



Dress, Gender, and Identity: An Inclusion of Many

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Significance/Innovation of the Concept:

Dress consists of all modifications and supplements added to the human body. Dress includes not only visual changes to the body that can be seen by the eye but changes that involve taste, smell, sound, and touch. Dress supplements are inclusive of hats, shoes, and jewelry. Dressing the body using modifications and supplements hinder and/or facilitate communication (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). According to Roach-Higgins and Eicher, “dress is a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids in human interaction in space and time” (p. 1). “It is also a definition that is free of personal or social valuing or bias, usable across national and cultural boundaries, and inclusive of all phenomena that can be accurately be designated as dress” (p.1).

In recent times, there has been a paradigm shift with regards to gender prompting cultural changes not only in conversation, but in many facets of society. Gender identity is defined as “one’s internal, deeply-held sense of one’s gender as male, female, or something else entirely.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016, p.1). The question being asked is “What is gender?” And “How do we define gender?” Many individuals no longer identify with “he” or “she” or “male” or “female” dichotomies. “Other” or “fill in the blank” no longer suffice; neither do male or female public restrooms. On the New York City’s Commission of Human Rights website, readers are not provided with gender identification definitions for further understanding or clarification, but instead there are definitions of gender identity and gender expression. For example, at universities, such as University at California Berkeley, definitions could be found online. Thirty-one genders are defined including *two-spirit* or an individual who is “Native American who have attributes of men and women, have distinct gender and social roles in their tribes, and are often involved with mystical rituals (shamans),” and *Genderqueer* or an individual who identifies with “neither man nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is the combination of genders.” In another example of broadening the gender concept, individuals who live in New York City can choose from thirty-one (31) different gender identities to select preferred gender for governmental purposes (Hasson, 2017).

Businesses that do not accommodate those individuals who identify on the list of protected gender identities such as: *gender queer*, *gender bender*, *two spirit*, and *gender gifted*, can face a six-figure fine, up to a \$250, 000 in an anti-discrimination law suit on the basis of gender identity and gender expression or if “an establishment refuses to address someone by their preferred pronoun” (Beaman, 2016, p. 1). The *purpose of this concept paper is to investigate different gender identities as defined in current literature and to propose research and teaching strategies for dress scholars that incorporate these definitions.*

Synthesis of Relevant Facts, Data and Literature:

There are a few sources that provide a foundation for fully broadening the concept of gender. A list of gender identities and definitions is provided by the NYC Commission on Human Rights (2018). These terms were detailed as guidelines to defining rights and responsibilities within the city. These terms are as follows: (1) Bi-gendered (2) Cross-dresser (3) Drag King (4) Drag Queen (5) Femme Queen (6) Female-to-Male (7) FTM (8) Gender Bender (9) Genderqueer (10) Male-to-female (11) MTF (12) Non-OP (13) HI JRA (14) Pangender (15) Transsexual/ transsexual (16) Trans person (17) Woman (18) Man (19) Butch (20) Two-Spirit (21) Trans (22) Agender (23) Third sex (24) Gender Fluid (25) Non-binary transgender (26) Androgyne (27) Gender gifted (28) Gender Blender (29) Femme (30) Person of transgendered experience (31) Androgynous (NYC Commission on Human Rights, 2018). Characteristics of these genders will be detailed in this presentation. Through theme analysis (van Manen, 1990). of these definitions the constructs used to define gender include physical traits, dress/appearances that are male and/or female, neither male nor female traits, genderless, incorporation of a combination of genders, sexual orientation, and sexuality on a continuum.

One of the problems in researching concepts on gender is that the terms used are often slang words “created” in certain sub cultures that have been used only recently in mainstream. An organization, Thesafezoneproject.com, is a free online resource for awareness and education on a variety of sexual orientations (LGBTQ). The Safe Zone is a large education platform that has an extensive database, information on this timely topic, and downloadable curriculums that can be used to educate and teach. This website even encourages one to “*use all material without feeling weird or needing permission*” as all the information created and used “was all made for you” (The Safe Zone Project, 2018). The website includes a comprehensive dictionary of LGBTQ terms.

Issues with words such as *policeman*, *mailmen*, *man*, and *construction men* have constructed identities of male dominated work. This has been an issue for feminists as it creates sexist-type language and stereotypes. Gender-neutral pronouns are pronouns which that do not have any association with a particular gender. Terms that have been suggested are “they” (as in in the plural but meaning singular) (Hess, 2016), co-pronouns such as “ze” (combination of sounds for “she” and “he”) and “hirs” (his and hers) and “hir” (her and him). Some “genderqueers” or individuals identified as both genders may use “she” or “he” alternately.

Proposal for Future Action

Dress scholars can be part of this movement to redefine gender beyond the traditional male/female dichotomy. Research strategies include, examining the definitions on the databases presented above using content analysis, investigating historical writings to understand how individuals of different gender groups dressed during historical time periods, making a survey that assesses how the public in varying geographic regions view gender, and qualitative research interviewing individuals who associate with a gender other than male or female. Dress scholars can make a significant impact in teaching diversity by incorporating multiple gender identities in courses. Strategies include, having students imagine dressing in clothing that is the opposite their own, and holding discussion on stereotypes related to dress and gender.

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