays a shield from the savage outside world, preserving the virgin bride. In fact the Christian veil derives from the *suffibulum* of Roman vestal virgins (Calefato et al., 2004). The act of wearing a veil protects and conceals a brides purity in the catholic religion, but also signifies the vow of chastity catholic nuns take in order to devote their life to God. The term 'taking the veil' is associated with concealment of "suppressing individuality and articulating a distinct detachment from earthly matters"(Hume, 2010). The type of veil that a nun wears is known as a habit. The habit "conceals the body and absorbs the self into a collective whole" (Hume, 2010)., a person of individuality is concealed but a member of spiritual community is gained



Fig.6 (Masolino, 1425), Virgin Mary and Christ Child

The veil - Reveal

As in every paradox, there are two poles - in this case, the veil can also reveal. The veil can be worn to reveal information about a person's affiliations, style and personality (Eicher & Vogelsang-Eastwood, 2010). Ironically, many veils that are used to conceal gaze are constructed out of transparent fabrics, such as organza and chiffon (Calefato et al., 2004). The perfect instance that expresses the veils how veils reveal information about a person, is the moment when a bride lifts her veil during the wedding ceremony. The action of unveiling reveals an "irreversible step" in womanhood (Eicher & Vogelsang-Eastwood,

2010). The removal of the veil declares a shared silent truth, a loss of a woman's virginity. I believe the poet Philip Larkin accurately depicted the effects of revealing truths of wedding attire in 'The Whitsun Weddings', as he writes in the sixth stanza "The women shared, The secret like a happy funeral; While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared, At a religious wounding" (Larkin, 1964, lines 52-55). Similarly, a nuns public beliefs and chastity can be revealed through wearing a habit. Since the Second Vatican Council modernised the rules around wearing habits and they became less and less prominent, as nuns were given the option to wear conservative modern clothing (Eicher & Lindholm, 2010). Even though the habit is not as popular as it once was, wearing a habit reveals a persons outward "path toward saintliness" (Hume, 2010).

Tinted Sunglasses - Power

Similarly to the mask or the veil, I believe tinted sunglasses are another item that symbolises a paradox of daily life. In wearing tinted sunglasses, you are asserting both power and vulnerability. The power comes in the form of anonymity. Once you are wearing sunglasses you enable the item of clothing to "attract or deflect attention" (Brown, 2015). In the nineteenth century there are portraits of nobles and men of hierarchy wearing some of the earliest models (Calefato et al., 2004). Most sunglasses back then were crafted for a noble's aesthetic and power in mystery of expression Today sunglasses are bought for practical use however, one can not deny sunglasses continue to preserve the power of fascination in a person's expression and true thoughts hidden in the eyes behind the sunglasses (Calefato et al., 2004). It is thought power in curiosity and anonymity originates back to the Mid-eighteenth century in Venice when fans were used by women to distort gaze and convey a mystic allure (Brown, 2015). This distortion of gaze led to power in seduction and anonymity, this common opinion ultimately changed a wearers social role.

As times changed and fashion trends have developed, handheld fans became less prominent and tinted sunglasses have become the new 'gaze distorter'. Sunglasses are more readily available than ever before due to mass production, this enables larger numbers of people to find power in their ability to "suggest vision" and create their own facade or image of self, prime examples; include Karl Lagerfeld and Anna Wintour. (Brown, 2015). Both fashion icons used tinted sunglasses as a barrier between their shielded expression and the chaos of the fashion world, therefore finding power in anonymity and curiosity (Brown, 2015).

Tinted Sunglasses - Vulnerability

As tinted sunglasses enable power in anonymity, they also symbolise vulnerability in a person who wears them. Sunglasses can outwardly project a person's insecurity and need to be unrecognisable. The shades can become a barrier in protecting the eye from the rays of the sun while also "hiding or veiling the area around the eyes, and thus modifying salient facial features" (Calefato et al., 2004). It is common manners to take off sunglasses in order to talk to somebody, although this may not be the case if the wearer is feeling upset or embarrassed (Calefato et al., 2004). Sunglasses can distort true vulnerable expression or mask our inward gaze. In America during the 1940's, tinted eye wear suddenly became popular as it became a social rule not to make eye contact in large cities such as Chicago, or there may be violent consequences due to high rates of street crime and gun violence. The lack of eye contact lead to fear behind the tinted glass (Brown, 2015). The eyes were "believed to be the ultimate traitor of weakness, emotion, vulnerability; their tiny movements communicating a wealth of information to others" and Sunglasses only projected these beliefs (Brown, 2015). Tinted eye wear allows one to

detach oneself from a situation presented in front of them, but in wear them they can unintentionally show vulnerability in not being able to take the shades off.

In discussing the veil and the tinted sunglasses, one cannot deny the complexity of symbolism an item of clothing expresses in the simple act of putting it on the body and wearing it, or not. It is evident that many items of clothing have been introduced for practical use, how ever over time such items become a way of set expression. Clothing allows for people to be read by other other people, enabling people to form communities of like minded people or echo-chambers.



Fig.7 (Evans, 2015), Shoppers avoiding eye contact in Chicago

Conclusion

In conclusion, The world pandemic of 2020 has opened many individuals eyes up to the power of fashion. Fashion can be a medium of story telling. What we wear and how we choose to wear it expresses far more than personal taste; clothing can communicate a persons political stance, beliefs and personality. Fashion has the ability to contradict its meaning simply by wearing a garment or not, this can be seen in terms of mask wearing. I believe the mask is a very important clothing of paradox as I had witnessed both sides of the paradox. In wearing a mask we as humans can be protected but also isolated by its simple design in covering facial features such as the mouth. The ambivalence in wearing particular types of clothing has remained as constant while there have been changes in popular trends, economy and politics (Mackinney-Valentin et al., 2017). It necessary for fashion to be contradictory in order to enable opinions and encouraging for better design to include outliers or minority groups in our conversations.

The mask has a long history in protecting humans from the bubonic plague to the current Coronavirus pandemic. Its design has evolved from the beak shaped mask of the bubonic plague, to early cotton gauze mask of the twentieth century, finally to the blue surgical mask as we know it. The mask has developed in design and filtration efficiency to serve greater protection for the wearer. They have allowed us to carry on about our daily lives during a global pandemic, it became a garment of comfort and safety for many wearers. However, in my findings it is evident that the ideal of protection in wearing a mask may overshadow the feeling of isolation it has cause many communities who struggle to accept masks wearing as a normal part of life now. As the saying goes there are two sides to every story, it seems clothing is no acceptance.

Through my own experiences in supporting masks in the hope of protection for Covid-19, I also witnessed the masks isolating qualities. By way of conducting an interview with my

profoundly deaf father, the mask became a garment of isolation. The design of the mask covers the lips of individuals which prevents us from seeing a mask wearers lips or expression. For people, like my father this prevents them from being able to communicate in social or professional settings. The wearing of the mask forces people with hidden disabilities like my father into a state of unintended isolation. In order to prove the isolating values of mask, I discovered how to lack of mask wearing can also be a cause for isolation. The choice of refusal left many individuals angry and forced into toxic communities of extreme beliefs.

The paradox of fashion is not just restricted to mask wearing, there are many cases of paradoxical clothing. To prove my theory that wearing can symbolise contradictory connotations of the garment. The veil and the tinted sunglasses are garments that proved this theory, by concealing and revealing or expressing power and vulnerability. By way of a combination in personal experience and research, it is clear to see why clothing and personal style is important to people all across the world. Clothing can be used to express our views on particular topics, while also exposing many of our greatest vulnerabilities. Our lives and what we wear consists of a fashionable paradox.

Appendix

1.1 - Self-conducted interview

My name is Ellie Mortimer, It Is 17 January 2022 and I am interviewing and recording my Dad Andrew Mortimer in research for a thesis project. I will be discussing the protective traits of the surgical mask, as well as the isolating traits. As a profoundly deaf man, Andrew will give his insight into what it is like to communicate in a mask wearing world, when you rely predominantly on lip reading as a source of hearing.

Ellie: So, what is your name?

Andrew: My name is Andrew Mortimer.

Ellie: what age are you?

Andrew: I am 56 years of age.

Ellie: When is your birthday?

Andrew : 17th of March 1965

Ellie: And where were you born?

Andrew: I was born in Westow, North Yorkshire, England.

Ellie: At what age did you start losing your hearing?

Andrew: Roughly, around my early teens.

Ellie: Okay. And did you have any hearing before you lost..that, like lost your main amount of hearing?

Andrew: I always had perfect hearing

Ellie: Up to that?

Andrew: erm, just about perfect hearing. I had a little bit of hearing loss but not too severe. And I lost a lot of hearing from my mid teens onwards.

Ellie: Okay, would that like 16... did you say?

Andrew: Erm, early teens so...12 to 13. So from about 13 years onwards I started losing hearing in my early teens and it gradually got worse and became more profound when was about 16. Then I had to wear earring aids on a permanent basis.

Ellie: How did you notice that your hearing was decreasing?

Andrew: Because I was not hearing , obviously not hearing anything.

Ellie: so you could not communicate properly?

Andrew: I noticed more in lectures at college. I couldn't hear in lectures at college. I was having great difficulty.

Ellie: That was the prime example for the next question. Did experience any hearing loss in school and if so, how did people communicate with you? Were there extra resources for children with hearing disabilities back then?

Andrew: The teachers were aware that I had hearing difficulty and I would have a place at the front of the class. I was encouraged to make it known if I had not heard and the teacher would be quite happy to repeat or go through things with me if required. But that was the only real help that I got. It was more of a question of the teacher being aware and me triggering the difficulties if I had any. But usually sitting at the front of the class was enough because I could lip read and I could hear because I was at the front.

Ellie: And there was good communication between teacher and student?

Andrew: Generally, most teachers. Yes.

Ellie: Do you work and socialise amongst the deaf community in Ireland ?

Andrew: No, I do not no.

Ellie: Do you think there are any contributing factors as to losing your hearing at such a young age?

Andrew: Erm, can I go back to the other question. You asked me do I socialise amongst the deaf community its in Ireland. Do you need to know why?

Ellie: Yes of course , that's a question further down but I would love you to explain why.

Andrew: Well, the reason is that I was always brought up in the hearing world. So, I never learnt sign language and I've never actually spent any real time in my life with hard of hearing people. So, I have always lived as a hard of hearing person in a hearing world.

Ellie: And this answers other questions further down but How come you did not learn sign language ? Is it just because you did nit want to restrict yourself by learning how to sign?

Andrew: I think it was more to do with my parents wanting me to go to normal school, so that I would be able to integrate with normal hearing people and live in the hearing world.

Rather than just be restrained to or restricted to communicating with deaf people or hard of hearing people.

Ellie: Because of that do you rely a lot on lip reading?

Andrew: I do a combination of lip reading and hearing.

Ellie: Do you think there are any contributing factors that made you lose your hearing at such a young age?

Andrew: Apparently, I had a bad accident when I was a child and erm...they think possibly that the drugs that I was treated with can sometimes cause nerve damage. They think it could have caused nerve damage to my hearing. To the auditory nerves.

Ellie: what types of technology do you rely on for your day to day life interactions with other people?

Andrew: Well, I rely very much on my phone for whatsapp, texting and obviously emailing. I find them all very useful as a hard of hearing person. That would be the main thing I would use and subtitles. Well, I also have a cochlear implant, which helps me to hear better and I wear a hearing aid.

Ellie: So, you have a cochlear implant in one ear and a hearing aid in the other?

Andrew: Correct.

Ellie: Due to getting your cochlear implant were there certain elements of your disability that allowed you to qualify for the operation?

Andrew: Well, to qualify for a cochlear implant you must have... your hearing must be of a certain level. A certain poor level. So, you must have had a certain percentage hearing loss before you would be considered for a cochlear implant. I don't know what the criteria is but you have to have a certain percentage of loss of hearing before they would even consider doing that for you.

Ellie: And since you have got that done do you think you rely on lip reading as much or is it still a combination?

Andrew: Is still a combination. I don't think that has particularly changed too much.

Ellie: By Irish guidelines it states that hard of hearing citizens do not have to wear a mask.

Did you adhere to these guidelines? And if not why not?

Andrew: What did I wear a mask or didn't wear a mask?

Ellie: It says you didn't have to wear one but like, I know you did wear a mask. But why did you choose to do that?

Andrew: Well, I chose to do that because that was the health guidance that was given because of Covid-19. So, its no problem for me to actually wear one, it is more a problem for hearing path people wearing them, wearing a mask. So it did not have any hindrance on me unless I was dealing directly with a hard of hearing person, and I have not been. So, I felt it was only fair to abide by the normal health rules in regards to Covid.

Ellie: Did you witness a change in you ability to communicate with others during the pandemic and through others wearing masks?

Andrew: Yes, I found that particularly difficult because I could not lip read because of the masks. So, yes it was. It has been quite problematic at times.

Ellie: Was there any way around that?

Andrew: Generally speaking, people would either volunteer to remove their masks or they would speak louder and clearer; or a combination of the two.

Ellie: And you find most people would be okay with that? Did you ever have any bad situations where people refused to do that?

Andrew: I have had situations where people won't remove their masks and I have had to then ask them to write down what I haven't been able to hear.

Ellie: But overall people have been pretty understanding?

Andrew: Generally, yes.

Ellie: How do you feel like you dealt emotionally and physically with the pandemic? That must have been pretty hard on your self esteem and confidence. You can go out but you can't hear to the ability that you want to hear. How did you find that?

Andrew: Well, I haven't been going out as much in the pandemic and I've been lucky enough to be working. So, in all honesty I haven't found it too difficult because my life hasn't changed as much as other peoples has. Ive been able to maintain a working environment but my social environment has obviously changed but everybody's has changed. I haven't been socially active, so I haven't found it difficult because I have not been going out.

Ellie: But, if you were to go out, would you find it difficult? Would you shy away from socialising a bit more lately? Would you feel isolated by the mask as a garment?

Andrew: I don't feel too bad when I'm with your mum or when I'm with somebody that's got hearing. But I certainly would not like to, well it wouldn't bother me that much because I would find a way around it , but I would not like to be in an environment where I was with someone that did not have hearing. For example, if we are in a restaurant and somebody is serving and they have a mask on I cannot hear what they are saying to me. I don't get too uptight about it because usually if you're in those sort of environments, these environments aren't critical. If you order a cup of tea and you get a cup of coffee it's nit the end of the world. However, in a business environment it can be more tricky. The decisions you make may be more careful.

Ellie: So you need to be careful about the people you surround yourself with.

Andrew: Certainly. For example, Recently I had to go and have a new hearing aid fitted and it very, very important that when you're having a hearing aid fitting that you answer the questions correctly. I f you don't you could end up with a hearing aid that is not tuned in correctly. So, if it is an environment where the information you're trying to receive or trying to give back is critical to the outcome, then that is a little bit more stressful. If its general

environment; such as a restaurant or a pub, it's not critical. There is not critical mistakes or there is not mistakes that can be put right. They're not the end of the world. It is more difficult in a working environment or an environment where you need to get exact information. It can be more... stressful is not the word. It is a little bit more frustrating.

Ellie: So, you would need to be careful and would want to comfortable with the people are environment that you're in.

Ellie: How do you think you could protect yourself and others from Covid-19 while also being conscious of hidden disabilities, such as being profoundly deaf?

Andrew: How do you mean? Or what are you getting at?

Ellie: Do you think there is a different solution to masks? Is there a different design that would find find more helpful in terms of communicating while being hard of hearing during a pandemic?

Andrew: What I feel should happen is that, certainly when you're visiting your GP or doctor of any sort that there should be masks that have a clear, transparent area around the mouth. This would help hard of hearing people to communicate. I think that has been lacking. I don't think that has kept up with it to be honest. I this it is very, very important for that to be introduced. I haven't seen that many of them around really. I have seen some but not many. It is important that the mask is transparent around the working area of the mouth.

Ellie: The mask should really should be transparent throughout all communities, not just marginalising one and protecting another.

Andrew: I think it's also important that we remember that we take on board peoples facial expressions. Facial expressions can be stronger than words, and I would say that been a difficult thing over Covid-19. You don't really know how people are feeling about certain situations. You can't really get or understand other peoples emotions. You can say certain

words like no or yes but it can be a hard no or a soft yes. Do you know what I mean? You can not pick it up because you can't see facial expressions, whereas a hearing person can probably pick it up in the tone of their voice. Our communication is all to do with expression and masks hide this from us.

Ellie: I completely understand. Well we have come to end of my questions on the topic of the mask being a paradox. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Andrew : I think that is everything. Thank you for interviewing me on this topic.

Ellie: Thank you for openly speaking about your experiences, I really appreciate it.

Time : 14:40

Date: 17th January 2022

Word count: 2,122

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