

Jan 1st, 12:00 AM

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Reilly, Andrew and Barry, Ben, "Androgyny in the Post-postmodern Era" (2017). *International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings*. 161.

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Androgyny in the Post-postmodern Era

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Keywords: crossdressing, gender, performatism

Androgyny is defined as the mixing of masculinity and femininity, yet the way in which they are combined can vary from *blending* masculine and feminine signifiers to *juxtaposing* them. This study sought to explore a hypothesis brought forth by Morgado (2014) that androgynous appearance forms had shifted from the gender-blended aesthetic common in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to a new interpretation of androgyny today that contrasts masculine and feminine elements. Morgado situated her work within Eschelman's (2008) concept of performatism. Eschelman argued that the postmodernism era<sup>1</sup> is dead and has been replaced by performatism, of which one aspect is the eradication of cultural categories (e.g., gender). Eschelman's work is part of a body of literature that is coming to be known as post-postmodernism. Thus, the New Androgyny, as we call it, is an aesthetic representation of this dawning epoch. Yet, the meanings and motivations of men who employ this look has not been studied and understanding them will help scholars to understand contemporary identity in relation to gender norms.

This presentation is part of a larger study on men's fashion consumption, using Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) as a method, where 50 men were recruited using a snowball technique. All participants were individually interviewed in their homes using a sartorial biography methodology (Woodward, 2007), where they used examples from their wardrobe to illustrate specific topics. Interviews lasted between 2.5-6 hours and were recorded and transcribed. Of the original sample, four who engaged in crossdressing were analyzed for this study. This subset include a diversity of race (African-Canadian, Caucasian, Filipino), whose ages ranged from 22 to 34, and identified as gay or straight. The original transcripts were analyzed using phenomenological analysis (Cresswell, 2007)

Each of the men in the subset engaged in crossdressing on a regular basis and described their aesthetic as alternative, androgynous, gender nonconforming, or unisex. They mixed obvious gender signifiers of masculinity (e.g., basketball jerseys, men's blazers, leather jackets,

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<sup>1</sup> The postmodern era, roughly from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, is seen as questioning and challenging modernism's (c. Industrial revolution to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) inflexible rules.

camouflage print) with signifiers of femininity (e.g., skirts, stiletto heels, sequined tops, faux fur, handbags, and heavy jewelry). However, their motivations were varied, including purposefully challenging socially-constructed limitations on gender, appreciating the aesthetic nature and fit of clothing designed for women, or finding a historic or spiritual quality about the clothing. None of the men sought to pass a woman.

Our analysis indicates that the New Androgyny is limited to the Millennial generation as the men in the sample were all under 35 years of age, but is not limited to race or sexual orientation. While challenging gender norms re: appearance was a motivation, similar to androgynous dressing of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Steorn, 2012), in this case other motivations were also found, including clothing fit, aesthetics, and a “connection” with the garment was important. We interpret these differences to the Zeitgeist in which Millennials were raised and currently live, where gender norms are frequently critiqued in popular culture and individuality is desired.

Our analysis also supports Morgado’s (2014) articulation of dress forms as representative and illustrative of a dawning post-postmodern epoch. While there are some features of postmodernism featured in the look (e.g., androgyny) it does indicate a shift in aesthetic representations of gender.

This research analysis is limited by the small sample size, making generalizability impossible. Nonetheless, as a qualitative study, it illustrates a new form of androgynous gendered-appearances which is distinct and novel from previous androgynous appearances.

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