

Gender Stereotypes in Female Contemporary Dress Aesthetics

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Abstract: People always follow trends that are preferred by the mass, and stereotypes are generated as the trends spread out. Stereotypical aesthetics is somehow dominating society, because of the so-called norms of clothing and requirements. There are some potential problems with stereotypical aesthetics in females' dress codes. The paper discusses the stereotypes of females' dress code in the workplace, in daily fashionable wearing, and for different ages. The stereotype can be revealed from the clothes design, the brand concepts, and the emphasis on design. It is found that the stereotypes of female dress codes in the workplace have some negative impacts on the females' body and their work. Furthermore, the stereotype of popular fashionable dress codes has been affected by social media and popular brands as well, and the socially moral judgments on females' dress codes have contradicted what is prevailing in the real world. Last, the stereotypical impression of females of different ages has limited the creativity and diversity of clothing styles and aesthetics.

Keywords: Aesthetics; females; stereotypes; dress code

1. Introduction

Nowadays, due to the rapid development of informational technology, social media have been widely used and it has been part of everyone's life. Whenever there are videos about clothing or just daily sharing, there are plenty of comments including critics and appraisements under the videos or the posts. Through this phenomenon, the stereotype of beauty and trendy fashionable clothing has been followed in these social comments, which sometimes even cause body discrimination or age discrimination. The dress aesthetics for different areas have been fixed in people's minds, for example, how young women should look like or what kinds of clothing are attractive. However, aesthetics should not be limited and should not be unified. Eliminating stereotypes in dress aesthetics can significantly lead to a more diversified fashion world and clothing freedom, followed by increased confidence among females. Existed research proves the clothing requirements of some certain workers and also teenagers, and some potential harms brought by some specific clothing to the human body. But there is a lack of research about the dressing stereotype in different fields. In this paper, stereotypes of different aesthetics will be shown, including the stereotypes in female workplace dress aesthetics, stereotypes in female fashion dress aesthetics, and stereotypical impression of female age-specific dress aesthetics. The author tries to reveal the potential stereotypes in female dress aesthetics through literature reviews of different journals about the dress aesthetics of females in several areas.

2. Stereotypes in Female Workplace Dress Aesthetics

2.1. Professional Dress Code Requirements and Women's Social Status

Females and males are always required to dress in a certain way in their workplace, to build up the company's image and make the position of different staff clearer. In most companies, females are not allowed to wear jeans or sports cloth during working hours, because the managers perceive this clothing as presenting disrespect and lazy attitudes. Males are asked to wear pants, suits, or T-shirts; while females need to wear skirts or trousers. Not only the clothing but also the make-up takes a big role in the workplace. Without daily makeup, it is common for coworkers to put you in a relatively low position. According to Fred Davis Ph.D., clothing impulses present the age and sexual and social status of women [1]. Women who wear clothes from famous bands or clothes that look formal are more likely to be recognized or perceived as successful or high social status females. In many workplaces, females who dress up casually may be seen as employees that are in a lower position than those females who wear formal skirts and suits. Not only the dress code but also the jewelry and bags are seemingly symbol of positions. Women with higher status often wear luxuries from Bulgari or Louis Vuitton, while younger women or women with lower working positions wear accessories and handbags from normal brands. One of the reasons why appearances affect social status is that outlooks often provide others with a first impression and perception of position in their companies. As a result, females pay much attention to their dress code, to gain more respect and fewer buzzes. Gradually, stereotypes are generated in both the women's minds and society's perceptions. Undergraduates and graduates prepare a lot on their clothing for their transition to the workplace from school [2]. Those employees are restrained in dressing up in trousers or skirts with long hair and daily make-up. This dress code restriction even detailed the color and style, which limits the creativity and interest in discovering fashion.

2.2. Body Discrimination in Women's Professional Dress Code

Since professional dress codes for women are usually tight and restricted, which could easily show women's body shape, females are often blamed or gossiped about their body lines, no matter whether their body shapes are fit or full. Disregarding the external presence of the common dress code, attires like heels, corsets, or fitted clothes, are destroying women's bodies that could make them malformed. Females who wear high heels are found more attractive than those who wear flat shoes in the male gaze [3]. However, what high heels bring to women is a pain as well. It is likely for them to have joint pain or knee pain or even Lumbago. Materials that are used to make girdles or corsets are elastic textiles which give out high garment pressure on bodies that could cause damage to human bodies [4]. But these wearing are accepted by women, since they may internally perceive that as beautiful even though these heels and girdle may hurt themselves. As a result, pursuing a slim, while, and so-called beautiful appearance becomes a trend. In the workplace, there are many dress code requirements reflected in this perception. For example, the uniforms of female flight attendants also reflect this common aesthetic. Female flight attendants show images of attractive and feminine women [5]. Disregarding their elegant presence and professional quality, the biggest reason why they seem attractive is that they wear heels which is something that is commonly loved by the mass. However, it is not convenient for their work, since they are on a plane which means that it would be difficult for them to keep stable. On the other hand, the stereotype of a professional dress code can also cause a limitation on the personalized style of individuals. Teachers who are recognized as solemn and modeling characters are not allowed to wear short skirts, jeans, or short tops. This restricts female workers to show their body lines and styles. Once the dress code is uniform, discrimination on not only the body shapes but also the cloth size generates. According to Lazarou Loucia,

discrimination against women's bodies and females has shown the patriarchal society, which is inclined toward gender inequality [6]. In working places, especially in big companies, body discrimination in women's professional dress code is even more serious.

2.3. The Negative Impact of Professional Dress Code on Women in the Workplace

Because of the restricted dress code in workplaces, women may feel constrained about their bodies and also feel bothered about others' gossiping. When ones feel extremely uncomfortable about comments on their body, they may be self-abased about their body, creating a kind of body shame. It may probably restrict their identity, like their real selves. Physically, this kind of stereotypically professional dress code could cause damage to the human body. Wearing high heels frequently results in joint pain and knee pain. Wearing corsets can probably lead to a hurtful body experience because of the consistently high pressure on the human body. Mentally, formalized aesthetics of females' bodies and professional dress codes may diminish females' mental health, causing self-abasement. Women who are too skinny would sometimes be discussed as anorexia patients or weak forces, while women who are a bit obese would sometimes be said as the fat girl and be not respected by others. These girls are sometimes being bullied or isolated, no matter how they look like. And there is even a so-called clothing standard for each type of girl, for instance, fat girls cannot wear tight clothes. This is a kind of discrimination that could lead to a serious mental problem, ultimately causing them to be not confident about themselves and not accept themselves. Nevertheless, the professional dress code and body discrimination restrain one's career choices. It is not common to see an obese girl among models or flight attendants. This phenomenon is not only because of the career requirements, but also the stereotype among the public. Since most people prefer a delectable figure like a skinny woman, works that face the mass are always for those girls with more commonly perceived appearances. The stereotype of gender and the rigid aesthetic of professional dress code and social status increase body and gender discrimination.

3. Stereotypes in Female Fashion Dress Aesthetics

3.1. Popular Female Dressing Styles in Social Media

Nowadays, females are mostly dressed in several styles, such as androgynous, anti-fashion, bogan, artsy, B-girl, char, and the "BM" style, which stands for "Brandy Melville". The slogan of Brandy Melville is "one size fits all" which largely limits the consumer ranges and even lead to a trend of pursuing body shape that could fit in Brandy's outfits, which somehow causes body discrimination. According to Wu et.al (p. 245), when Brandy Melville first came into China, people were crazed about it and cannot stop buying it. One of the reasons why this current flows in is that the concept of Brandy matches the definition of beauty for Chinese—"creamy white skin, big wide eyes, and stick thin figures" [7]. Because of this common opinion, girls feel frustrated when they cannot fit in the clothes, which causes more serious self-abasement. On social media, like TikTok or YouTube, it is common to see a bunch of young girls wearing short shirts and long pants, which may present a better body shape and a better body proportion. Once starters are wearing new styles that attract many audiences, this kind of clothing style will become a trend. The trend then stuck into the public's mind, generating a kind of stereotype about "beautiful and attractive" female clothing. This stereotype is enhanced in the advertisement as well. Women shown in advertisements always wear clothes that could show their body lines, and this has evolved from the 1950s till now. According to Plakoyiannaki et.al, women are portrayed in a sexualized way and presented as independent women [8]. The influences of social media and advertisement are the same since they are all public and seen by everyone. The aesthetic trend brought by social media and popular brands leads young women, that they incline to purchase clothes that are socially preferred.

3.2. Popular Female Dressing in the Consumer Market

In the consumer market in China, it is found that elegant fashion, popular fashion, cool fashion, and Bobos fashion are highly presented. It shows that nowadays people do not focus on casual style only, but some clothing that could indicate their personalities or social status. Luxury brands like Yves Saint Lauren and Chanel are widely preferred by the upper class in society since females usually show their social status and wealth fare by their outfits. For those fast-moving clothing brands like Zara and H&M, which are more common on the market, their designs are often for fit women, resulting in the negligence of women who need to wear a large size or an X-large size dress. According to Otieno, it is found that obese females can hardly find clothing that is both fitted and fashionable, which negatively affects their satisfaction [8]. There is a common perception that large-size clothing is low-cost and unpopular because the wearers of these large clothing are not perceived as beauties. It reveals that body discrimination is internally placed in our minds, and shown in society.

3.3. The Contradiction between the Aesthetics of Women's Fashionable Dress and Public Moral Evaluation

The popular aesthetics leads the young female in their daily dressing and dating outfits, which are asked to be fitted and elegant. When females are pursuing beauty and wearing clothes that they love, there are always a lot of comments on them. Like the public evaluation of BM style (short shirts with long pants or short skirts), it is all about the females' body and their characters. People justify their body shapes, whether they are fat or fit, and they also make comments on their jobs, whether they do some inappropriate work. These kinds of words diminish women's confidence and humiliate women themselves. However, even though people realize and understand the unfair or immoral facts of those brands, females still purchase them like all possessed and males still love seeing girls wearing these attractive outfits. Nevertheless, many critics on the internet discuss the outfits of females. Girls who wear short skirts and tight tops may be not reserved and not elegant, while girls who wear loose T-shirts and pants may be blamed for their body shape. While females with more plump bodies wear tight dresses, people describe them as dissolute women who want to attract males. Normally, so-called good women should wear conservatively and have simple make-up. However, when this connects to popular aesthetics and morals, females could feel controversial and frustrated. What is an appropriate dress code? What is popular aesthetics? What is beauty? The contradiction between the moral factor and the aesthetic factor can hardly be solved.

4. Stereotypical Impression of Female Age-specific Dress Aesthetics

4.1. Stereotypical Dress of Female Teenagers and Young Adults

Female teenagers are perceptually imaged as characters with youthful and energetic appearances, similar to young adults. When asking people about their imagination or impression of a female teenager, it is often found that people describe them as youths who wear sports clothes or wear fashionable outfits. They are often related to sports figures and these sports figures appearing on television have a significant influence on their identity and spirit as well [9]. According to McNeill and Venter, individuals develop their clothing style and consume for setting up their special identity [10]. Through the growth of the teenager, they have formed a basic concept of beauty and had their clothing preference. It can be influenced by social comments and reality, when teenagers observe some trendy styles on the street or on social media that are frequently appraised by others, especially peers, they may probably generate a preference for this style. It can be explained by the psychological term "exposure effect", meaning that the more frequently you get exposed to a certain object, the more likely you will love it even though you do not like it initially. On the other hand, the self-

awareness of aesthetics could be generated from the speech by family members and also the comments from netizens. Due to the development of technology, information spread out so fast that when a new trend comes, people can immediately know and make comments on it. Therefore, it is easy for teenagers to know what means pretty in the recent society. So when they purchase clothes and shoes, they may choose those that are exposed to them often. For example, some popular brands like Sculptor, Brandy Melville, Hollister, etc, are consumed by young women a lot. The similarity among these brands is that they all follow a style like having a short top and long pants or jeans. They ought to present youthful figures and attractive girls like the California girls, which are loved by the young. Hence, the stereotypical dress code for young ladies is generated; they are figures of youth and energy that have a nice body shape and appearance. Seeing through the various brands, a large majority of them is for young women, with similar concept and styles, but different designs.

4.2. Stereotypical Dress of Middle-aged Female and Elder Female

Thinking about middle-aged and elder females, most people may consider an image of a woman wearing an elegant style or in a professional dressing style. They may look mature, intellectual, and understanding, but without vitality. This stereotype somehow causes the limitation and scarcity of brands that focused on middle-aged females and elder females. In a shopping mall, the ratio of the brands for the elderly and the brands for the young have a great disparity, that there are approximately two to five stores for the elderly, while the spare shops are all for the young. According to das Neves et.al (p. 6338), fashion design for the elderly requires to fit two standards: “the physical and functional aspects inherent and the characteristic of the aging process” [11]. Therefore, the clothes for the elderly must be focusing on comfortable textiles and conveniences. This somehow limits the variety of designs for the elderly, and sometimes even ignores the fashionable aspect of dressing. Because of the limitation of designs, the fewer choices for the elderly and the ignorance of the elderly’s clothing, the consumption of fashion items has decreased, compared to the purchases among young adults. As a result, the creativity of the elderly and their pursuit of beauty and fashion can be greatly diminished. This is how the stereotype of the dress code of the elderly generates, that their clothing style is simple and unitary.

4.3. Impacts of the Stereotypical Dress Code for Females Ranged from Different Age

Due to the stereotypical impression or justice of females dressing from different ages, females’ dressing styles may eventually correspond with the general stereotype, which could largely limit one’s creativity and hinder one’s desire to express themselves. Adolescents may be blamed for their premature or sexy dressing, while middle and older-aged females may be judged about their trendy wearing that may be contradicted by their age. If society breaks through some “norms” about aesthetics for different ages, the fashion field and the aesthetics of the whole society will probably be improved.

5. Conclusion

Overall, different kinds of stereotypical aesthetics on females’ dress code reveal that there are still a lot of internal and potential problems about body discrimination and ignorance of the elderly and even the existing patriarchal society. Females in the workplace are still being leveled by their dress codes and brands, which means that women prove their status by their appearance(both the makeup and the dress code). In different occupations, some clothing is required such as high heels, even though they are not that convenient for work. Also, to pursue a willing body shape, females may wear corsets that could shape themselves better. However, it causes some negative impacts on the human body due to the high pressure pushing on waists. Therefore, these requirements and aesthetics should

be modified to fit people's needs and health. Second, the stereotypes of fashionable dressing also lead to problems of body discrimination and individuals' mental problems. The prevailing clothing styles have been influenced by social media and the lead of popular brands. The outfit that is in demand among young girls could shape their body line and show their energy, but it could also bring some problems to girls. If they cannot fit in those small clothes, they may consider themselves fat girls, resulting in self-abasements. Regarding the social comments on these clothes, although there is an apparent preference for the "BM" styles, people still make judgments on girls who wear those clothes, which is contradictory. Lastly, the dress codes of females of different ages have been limited, that the society has a stereotypical impression of different age groups. This stereotype limits the creativity of new aesthetics and generates discrimination on ages to some extent. The paper shows the existing issues of stereotypical aesthetics of different groups of females and their impact. It could make society notice the internal stereotypes that already spread deeply in people's minds. However, the limitation of the research is that no field trip could precisely observe different people in different workplaces, so the paper might be general to most of the cases. All of the pieces of evidence are second-hand, so there may be not much innovation in information. In the future, natural observation and surveys will be conducted to study this problem and see if there are any improvements as time flies.

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