National College of Art and Design

Department of Design for Body and the Environment:

Textile & Surface Design

'The Denigration of Femininity: An Exploration into society's perception of

Femininity under Patriarchy'

Eleanor Gleeson

Submitted to the School of Visual Culture in Candidacy for the Degree of B.A.

(Hons) Textile & Surface Design (Studio+ Year)

2022

NCAD DUBLIN

National College of Art and Design

School of Visual Culture

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

Signed: *Eleanor Gleeson*

Programme / department: Textile & Surface Design, School of Design

Date: 9th February 2022

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: A young boy defying gender norms by playing with a "girly" dollhouse. Available at: https://www.istockphoto.com/photos/boys-playing-with-dolls [Accessed 19 December 2021]

Figure 2: A comic sketch mocking the sexist phrase "throw like a girl". Available at: http://chicksdigthefastball.blogspot.com/2011/03/you-throw-like-girl-which-means-you-are.html [Accessed 9 January 2022]

Figure 3: A suit from Jean-Louis Scherrer SS1983, a masculine shape was embraced, symbolising the idea of having equal status with men. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781847888525.EDch3031 [Accessed 8 November 2021]

Figure 4: Painting of Pandora's box by Charles Edward Perugini, 1839-1918 , oil on canvas. Available at: https://www.pressenza.com/2020/05/pandoras-box-hope-in-the-time-of-covid-19/ [Accessed 18 January 2022]

Figure 5: An "unnatural" man, his body decorated with tattoos, beard groomed and body sculpted through gym and steroids. Available at: https://insidebodybuilding.com/benefits-of-anabolic-steroids/ [Accessed 5 January 2022]

Figure 6: Elle Woods from Legally Blonde, dressed in a hyper feminine pink dress with a sequin belt, appearing very much confident and in control in the courtroom. Available at: https://www.buzzfeed.com/krystieyandoli/reese-witherspoon-legally-blonde-3 [Accessed 9 January 2022]

Figure 7: Coke Zero ad displaying gendered marketing targeting men. Available at: https://erajournal.co.uk/thoughts/is-food-a-feminist-issue [Accessed 9 January 2022]

Figure 8: Candace Owens' response to Harry Styles feminine style. Available at: https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1943740-harry-styles-dress-vogue-cover [Accessed 21 January 2022]

The Denigration of Femininity: An Exploration into society's perception of Femininity under Patriarchy

Introduction:

In this research essay, I would like to explore the ways in which femininity can be deemed negative within Western society, and how this collective view of femininity is rooted in the fact that we all exist within a Patriarchal society. Patriarchy can be defined as a system of society that favours men over women. It upholds the belief that what is associated with man; masculinity, is superior to what is associated with women; femininity. Under a patriarchal society, women are perceived as subordinate or "other" to men, (Walby, 1990, p. 20) with femininity considered inferior. Another term to describe this is Androcentrisim, which literally means male-centred. It is the practice of placing a masculine point of view at the centre of one's world view, thereby marginalising femininity. Androcentrism results from and perpetuates patriarchy (Hibbs, 2014). As a result of patriarchy and androcentrism, femininity is devalued and regulated. The term for this phenomenon is "femmephobia" (Hoskin, 2020). In a patriarchal economy, it is of no surprise that men reject and devalue femininity. However, it is not just men who can view femininity as a weakness, as women can also view their own signifier as negative. "In an androcentric society, the unconscious is also androcentric" (Cremin, 2021, p. 5). Some women, not only reject femininity because of unconscious or conscious negative associations, but also purposely abandon femininity for feminist reasons, specifically relating to 2nd wave feminism, which will be discussed within this thesis. This thesis thus endeavours to explore the denigration of femininity and how the negative

connotations associated with femininity manifest in certain behaviours within society today.

My interest in feminist theory, sociology and political philosophy is the primary motivation for this topic choice. I feel this subject matter is often overlooked by Feminist scholars, and I wanted to add my own observations and conclusions to this subcategory of feminist discourse, in addition to expanding my knowledge on the topic. The material I gathered and researched for this thesis contains a balance between classic and contemporary sources. I have researched various books, articles, academic journals, and dissertations for this research essay, as well as revisiting relevant books I have read in the past. Ciara Cremin's book *"The Future is Feminine" (2021)*, and many of Rea Ashley Hoskin's academic articles on Femmephobia have been particularly useful for this thesis.

In chapter 1, I will discuss Patriarchy and gender, and how Patriarchy affects our perception of masculinity and femininity within society. The aim of this chapter is to set the scene before discussing women and men's relationship with femininity.

In chapter 2, I will focus on Women & Femininity. I aim to understand the relationship between femininity and feminism, as well as identifying the key negative associations femininity. I also will touch on the logical fallacy of Naturalistic fallacy in relation to gender and dress.

In chapter 3, men & femininity will be the focus point. I will discuss men's expected behaviour within society in relation to gender, as well as analysing the manifestations of masculinity under patriarchy in today's world.

The thesis will then conclude with, an overall conclusion of the topics addressed, including the implications of femmephobia, what I have discovered within this research, and a brief argument as to why femininity is vital in order to tackle social issues such as sexism, toxic masculinity and trans misogyny.

Chapter 1:

Gender & Patriarchy

What is Gender?

People often use the terms 'sex' and 'gender' interchangeably, although they mean different things. Newman (2021) refers to 'sex' as "the physical differences between people who are male, female or intersex". People typically have their sex assigned at birth based on physiological characteristics. Gender, however, is a social construct, centred around how a person identifies, with masculinity and femininity being the main components of gender. While gender is usually based on the biological difference between men and women; sex (Paoletti, 2012, p. 1), gender is not inherent. Indeed, as Simon de Beauvoir (1953, p. 267) famously states: "One is not born but becomes a woman". Thus, people may identify with genders that are different to the ones they were assigned with at birth. These identities may be transgender, nonbinary, gender neutral, or bigender (Newman, 2021). Gender has also been described as a continuous set of performances, including gender and dress (Judith Butler, 1988, p. 519). As soon as a baby is born, gender is involuntarily put upon them, with dress being used to reinforce gender (Michelman and Miller-Spillman, 2010, p. 227). Today, baby girls are dressed in pink and baby boys are dressed in blue; though, there are some babies dressed in gender neutral colours like yellow, cream or grey. As the baby develops into a child, they may want to participate in behaviours that do not align with their expected gender role. For example, a boy might decide he would like to play with Barbies and play dress-up in skirts or makeup. When this occurs, "parents may redirect the child's behaviour into a more socially acceptable and gender-specific activity" (Michelman and

Miller-Spillman, 2010, p. 228). Children are expected to comply with a specific gender role and this can carry on and does carry on to adulthood too. Many girls play with dolls and other girly things until one day they realise it feels more accepted and that there is more social value in masculine behaviours. Even if a girl enjoys playing with dolls, they may begin to see the value in the masculine, and begin to play football and become 'tomboys'. Boys may also want to play with dolls and do girly things. However, even today, boys are discouraged to be girly or feminine and are encouraged to be treated as little men (Pollack, 1998). Thus, many boys suppress their desire to have, wear, do and possess girly things. As Cremin (2021, p. 152) writes:

> Fascinated by vibrant colours, silky fabrics, flowery scents, shiny objects and different shapes, the infant is oblivious of any gender signification. Their interest is a sensory one. It is only later when the child enters the symbolic order that these items are seen gendered, and the fascination now met with disapproval.

As children, they do not have much control over their gender. However, when they become adults, they do have more control over their gender, though it must be noted that there is still a lack of free will in their decision of whether they want to be masculine or feminine. In addition to the fact that most people dress to conform to societal norms, masculinity is the dominant and valued gender within a patriarchal society. This directly affects how people perceive masculinity and femininity, and therefore also affects people's decisions on whether they choose to present as feminine or masculine.

Fig. 1 - A young boy defying gender norms by playing with a "girly" dollhouse

How Patriarchy influences our perception of Men and Women, Masculinity and Femininity

Patriarchy is a universal phenomenon that can be found in almost every society (Sullivan, 2009). As previously mentioned in the introduction chapter, it is a social system which considers men and masculinity superior to women and femininity. As a result of this social construct, masculinity comes across as natural and the default, in comparison to femininity. As Monden (2015) states: "conventional femininity is seen as gendered and hence crafted. Indeed, the concept of being gender-less is often adjusted to one particular image of a white, heterosexual and masculine man". Because of this androcentric system, men and women, specifically men, attempt to reject and avoid femininity, in order to avoid appearing weak, less than or other. As such, Monden (2015) identifies that, in order for women and girls to claim a position of power, they will adopt an "overtly masculine demeanour". Monden (2015) then applies this concept to superheroes, pointing out that superheroes in TV and film are mostly male, and if the superhero is a woman, she is expected to act and look like a

man. Whilst women are expected to appear more masculine on TV and real life to be taken seriously and valued, men are not encouraged to embrace feminine traits. Men are encouraged to reject and devalue femininity. On this, Stoller (1985, p. 83), as cited in Cremin (2021, p. 11), states "The first order of business in being a man is, 'don't be a woman'." This is visibly evident in society today: ask an average man if he would wear lipstick or a floral dress, and most of the time he will react in horror. Ask a man to hold your handbag, and watch how far away he holds it from his body (Archer Mann and Patterson, 2016, p. 352). With the exception of some men, usually gay men, most men reject items and behaviours that signify femininity or women. Although, gay men are often seen as inferior to straight men because gay men are seen as inherently "effiminate" (Fradet, 2019).

The intense rejection of feminine traits and characteristics above often translates into Toxic Masculinity, which Sculos (2017, p. 3) defines as a loose set of "norms, beliefs, and behaviours" which are harmful to "women, men, children, and society more broadly". It occurs when masculinity is excessive, and traits considered feminine, like care and vulnerability, are completely rejected. This can lead to violence and high suicide rates amongst men, as well as violence against women, children, and minority groups. Repudiating femininity completely can be extremely harmful for everyone within society. Therefore, it is important not to overlook the negative associations with femininity amongst all genders.

Avoiding femininity is more common with men than women, though many women also avoid femininity. Femininity can be avoided for feminist reasons, relating to second wave feminist beliefs. It also can be avoided because of the shame

associated with being feminine, in addition to the fact that there is more societal value and power in the masculine. When phrases like "You throw like a girl" exist, as if "like a girl" means incapable, it is no wonder why some women would avoid looking or acting "like a girl". Many common insults are rooted in what is associated with a woman, such as "Ya big girl's blouse!" and "Don't be such a pussy". These expressions are often used against effeminate men. The phrase "too girly" is often used against hyper feminine women, but there is no male equivalent to this phrase; at least not one that springs to one's mind right away. If women, like men, see less value in the feminine, they may then develop an inferiority complex (Cremin, 2021), since femininity in terms of dress has been assigned to them since birth. Feminist scholar, Iris Marion Young, investigates the ways in which women perceive themselves as less capable than they actually are, through the lens of feminist phenomenology. In her essay *"Throwing Like A Girl " (1990)*, Young identifies the differences between 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in a physical context, highlighting the notion that women physically exist differently to men. It is pointed out that women do not believe they have the same ability as men, and therefore have a lack of trust in themselves before performing a physical task like 'throwing'. Consequently, this lack of confidence directly affects the performance in a negative way. As a result, the self-fulfilling prophecy occurs. Young (1990, p. 147) writes: "We have more of a tendency than men do to greatly underestimate our bodily capacity. We decide beforehand, - usually mistakenly - that the task is beyond us, and thus give it less than our full effort". The negative beliefs attached with the feminine directly affect how women perceive themselves and other women. Furthermore, these attitudes, towards the feminine and towards women, can manifest into internalised sexism and internalised misogyny. Internalised sexism occurs when women apply learned sexist

behaviours and attitudes upon themselves and other women (Bearman et al., 2009). Weiss (2015) writes that internalised misogyny refers to the negative societal view of women that "cause women to shame, doubt, and undervalue themselves and others of their gender". In addition, Serano (2007, p. 20) emphasises that sexism does not just target people for their femaleness, "but also their expressions of femininity".

Fig. 2 - A comic sketch mocking the sexist phrase "throw like a girl"

 Although some women may actively and consciously reject the feminine, they also unknowingly avoid it too. Some women may say, "I just don't like feminine or girly clothing", or "I'm just not attracted to feminine men or women ". While there is nothing wrong with these claims, as Cremin (2021, p. 10) points out, if there is nothing genetic about femininity, it is clear that the androcentrism within society today is incredibly successful in socialising us into wanting the gender that sustains it. Thus, when women want to look smart or professional, they put on a suit. In other words, when women want to be taken seriously, they dress in a more masculine style. In the 1980's, the exaggerated masculine suit became popular for women's professional dress, which symbolised asserting equal status with men (Michelman

and Miller-Spillman, 2010, p. 227). Historically, the suit plays an important role in feminism. Nevertheless, looking at this from a different angle, it seems negative that a woman should sacrifice feminine dress just to be taken seriously. On this, Cremin (2021, p. 181) writes: "The standard feminist strategy of rejecting femininity on the basis that it represents weakness, passivity and subordination does not negate androcentrisim. It merely confirms it ". Possibly, rejecting femininity actually perpetuates the idea that the masculine has more value and is more worthy. Masculine clothing is deemed gender neutral, whereas feminine clothing seems to only apply to women. Conversely, dresses and skirts, which are symbolic of a feminine style, are never to be seen in men's clothing or gender neutral clothing styles. As such, masculinity is generally the dominant style for both men and women today. However, rather than leaving behind femininity entirely, perhaps femininity needs to be embraced and celebrated by all genders, to tackle toxic masculinity and internalised sexism?

Fig. 3 - A suit from Jean-Louis Scherrer SS1983, a masculine shape was embraced, symbolising the idea of having equal status with men

Chapter 2:

Women & Femininity

Women and their Femininity as Deceptive in Historical and Contemporary Society

Throughout history, there have been negative associations with women and their femininity. In *The Masque of Femininity (1995)*, Social Psychologist, Efrat Tseelon, examines the link between traditional conceptions of a woman, and how these stories continue to frame women in contemporary society. Tseelon (1995) draws upon historical, religious, and mythical stories, such as Pandora's box, Adam and Eve, as well as the witch-hunts in Europe in the sixteen and seventeenth centuries in order to highlight the "deceptive" and "inauthentic" portrayal of women and femininity. The Greek myth of Pandora's box symbolises women bringing all evil into the world. Pandora was the first woman created, designed to punish all humans. Unable to resist the urge to open a forbidden box, Pandora opened this container and released all troubles and curses upon humankind, "trapping hope inside as she closed the lid" (Tseelon, 1995, p. 9). Pandora appeared beautiful and, therefore, moral; however, her beauty was a façade. A lot like Pandora, Eve, in the biblical story of Genesis, gave into temptation by eating the forbidden fruit. By doing this, she ultimately brought death into the world (Tseelon, 1995, p. 9). Both Pandora and Eve are not innate in these stories. Pandora was the first woman made in a man's world, destined to cause misery for humankind. According to the book of Genesis, Eve was created from Adam's rib, indicating her derivative nature and the suggestion that she was subordinate to Adam (Kabir, 2020). In these stories, the women are framed as other, unnatural, and untrustworthy, unconsciously using their beauty and femininity as an instrument for deception. Furthermore, Tseelon (1995, p.16) points out the

biblical link between feminine dress such as makeup and the devil: "Whatever is born of the work of God. Whatever, then, is plastered on that, is the devil's work" (Tertullianus, 1869, p. 321). These religious and historical stories are patriarchal in nature, emphasising how women were always positioned on a lower pedestal than men, and portraying women as other and deceptive. It is ironic that women were painted as an evil threat and deceptive in these stories, because in reality it was women who were vulnerable to violent or sexual assault (Tseelon, 1995, p. 24). These traditional views of women and their femininity influences how one perceives femininity today.

Women and their signifier is not just seen as deceptive in historical stories, but also in modern reality. Women and their femininity being perceived as deceptive can specifically be seen amongst transwomen. There are many misconceptions and connotations that transwomen are "perverts" or "sexual predators", luring men with their feminine façade (Hoskins, 2020). According to an interview conducted by Hoskins (2020), when a trans woman came out as transgender to her uncle, he claimed he was not comfortable having her around his young children, implying that her gender identity suggested that she was a predator. In a patriarchal society, the desire for someone to look feminine, rather than masculine, is inconceivable. Indeed, Serano (2007, p. 20) points out how suspicious it seems to want to look like the weaker sex:

> Today, while it is generally considered offensive or prejudiced to openly discriminate against someone for being female, discriminating against someone's femininity is still considered fair game. The idea that masculinity is strong, tough, and natural while femininity is weak, vulnerable, and artificial continues to proliferate even among people even among people who believe that women and men are equals. And in a world where femininity is so

regularly dismissed, perhaps no form of gendered expression is considered more artificial and more suspect than male and transgender expressions of femininity.

Hoskin (2020) indicates that the construction of trans women appearing deceptive is unique to trans-femininity, and is rarely seen in trans-masculinity. This implies that femininity and the desire to become feminine is the common denominator when it comes to women and transwomen being perceived as deceptive. Under a patriarchal society, to want to give up masculine privilege and appear feminine is so unthinkable that there must be an ulterior motive at play. Bettcher (2007) argues that the stereotype of transwomen being deceivers promotes and excuses transphobic violence. This misconception surrounding femininity can evidently be fatal.
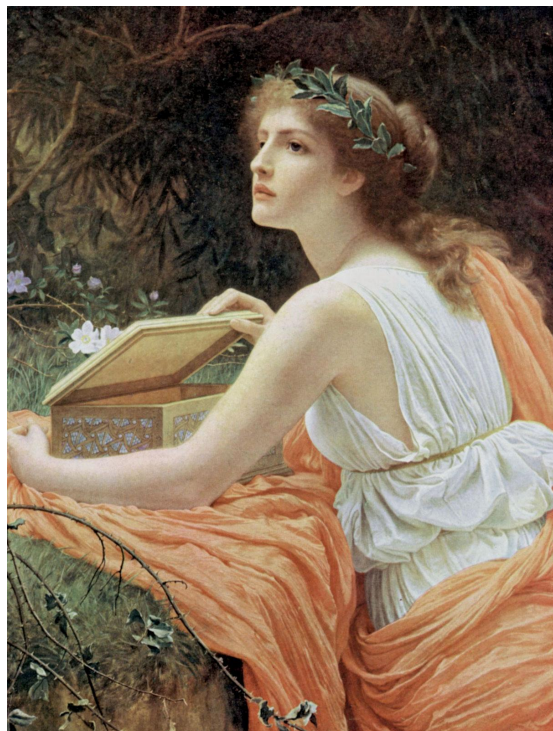

Fig. 4 - Illustration of Pandora's box

Femininity and The Naturalistic Fallacy

Femininity as deceptive is linked to society's perception of femininity as inauthentic and unnatural. Hoskin (2020) highlights the connection between inauthenticity and deception: "The ideology of femininity as inherently deceptive is propped up by femininity's assumed inauthenticity." Indeed, connotations such as "artificial", "contrived", and "frivolous" are "deeply ingrained in our cultural understanding of femininity" (Serano, 2013, p.52 cited in Hoskin, 2020). When one thinks of feminine dress, they may think of jewellery, dresses, makeup, eyelash extensions, hair dying, hair styling, nail polish etc. Thus, there is an association of fakeness or inauthenticity when women dress feminine, particularly when they dress hyper-feminine. Feminine dress extends to cosmetic procedures like lip fillers and breast augmentations, as these alterations are mainly seen amongst women and, therefore, are gendered. These cosmetic alterations may be a product of a capitalist society, but they are forms of dress nonetheless. However, although these forms of feminine dress are widely accepted as fake and unnatural, this notion becomes particularly flawed when one considers the philosophical theory of Naturalistic Fallacy. This can simply be defined as a logical fallacy that argues that, if something is natural, then it must be good or moral (The Ethics Centre, 2016). This fallacy is often seen within society for many different reasons, where it is often used to justify unethical behaviours such as eating meat, because eating meat is "natural". It is specifically seen when it comes to dismissing feminine dress, such as makeup and body alterations, as fake and unnatural. The flaw within this thinking is that just because something is natural, does not mean it is good, and just because something is unnatural, does not mean it is bad. Hurricanes, decay, death, and deadly diseases would be considered natural, and they are clearly bad. Medicine, cancer treatment, antidepressants, wheelchairs

etc. are unnatural and man made, but they are positive additions within society. Ultimately, it is a mistake to believe what is natural must be better. In addition to that, it is a flaw to believe humans are natural at all. Indeed, as Wilson (1985, p. 234) writes: "Human beings, however, are not natural. They do not live primarily by instinct. They live in socially constructed cultures". Throughout history, human beings have been grooming and decorating themselves. We use man-made toothbrushes to brush our teeth, hair brushes for our hair, razors for shaving, soaps for cleaning. Some women may alter their bodies with makeup and adornments such as jewellery, but men also alter themselves when they groom their beards and attend the gym to sculpt their body. The critique that masculine dress is inauthentic, fake, or unnatural is rarely heard of, or perhaps non-existent. However, it is a common belief that elements of feminine dress are unnatural or a "masquerade". When naturalistic fallacy is considered, the belief that femininity and feminine dress is inauthentic in comparison to masculine dress is void. Both femininity and masculinity have cultural significance and they are both "unnatural". The significant difference between feminine and masculine dress, is that one is heavily critiqued and the other is not. Perhaps the reason why people so easily believe in these fallacies of femininity as inauthentic and deceptive is due to the androcentric and masculine biassed society we live in.

Fig. 5 - An "unnatural" man, his body is decorated with tattoos, his beard is groomed, there is an earring attached to his ear, his hair is cut and styled, and his body is sculpted through the gym and steroids

Femininity and Feminism

Femininity has been described as a "theatre of women's enslavement" (Sontag, 2004, p. 278 as cited in Hoskin, 2020). As such, "To be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile" (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 49). This rhetoric is often reinforced by feminists adhering to second wave feminist beliefs, whereby femininity indicates patriarchal domination and oppression (Schippers and Grayson Sapp, 2012). However, the idea that femininity or more specifically, feminine dress is symbolic of oppression has been critiqued and challenged by many scholars of dress, including Elizabeth Wilson (1985), Valerie Steele (1985), and Joanne Entwistle (2000), to name a few. One of the reasons feminine dress is considered oppressive is because of the uncomfortable and restrictive nature it can possess. For example, high heels are usually physically uncomfortable and women's sitting

postures are restricted when wearing a dress or skirt. These critiques of feminine dress by second wave feminists are plausible until we consider what they wore alternatively. As they criticised feminine dress for its lack of comfort and restriction, it would be fair to assume the clothes they dressed in instead were comfortable and functional. Wilson (1985, p. 240) explains that feminists of this time were usually seen in clothing such as dungarees or a boiler suit and Dr Martens boots. It is ironic that these items of dress were considered "rational apparel", considering someone wearing dungarees or a boiler suit would have to fully undress themselves and experience the discomfort of the cold, just to go to the bathroom (Wilson, 1985, p. 242). In addition to that, anyone who has ever worn Dr Marten boots knows the extreme discomfort one feels when trying to break them in, as well as the discomfort of carrying them around on your feet. Furthermore, these garments were not just a feminist uniform, but fashion garments that were commercially marketed as casual chic (Wilson, 1985, p. 242). Behind the guise of second wave feminist theory, women were shaming other women for wearing feminine dress. Wilson (1985) perfectly captures this warped feminist attitude from one woman to another. It is striking that this same attitude persists, even 40 years later. Today, many women often feel ashamed for participating in feminine dress, such as wearing makeup, dresses, high heels etc. As Sociologist Ciara Cremin (2021, p. 18), claims, "women are shamed for being feminine". Nevertheless, one can understand a second wave feminist's strong aversion towards femininity when we consider the world they were brought up in at the time.

Women brought up in 1940s to1960s were deprived of male and masculine things, and were forced to participate in female and feminine activities (Baumgardner and

Richards, 2004, p.60). Feminists of this time fought for women's equality, and for

women's access to the same things as men, proving that women were not hardwired

towards femininity. However, they overlooked the fact that some women and men

are drawn towards feminine things. Thus, femininity was not the problem; being

forced to adopt femininity was (Baumgardner and Richards, 2004, p. 61). Today,

dressing feminine is a choice, not an obligation. Although it is understandable why a

woman brought up in these times would have a disdain for femininity at the time, it is

not reasonable to have this attitude today. In fact, having this attitude towards

femininity today may be very harmful. One does not have to dress feminine

themselves, but shaming and discouraging femininity for others is far from feminist.

One may argue that feminine dress can appear as infantile and submissive, but it

must be highlighted that gender is not just dress. As discussed by Judith Butler

(1988, p. 519), gender is a continuous series of performances, including gestures

and dress. A woman can wear feminine apparel such as makeup, jewellery and a

pink, frilly dress whilst also appearing very confident, assertive and in control. In

addition to this, Cremin (2021, p. 17) identifies a very important point when it comes

to the politics of feminine dress:

> Dresses and skirts are emblematic of a feminine style. What is erroneously
> called gender-neutral or unisex clothing, though, is neither a sign of progress
> nor of the victory of feminists. For while in protest against their physical and
> symbolic impositions, women were abandoning feminine affect and apparel,
> without the political motive or economic incentive, men were under no
> pressure to do likewise. Men enacted no equivalent abandonment of
> masculinity

As such, perhaps there is nothing liberating about discouraging and sacrificing

feminine dress when one considers the fact that men were under no obligation to do

likewise.

Fig. 6 - Elle Woods from Legally Blonde, dressed in a hyper feminine pink dress with a sequin belt, appearing very much confident and in control in the courtroom.

Chapter 3:

Men & Femininity

The expected gender role for Men

Previously, the focus point was on the relationship between women and femininity, and how women are often perceived negatively because of their femininity. In this chapter, the relationship between men and femininity will be discussed. Before endeavouring to explore this notion, men and their expected gender presentation of masculinity must be acknowledged first. As highlighted previously, masculinity is highly valued in society, signifying power, strength, and dominance. As femininity can be seen as deceptive, inauthentic, unnatural, and less than, masculinity is seen as authentic, natural, gender neutral and the default (Hoskin, 2020). While under a patriarchal society, being a man and displaying masculinity is a privilege, there are serious consequences for men that step out of this expected gender role.Thus,

although both men and women can display feminine and masculine traits, it is more acceptable for women to display masculinity than it is for men to display femininity. "Because most cultures are androcentric, it's more socially acceptable for women to demonstrate masculine traits than it is for men to demonstrate feminine traits." (Avery, 2013 cited by Nobel, 2013). Thus, when men display femininity, they're often mocked, scorned and even attacked. They are called "pussy's" and "sissy's" as if being declared feminine should be an insult. Effeminate gay men are usually the target of these attacks due to the sexist and misogynistic hostility towards femininity. Indeed, "Homophobia and misogyny, just like racism and misogyny, are inextricably linked." (Williamson, 2015). However, it is not just effeminate gay men affected by femmephobia, as straight cisgender men are heavily scorned for displaying femininity too. This directly feeds into toxic masculinity, and it is evident that men fear femininity and avoid it as much as possible. Even actions such as drinking a cocktail can seem too feminine, and is avoided for this reason. Furthermore, men carefully consider gestures such as the way they sit, avoiding crossing their legs as women would, despite the fact it feels comfortable for most men. It is significant that the discourse surrounding restriction is usually based around women wearing garments such as skirts and dresses for example, but men are extremely restricted by gender expectation of masculinity. There is little representation of men showing what is considered feminine traits such as vulnerability on TV, film or the media. Regardless of TV and the media, little boys do not see their fathers or brothers express vulnerable emotions, setting the standard from a young age. Thus, under patriarchy, men are expected to defy and suppress natural human emotions and mechanisms such as feeling hurt and crying.

The fear of the feminine can be seen even in advertising. Coca Cola's Diet Coke was deemed too feminine for men to buy. To encourage men to buy sugar free versions of Coca Cola, Coke Zero was introduced. It was marketed with slogans such as "Bro" and "Wingman", with darker packaging to make it look more manly and masculine (Contois, 2020). Avery (2013) describes this as "gender contamination". Avery (2013 cited by Nobel, 2013) compares this to anthropological studies of culture, where certain talismans could only be touched by men, as "the touch of a woman would make the object lose its power". Femininity being perceived as a kind of pollution in men's spaces indicates how demonised and devalued it is.

Fig. 8 - Coke Zero ad displaying gendered marketing targeting men

Effeminacy and Toxic Masculinity

As we have seen above, men displaying femininity is evidently not accepted within society. In an interview conducted by Hoskin (2020), one of the interviewees claimed

that masculinity was disqualified with even a tint of femininity, as it automatically becomes effeminacy. Although it is often effeminate gay men that are victims of homophobic violence because of their feminine traits, they are not exempt from being victims of patriarchal and androcentric beliefs. Indeed, many gay men perceive femininity as negative. Cremin (2021, p. 129), points out that in a recent survey of 5,000 gay men, "71 percent of respondents said that feminine attributes were a turn off" and "41 percent thought gay men who are effeminate gave "the gay community a bad image"". Fradet (2019) also points out the trend amongst some gay men of declaring "no fats, no fems", particularly on dating websites, informing others of their disdain for fat or feminine men. It is evident femininity is deemed negative amongst most men, whether gay or straight. Although people are entitled to their preferences, whether that be masc or femme, it is clear there is another layer to the situation when it comes to femininity.

Some men actively try to defy gender norms through dress. Harry styles, the singer and songwriter is a perfect example. Styles, a cis gender man is often seen in feminine apparel such as chiffon blouses and dresses, and feminine adornments such as earrings and rings. It is evident the singer is comfortable with effeminacy, despite society's issue with it. According to Styles from a Guardian article: "I'll go in shops sometimes, and I just find myself looking at the women's clothes thinking they're amazing. It's like anything – anytime you're putting barriers up in your own life, you're just limiting yourself" (2020). Although Styles is comfortable with his feminine and masculine side, in a patriarchal society there is no surprise that he has received backlash for his feminine fashion choices. Conservative Commentator Candace Owens, responded to Harry Styles on the cover of Vogue on Twitter,

stating: "There is no society that can survive without strong men… Bring back manly men", as seen in Fig. 8. It is striking that one equates someone's clothing choice with a lack of strength. Unfortunately, this was not a hot take, as 82,000 people liked her tweet, insinuating they may agree with her. The issue with this attitude is that it directly feeds into and perpetuates toxic masculinity. Styles dressing as feminine and being critiqued is not shocking under a patriarchal economy, however men are even critiqued for being feminine when displaying completely banal human behaviour. Actor, Daniel Craig, was seen carrying his baby daughter whilst shopping, and he was criticised for this "unmanly" behaviour (Cremin, 2021, p. 53). "Whether it is caring for a child or caring for the environment, to care is to be emasculated" (Cremin, 2021, p. 53). It is of no wonder that men fear the feminine when it is hard to exist and exhibit normal human behaviour without the critique of appearing feminine.

Fig. 8 - Candace Owens response to Harry Styles feminine style

As previously mentioned in chapter 1, toxic masculinity is essentially the extreme rejection of femininity and the excessive promotion of masculinity. Toxic masculinity

is often misunderstood as an excuse to condemn men, but really the issue is not men themselves. Rather, it is the patriarchal system that causes men to harm others and themselves. Toxic masculinity can manifest in different forms, from everyday sexism to femicide killings. Cremin (2021, p. 73) identifies the adverse effects that toxic masculinity can have on young men:

> Under pressure to prove their manhood, boys drink more alcohol than they can handle, shirk studying because it is seen as girly, engage in ritualistic bullying of classmates, lie and brag about sexual experiences and make defamatory jokes about girls and women they are attracted to… they must not express feelings, with the exception of anger; that they must not do anything considered feminine or womanly

As a result, toxic masculinity can cause men to associate anything that is feminine with unworthiness and inferiority, including women and their own emotions. Hoskin (2020) states that "many forms of violence today such as incel attacks, sexual violence, trans violence, anti-LGBTQ hate crimes are all symptoms of the same underlying prejudice: femmephobia." Toxic masculinity is extremely harmful for society as a whole, as, not only does it cause harm to women and children, but also to the men that participate in it. Indeed, it leads high suicide rates amongst men: "Psychologoical autopsies of young men who had died by suicide indicated that identifying with unattainable masculine ideals was a key risk factor in these suicides" (King et al., 2020). As identified by Hoskin (2020), the devaluation of femininity is at the root cause of many of these social issues, with Cremin (2021, p. 18) claiming that a way to overcome these issues and the fear of the feminine at a collective level is by "openly embracing the feminine".

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that femininity is often deemed negative within society, due to its patriarchal association with women or "the weaker sex". Through researching this topic, an abundance of Interesting information surrounding gender, patriarchy and value was discovered. Initially, It was challenging to find sources for this topic as It appears underexamined within feminist literature. Indeed, I found copious amounts of research critiquing femininity, however, information regarding the importance of femininity was lacking. Despite this, through intensive research of old and contemporary sources, I managed to find interesting and important information on the topic. As previously mentioned, Ciara Cremin's book *The Future is Feminine (2021)* and Rhea Ashley Hoskin's academic articles on Femmephobia, were incredibly useful. The portrayal and perception of femininity from a historical standpoint was addressed, as well as from a feminist standpoint. The philosophical theory of Naturalistic Fallacy in relation to feminine dress was also discussed. Finally, men's relationship with femininity, and toxic masculinity was explored.

From this research, It is clear that shaming femininity is neither useful nor productive for society. As discussed, the denigration and rejection of femininity can lead to serious problems, such as sexism, internalised sexism, trans misogyny, homophobia and toxic masculinity. Consequently, these implications contribute to anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes, high rates of suicide, violence against women, and femicides. Before it is possible to tackle these issues, perhaps it would be useful to address the underlying cause: the denigration and devaluation of femininity. As highlighted, It appears embracing femininity could be a plausible solution, or at least a starting point for tackling these matters.

Bibliography

Archer Mann, S. and Patterson, A., 2016. *Reading Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Barratt, Sue Ann. 2016. ""I Am Not A Girlie Girl!": Young Women's Negotiation of Feminine Powerlessness." Caribbean Review of Gender Studies issue 10: 11–42

Baumgardner, J. and Richards, A. 2004. "Feminism and Femininity: Or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong," in All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity, ed. Anita Harris, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): 62

Bearman, S., Korobov, N. and Thorne, A., 2009. The Fabric of Internalized Sexism. *Journal of Integrated Social Sciences www.jiss.org, 2009 - 1(1): 10-47,*.

Bettcher, T. 2007. Evil Deceivers and Make-Believers: On Transphobic Violence and the Politics of Illusion. Hypatia, 22(3), 43–65. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4640081

Butler, J., 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. 1988. Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, *40*(4), 519–531. https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893

Cremin, C. 2021. *The Future is Feminine: Capitalism and the masculine disorder.* London: Bloomsbury Academic. Retrieved October 11, 2021

Cremin, C., 2021. Society's problem with femininity. [online] Newsroom. Available at: <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/ideasroom/societys-problem-with-femininity> [Accessed 9 November 2022].

Contois, E., 2020. *That Shape He Can't Forget: The Bittersweet History of Diet Soda for Women*. [online] Jezebel. Available at: <https://jezebel.com/that-shape-he-cant-forget-the-bittersweet-history-of-d-18456186 13> [Accessed 7 February 2022].

Elan, P., 2020. *How Harry Styles became the face of gender-neutral fashion*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2020/nov/17/how-harry-styles-became-the-fac e-of-gender-neutral-fashion> [Accessed 5 February 2022].

Entwistle, J., & Wilson, E. 2001. Introduction: Body Dressing. In J. Entwistle & E. Wilson (Eds.). Body Dressing: Dress, Body, Culture (pp. 1–10). Oxford,: Berg Publishers. Retrieved November 07 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/9780857854032/BODRESS0003

de Beauvoir, S., 1953. *The Second Sex*. New York: Knopf, pp.45-49, 267.

Francis, B., Archer, L., Moote, J., de Witt, J. and Yeomans, L., 2016. Femininity, science, and the denigration of the girly girl. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 38(8), pp.1097-1110.

Harris, A., 2004. *All About the Girl*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hibbs C. (2014) Androcentrism. In: Teo T. (eds) Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_16

Hoskin, R., 2020. "Femininity? It's the Aesthetic of Subordination": Examining Femmephobia, the Gender Binary, and Experiences of Oppression Among Sexual and Gender Minorities. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49(7), pp.2319-2339.

Griggs, C. 1998. Social Recognition of Gender. In S/he: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes (pp. 42–69). Oxford,: Berg. Retrieved November 07 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/9781847888846/SHEHE0006

Holland, S. 2004. Negotiating Fluffy Femininities. In Alternative Femininities: Body, Age and Identity (pp. 35–52). Oxford: Berg. Retrieved February 1, 2022, from http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781847888648/ALTFEM000010004

Jamieson, K., 1997. *Beyond the double bind*. New York: Oxford University Press

Johnson, K., & Lennon, S. 2015. "The Social Psychology of Dress." Bibliographical Guides. London: Bloomsbury Academic. Bloomsbury Fashion Central. Web. 07 Nov. 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474280655-BG001>.

Kabir, 2020. *How 'Creation of Eve' Decided the Fate of Women in Society*. [online] Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/the-collector/how-creation-of-eve-decided-the-fate-of-women-in-society-129f7bff36e3> [Accessed 4 February 2022].

King, N. *et al.* 2020 'The Hegemony in Masculinity', *Men and Masculinities*, 24(3), pp. 432–450. doi: 10.1177/1097184X20981759.

Laing, M. 2021. Childlike Femininity: A History of Feminist Critique. In Picturing the Woman-Child: Fashion, Feminism and the Female Gaze (pp. 33–56). London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts. Retrieved November 07 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350059627.ch-003

Laing, M. 2021. Kinderwhore: From Catwalk to Slutwalk. In Picturing the Woman-Child: Fashion, Feminism and the Female Gaze (pp. 177–210). London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts. Retrieved February 4, 2022, from http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350059627.ch-008

Leonard Fradet, P., 2019. *Rejecting the "Real Man" Myth: Why Men Should Embrace Their Femininity*. [online] The Body Is Not An Apology. Available at: <https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/how-men-can-love-their-femininity/> [Accessed 3 November 2022].

Michelman, S.O. , & Miller-Spillman, K. 2010. Gender. In P.G. Tortora (Ed.). Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion: The United States and Canada (pp. 227–232). Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic. Retrieved February 9, 2022, from http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781847888525.EDch3031

Monden, M. 2015. Ribbons and Lace: Girls, Decorative Femininity and Androgyny. In Japanese Fashion Cultures: Dress and gender in contemporary Japan (pp. 107–134). London: Bloomsbury Academic. Retrieved November 07 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474228046.ch-005

Paoletti, J., 2012. *Pink and blue: Telling the boys from the girls in America*. Indiana University Press

Pollack, W., 1998. *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myth of Boyhood*. New York: Henry Holt.

Newman, T., 2021. *Sex and gender: Meanings, definition, identity, and expression*. [online] Medicalnewstoday.com. Available at: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/232363> [Accessed 9 November 2022].

Nobel, C., 2013. *Gender Contamination: Why Men Prefer Products Untouched By Women*. [online] Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hbsworkingknowledge/2013/11/13/gender-contamination-why-men-prefer-products-untouched-by-women/?sh=47ea8b2a8f0b> [Accessed 5 February 2022].

Scott, L., 2006. *Fresh Lipstick - Redressing Fashion and Feminism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.12.

Serano, J., 2007. *Whipping girl*. Berkley: Seal Press.

Sculos, W. 2017 "Who's Afraid of 'Toxic Masculinity'?," *Class, Race and Corporate Power*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 3 , Article 6.
DOI: 10.25148/CRCP.5.3.006517
Available at: https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/classracecorporatepower/vol5/iss3/6

Schippers, M. and Sapp, E. G. 2012 'Reading Pulp Fiction: Femininity and power in second and third wave feminist theory', *Feminist Theory*, 13(1), pp. 27–42. doi: 10.1177/1464700111429900.

Tirohl, B., 2021. Editorial issue 7 2021. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(7), pp.807-811.

Tirohl, B., 2021. Editorial issue 3 2015. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 24(7), pp. 293-307.
The Ethics Centre. 2016. *What is a naturalistic fallacy? The Ethics Centre Article*. [online] Available at: <https://ethics.org.au/ethics-explainer-naturalistic-fallacy/> [Accessed 4 February 2022].

Tseëlon, E., 1995. *The Masque of Femininity*. London: SAGE, pp.3-5, 8-16, 24, 35,

Walby, S. 1990. THEORISING PATRIARCHY. *Sociology*, pp20
http://www.jstor.org/stable/42853921

Wilson, E., 1985. *Adorned in dreams*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, pp.229-247..

Williamson, H., 2015. *Misogyny and homophobia: patriarchy, gender policing, and the male gaze*. [online] openDemocracy. Available at:
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/misogyny-and-homophobia-patriarchy-gender-policing-and-male-gaze/> [Accessed 6 February 2022].

Weiss, S., 2015. [online] Available at:
<https://www.bustle.com/articles/130737-7-sneaky-ways-internalized-misogyny-manifests-in-our-everyday-lives> [Accessed 3 November 2021].

Young, I., 1990. *Throwing like a girl and other essays in feminist philosophy and social theory*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, p.147.