

The Changes in Women's Power Dressings During Two Feminist Movements

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ABSTRACT

Everyone's body, like its sex, is innate and can't be determined by its will. Therefore, clothes, which are defined as an extension of the human body, have always carried the function of decorating the self-body and beautifying individual images. For women, whose bodies were always under the strict regulation of diverse social rules, clothes are also an effective tool to fight against the male gaze and patriarchal aesthetics. During the first and second feminist movements in the last century, the emergence and popularity of female power dressing made a great contribution to empower women, assisting them in gaining legal equality and democratic rights in different societal fields. This article will focus on the externalization of women's powerful dressings to explore its correlation with female consciousness and female discourse and the modification of female subjective status during the first two feminist movements in the western world. Additionally, the development of women's power dressings in China will be presented compared to Western women's costume revolution.

Keywords: *Gender communication, Power suit, Feminist movement.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism originated in Western nations in the seventeenth century and supposed the emancipation of women. One of its most vital goals used to be to fight for political rights, regularly referred to as the "feminist movement" [1]. Under the influence of this ideological and political movement, the fashion of gowns of women additionally changed. As a cultural vehicle, Clothing has contributed to a large extent to the development and unfold of this social culture. Today, feminism is an essential supply of suggestion in apparel sketch and has advanced with female and social civilization advancement in society.

The development of the feminist movement in the twentieth century further secured women's civil rights and led to more employment opportunities for women. The women's movement before the Twenties used to be characterized through the suffrage movement that led to women gaining the right to vote. From the Eighteen Nineties and early section of the 20th century, tons of the women's motion focused on regularly occurring societal ine-

qualities and, such as negative working and housing conditions, while also focusing on social ills such as alcoholism and prostitution [1]. Black girls in the Southwest of the United States, at some point in the 1930s, for instance, joined labor unions such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) to protest negative wages and work environments they had to endure. Apart from this popular social activism and gaining the right to vote, gender-specific topics, including equality in work and pay, were now not primary focal point areas. In the 1940s, females won growing employment as guys left distant places to combat World War II [2].

The prominence of women at work and their ability to work and men in the war have led to social reflection on gender relations and awareness of women's independence and rights. After World War II, some writers commenced to query how ladies in society had been perceived and the role they played, especially as the combat had proven ladies made valuable contributions and, in many cases, performed duties equally to men. Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex*, a groundbreaking book that wondered how society considered females and the role in

which they played. In her work, Beauvoir [3] writes, "One is no longer born, however as an alternative becomes, a woman." This quote characterizes how society fosters the thought of what a female must do and act, the place gender roles are realized and compelled upon women. World War II confirmed that females might want to destroy out of their gender roles as was once required. The ebook puzzled then why women's roles that noticed them as secondary to guys in the workplace and home were perpetuated when this was no longer the case for the duration of the war.

In this social context, the degree of freedom of dress and the style of dressing of women has also tended to masculinize with the awakening of feminist thinking, highlighting the sense of female entitlement. There has been a heated dialogue on the equality of man and female because a century in the past when feminists commenced attempting for women's benefit [4]. Compared to females in the nineteenth century, women in this day and age have greater rights and freedom. Women are now greater considered to be impartial individuals, as a long time ago, they had been possessions of men. Furthermore, women had been compelled to follow every single order from men unconditionally. As an important impetus to fashion, feminism, which was frequently formed via two waves, has modified the stereotype significantly and lead to the limit of restrictions on women's dressing [5]. The recognition of power dressing coincided with the feminist ideology and increasing needs for equality for women. In Western society, masculinity is intrinsically linked to respect, strength and authority. In distinction to masculinity, femininity is intrinsically linked to sexuality and motherhood [6]. These gender roles influenced the popularity of the electricity suit, as females wished a masculine garment to be viewed as equipped businesswomen. In the two ranges of feminist development, women's clothing changed accordingly. With the expanded want for democracy and female rights, feminist-style strength dressing grew to be a unique current.

2. POWER DRESSING IN THE FIRST FEMINIST PERIOD

The core of feminist was the liberation of women from oppressive social practices and ideologies. The awakening of female consciousness contributed to the initial development of a dress code of rights that represented women's rights and freedoms. "Feminism encompasses many one-of-a-kind theoretical, political, and academic traditions. However, at the center of feminist concerns is the liberation of females from oppressive social practices and ideologies." [7] The first wave of feminist motion dated from the nineteenth century to the Forties in the United Kingdom and the United States. Accompanied by the anti-feudal movement, feminism ultimately grew to become the most crucial section and the criteria of social revolution. Not fashion, but dress, grew to be an in particular feminist

issue for first-wave feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Dress used to be central to her politics which sought to liberate females from strictures, each bodily and sociological, both damning and suffocating in their ways. The petticoat restricted and hindered genuine physical mobility and supported the subordinating buildings of gendered financial and political oppression and domination, which sustained resistance to the suffrage movement. The lack of pockets on women's clothing, Gilman[7] writes, solely reinstates a connection of ladies to frivolity and ephemerality; the pocketless female becomes based on the pocketed man to elevate the world around for her. And frankly, pockets nevertheless reflect the sexist design. The motivations for the gown reform movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been pretty actually self-evident: bodices, corsetry, and closely layered undergarments have been being recognized as having deleterious fitness effects, altering women's spines and bodily compartments, compressing and negative their inside organs, compromising their very abilities to cross and function with any ease in the world. Medical experts and costume reformers alike recommended a turn from aesthetics to "health," promotion a subject for aesthetics as being "bad" for one's well-being, which in flip perpetuates a distinction between the lovely and the precise that parallels the comparison of the stunning with the inconsequential.

The initial development of the rights dress code was largely due to women replacing men in factory work during the war, which led to demands for equal rights for men and women and women's dress for work. The Chanel suit was created and became the first generation of women's rights suits. During this wave, World War I took place, which used to be any other cause of modifications in women's status. To defend countrywide sovereignty, men have been conscribed to combat in the warfare front. Therefore, women had to do men's bodily labor in the factory. Females no longer stayed in the house, only serving their own family. However, additionally went out working to guide the household and their country. Not accidentally, Coco Chanel's easy and sensible designs catered to the needs of working women. In her shop, she sold "flannel blazers, straight linen skirts, sailor tops, long jersey sweaters, and skirt-jackets," which had been inspired via menswear [8]. These convenient garments enabled women to work with greater efficiency. "Chanel used such serviceable substances and cozy patterns in the format of stylish daywear for state-of-the-art city women, safe in her information of their aspirational and practical qualities." Her accomplishment in fashion helped her located in the roles of the feminist pioneer. Simplicity has come to be a recognized attribute of Coco Chanel and affected the trend vogue afterward. By the mid-1920s, the "Chanel look" consisting of wool jersey suits, full-cut and short skirts, and costume rings had swept at some stage in Europe and redefined the photograph of a contemporary

European woman. Chanel introduced her signature cardigan jacket in 1925 and 1926, each of which redefined women's formalwear. In 1926, Vogue published a sketch of her calf-length easy black sheath and labeled it a frock that all the world would wear, for Chanel had created a new dresser staple. Throughout the 1930's she had a profitable profession. She even was employed by using Samuel Goldwyn in 1931 to travel to Hollywood to plan couture outfits for the stars of MGM, such as Katharine Hepburn. Chanel's simple, "boyish" clothing gained recognition for the duration of the First World War when females were compelled to assume the jobs of conflict men, and practical garb grew to become a necessity for the new "working woman." [8] Subsequently, Chanel accidentally sparked a revolution in which her unique fashions no longer solely changed the way females dressed and modified the way ladies considered themselves. By revolutionizing women's fashion and supporting to create the image of the independent, working woman, Coco Chanel had a brilliant influence on the first women's rights movement. Unfortunately, after the men returned from hostilities when WWI ended, women have been dispatched returned to the kitchen. "Still, a vital new stage had been reached, because the induction of ladies into the combat effort initiated the total process of liberation." [1]

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF POWER DRESSING DURING THE SECOND FEMINIST MOVEMENT

If the first wave feminism movement was the embryonic stage of women's power dressing, the second was the golden age of its development. After World War II, although women had gained some access to work, education, and politics and played a more important role in the workforce, they still suffered unequal treat in a great number of fields. Therefore, feminists started to rethink gender discrimination and finally concluded that the biological differences between genders were the origin of all the discrimination, so if women wanted to reach the same status as men, they had to eliminate the gender differences and narrow the gender gap. Supported by this new theory and the slogan "Personal is Political", feminists extended their battlefield to a new social domain in culture and custom. They sought more control over their bodies while maintaining their fight for power and more legitimate rights in the economic and political realm. The changes of the feminist movement led to the development of power dressing: traditional power dressing gradually developed into Power Suit and began to prevail from the fashion industry to daily life and professional fields. In these decades, Power Suit was more than a wear for "working women". It was given new connotations as a practical tool of feminists to rebel against patriarchy and promote female respectability.

3.1. Power Suit, Fashion and Lifestyle

The second feminist movement started in the 1960s, coincidentally encountering the rising consumerism, which was greatly developed by mass media during the post-war reconstruction. In this phase, consumer culture remolded female aesthetics with the idea that appearance and bodily presentation are associated with the individual expression of the self. Consumption was varnished as the valuable purchase of symbols. Consumerism perfectly infiltrated the feminist movement with its advocacy of "performing self", which was defined as a new form of rebellion against patriarchy. Women were encouraged to manage their self-body and present their individuality by maintaining the inner body and decoration of the outer body [9]. Regarded as the extension of skin, clothes can directly and visually reflect the result of decoration. Therefore, the selection of clothes can mirror the certain personality that the wearer wants to show and conceal her unwanted temperaments.

In this context, Yves St Laurent's "Le Smoking" was born in response to women's demand for gender equality in appearance. Unlike the glamorous Chanel's suit, which emphasized female self-possession, Le Smoking greatly empowered women by making them look like men. This black tailored tuxedo consisted of a ruffled shirt, a shoulder-padded blazer, and even a pair of straight, slender trousers, first included as an element of women's evening-wear [10]. To a great extent, this kind of androgynous design catered to women's need of "performing self" and showing individuality, so when Le Smoking first appeared in the 1967 YSL show, the unisex tuxedo immediately received a fanatical response, with the chase of some fashionable socialites.

The power suit was gradually generalized from a garment to a kind of fashion-conscious and progressive lifestyle. With the aestheticization of everyday life, women emphasized their own bodies and constructed them as independent symbols to fight against patriarchal appreciation. When model Nan Kempner was refused by a New York restaurant wearing a Le Smoking suit, she took off her trouser to orientate the dress code with a mini-skirt-like blazer only, audaciously mocking the discriminatory ban, which prohibited women from wearing trousers in the public area [10]. On another occasion, Bianca Pérez-Mora Macías married Mick Jagger and stunned the world by dressing a white YSL Le Smoking tuxedo blazer in a wedding dress. From this, we can see women's adoption of this power suit was rapidly extended from their activities in the fashion world to their daily lives to challenge the conventional public order and morals.

3.2. Power Suit in Professional Fields

With the need for power sharply increased, working women's appreciation of dressing shifted in the 1980s. Inspired by Foucault's subject theory, which reflected the

correlation between power and the human body, some feminists modified their theory from stressing their femininity to advocating the concept of androgyny and gender diversity. As Luce Irigaray had mentioned in her book "This Sex Which is Not One", to play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it [11]. When women strove to level discourse power in some professional fields, they tried to dress conforming to the traditional male scheme, to weaken their femininity and build a sophisticated and trustful image.

Following this tide, Giorgio Armani creatively combined traditional women's couture with the designs of male suits to innovate a smart business suit for women, which mainly featured an oversized jacket silhouette with exaggeratedly wide shoulder pads. This was the stereotype of "Power Suit". Its loose structure effectively helped women conceal their body shape and divert others' attention from their gender to their performance in particular fields. With this function, Power Suit soon prevailed among female elites. And it was remarkable that British first female premier Mrs. Thatcher was also a lover and fashion pioneer of Power Suit. The iron lady used to wear a blue power suit, including a blazer and long pleated skirt, when she officially settled in 10 Downing Street. Also, tailored skirt suits with bright saturated colors had become one of her most salient symbols in her whole political life. These classic images greatly influenced people's impression of Power Suit, leading them gradually to associate Power Suit with Mrs. Thatcher, the most powerful woman in modern British history, and then with the supreme authority she represented.

All in all, as an extension of women's bodies, power dressing is an echo of feminism. Compared to the first feminist movement, the second one proved its significance in developing power dressing, with women gaining more personal autonomy in consumption, social life, and even some professional fields. However, most women were still shackled in a huge "Panopticon", which could be materialized as a new kind of male gaze in the consumer society. Deviating from the original purpose of combatting patriarchal aesthetics, their management of the self-body was finally distorted by consumerism to provoke their desire for material goods and then endless material consumption.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF EVOLVING FEMINISM THEORY

From the first wave to the third wave, except for the development of woman status in political and customer field, the revolution of feminism theory also contributed to the creation and popularity of power suit. During the first decade of the 20th century, the sexual liberation started by Havelock Ellis, Ellen Kay, and Sigmund Freud added new motivation to the feminism movement, which

emphasized that women should have complete control of their bodies. At the same time, the original power suit emerges from the social trend, which is called the characterization of the female figure in a natural way. Corset and petticoat, which exaggerated the woman's shape, were replaced by natural garments [4]. In 1923, a casual and comfortable channel suit appeared, which started to relieve a woman from the male gaze and the shackles of patriarchal society. After the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote, the feminist movement came to lose society's attention. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, appealing to housewives to participate in social work instead of living a life that harmful to their mental health and self-development [15], which started the new round of feminist movement in the 1960s. However, the emphasis on women acting like a man also means denying traditional femininity from personality to garment, which leads to the creation of Le smoking in 1966. After 1970, with the development of woman's studies in western countries, the concept of gender distinguishing from sex helped to improve feminism ideology. Kate Millett proposed to break the either-or framing in sexual personality in her work *Sexual Politics* [12]. During this period, the balance of masculinity and femininity became a new trend. Another work of Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage*, came out in 1981, which made some reflections to the first wave and believed that only when the public paid the same attention to femininity and masculinity could a woman have the same right as a man [13]. The pursue of hermaphroditism of feminists was called the appearance of 1980s power suit, matching the suit coat to skirts.

After the 1980s, the second wave started to convert into the third wave, mainly reflected in applying postmodernism to the feminism ideology. The postmodern feminists deconstructed most of the previous modern ideas, such as the dichromacy of femininity and masculinity. They did not believe in the existence of absolute truth, which explained why feminists like Judith Butler thought that there is no fixed female or male essence except for some rules about it imposed on women by the patriarchal society. Qualities connected to traditional masculinity, like ration, are no longer the only thing that we pursue. Instead, we try to break previous rules that fettered individual development, calling for a free and pluralistic society, which leads to the change of the status and meaning of power suit today. Nowadays, a power suit is not the necessary garment for the working woman because they have more freedom and a much better workplace situation than the past, which means they no longer have to use power suit to show that they are reliable and authoritative. As Julia Kristeva claimed, a liberated person can make free action between femininity and masculinity, chaos and order, revolution, and present situation [14].

4.1. Globalization and Postmodernism: a Pluralistic Future

In the 21st century that feminism ideology came to inspire a cascade of widespread and deep ideological change in mass media and the public around the globe. More people, especially those who live in developing countries, have the voice and power in “woman’s subjects”, getting unprecedented attention from the public and social media. When it came to the developing countries, some of their domestic garment also played similar roles as power suits in the three-wave of the woman movement, especially in China. At the beginning of 20th century, woman right was regarded as a symbol of modernity and humanity among many intellectuals and politicians in China, such as Mao. Affected by the introduction of feminism ideology, young Chinese woman, especially female students, tended to choose clothes that avoided the sexual explicitness in garments to show their independence and freedom, which in turn led to the popularity of loose and ankle long cheongsam in Shanghai, breaking the gender stereotypes in traditional society. From the 1950s to 1960s, Mao’s slogan appealing to women taking part in social production instead of doing housework had great influence, giving the woman a chance to realize personal value. However, the over-emphasis of collectivism led to the ignorance of individuality in different genders and classes, which meant people had no choice but wore Mao’s suit, which was a modification to lounge suit. Underneath the male suit, Chinese women had no right to express themselves. In the 1980s, the end of the Culture Revolution started renewed liberation in sex and mind with the complete revival of the economy. During this period, the development of the feminism ideology in China corresponded to that in the western world, which led to the introduction and popularity of power suits as women work clothes on the mainland in the 1990s. When it came to the 21st century, due to the revolution of the economic system and the development of commercial society, individuality became the main ideology of concern which in turn caused a change in aesthetics during two decades. Chinese feminist artists started to portray a woman with genderless means of artistic expression, paying less emphasis on femininity and focusing on the individuality and self-cognition of females. People started to pay more attention to the individual experience and existence in society instead of being faceless members of a group. Nowadays, Chinese women tend to wear different styles of casual clothes instead of power suits at work. In conclusion, compared to the one-time west-centric narrative of feminism, we need to realize and gain insight into the history that global women experienced similar oppression in the patriarchal society in the past century. We can see how women struggled and fought for freedom and rights within the evolution of power suit in different stages and different countries.

When it came to the second decade of 21 century, we can expect the prospect and potential of postmodern feminism. With the intensive deconstruction to the previous dominant ideology like phallogocentrism, postmodern feminists, which attach most weight to diversification, are committed to breaking the conventional dichromacy of male and female. They reject to make definition and create absolute truth about gender and human in order to give more freedom to the individual.

5. CONCLUSION

Looking backward to the first and second wave of the woman movement, we can see the first wave movement guaranteed women’s civil rights. The “Chanel look” was all the rage in Europe and redefined modern aesthetics. Chanel suit acted as the prototype of the power suit. It was followed by the YSL Le Smoking, which actually featured the androgynous design catered to women’s need of performing self and showing individuality. Through the second wave, we can see an evolving strategy applied to call for equal rights, illustrated by the power suit. The focus of the campaign changed from embodying masculinity to balancing two different kinds of gender temperament. The loose structure of the 1980s’ Power Suit effectively helped women conceal their body shape and divert others’ attention from their gender to their performance in the workplace, which dramatically improved the situation of working women over some time. When it came to the 21st century, more reflection and innovation of feminism emerged from the real women faced. Postmodernism arose a new kind of vitality by deconstructing the traditional dominant ideology. In this background, Power Suit, which used to be a protest against patriarchal society, seems to become the one that should be deconstructed to break the stereotype of a working woman, return the individual freedom to them and increase the diversity of aesthetics. The ultimate target of the feminist movement should be eliminating the unnecessary constraints on a single person and creating an open, inclusive society.

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