

“Sexchange Day”:

The Emerging Spectrum of Gender Identities

「セクスチェンジ・デー」とジェンダー・アイデンティティの連続化

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要旨

我々の服装やファッションはまさに我々自身の表象である。この命題は真であるかのように感じやすいが、土肥(1998)の研究を通して見られるように、ファッションなどの被服行動は我々自身のみならず、誰が何をどのように着るかなど、属する社会の文化形態そのものの表象でもある。いわゆる「変わったファッション」—すなわち社会的な暗黙の了解から外れた行動、例えば異性の服装をするなど—の場合ではなぜそのような行動をするのかといった問いが挙げられるが、この論文では特に異性装を対象に、その行動を考察する。また、考察を踏まえ、近年山梨県の高校で学生が主体となって行われた「セクスチェンジ・デー」と呼ばれる取り組みを紹介し、異性装に対する社会の受容性、容認性に変化が現れていることを提起することを試みる。そして、男女のいずれかしか存在しない「ジェンダー二項対立」の脱構築を試み、より可塑的で流動的な性別という選択肢が社会に浸透する可能性を探る。

【キーワード】 ジェンダー, 異性装, セクスチェンジ・デー, ジェンダー・スキーマ, 心理的両性具有性

Introduction

It is not an unusual sight to see Japanese high school students wearing school uniforms. Most high schools in Japan require their students to wear specific uniforms, but on November 11, 2014, nearly 300 students at a high school in Japan's Yamanashi prefecture approached this policy in an unorthodox way; they participated in a student-initiated event entitled “Sexchange Day”. This high school, like many, also had a uniform policy. However, for a whole day, students dressed in the school uniforms of the opposite sex, to “take a second look at oneself and the world,” for a fresh perspective on everyday school life. The experimental event was brought to life through the presentation competition held at Tohoku University of Art and Design, the “Deza-sen (Design Competition)”, at which high school students present their ideas to “make everyone happy”. Sexchange day was the top-prize-win-

ning idea of 2013, its name being a combination of the words “sex” and “exchange” (from the Japanese word 交換 or *koukan*, not the orthodox English phrase *sex change* meaning gender reassignment surgery). In all, 117 boys and 182 girls, around 40 percent of the high school’s students, participated in the school event (Mainichi News, 2014).

It is easy to assume that fashion is a representation of who someone is, and how they see themselves. However, as the study by Dohi (1998) shows, fashion not only represents oneself, it also delineates one’s cultural boundaries — who can wear what, when, where, why, and how (Dohi, 1998; Mitsuhashi, 2006). Because fashion is so culturally bound, hardly anyone even notices how it functions. Nearly the only time anybody does notice is when there is a perceivable anomaly, and interestingly, there has been gender inequality in the degree of nonacceptance of those anomalies (Dohi, 1998).

Men who dress in women's clothing have long been called transvestites and were treated as if they had a severe mental disability, even by the medical community, being labeled “transvestic fetishism” in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) by the American Psychiatric Association. By contrast, women who refuse to wear skirts and high-heels have gained acceptance as well as the persona of being sharp or even cool (Dohi, 1998) through the Modernism movement dating back 100 years. But this begs the question: How can a mere shape or detail of something covering part of one’s body determine one’s masculinity or femininity? Fashion is a representation of gender, not necessarily for oneself, but also for signifying to others one’s gender through what is known as the gender schema (Dohi, 1998). Because there is the gender schema, many individuals frame themselves into the favored way of dressing so as not to be treated as outcasts.

Despite advancements in cultural and gender diversity, there still exists great hegemony of the gender binary, especially reinforced by older generations in power. Societies tended to view those taking part in the act of cross-dressing as seeking sexual pleasure from it (Dohi, 1998) as if cross dressing were a fetish to all who take part, and the DSM did not help changing general opinion with its description. This brings the focus back, however, to “Sexchange Day”, an event in which the student participants were evidently not seeking any erotic gratification from wearing clothes normally associated with the opposite sex. Nor were they considered to be peculiar in any way. If they *were* special, it was in their desire to question the status quo. Indeed, the long-lived hegemony of the gender binary is increasingly questioned by members of society; a spectrum of gender identities is emerging that is broader and more nuanced than the restrictive binary. This paper briefly explains the relation between fashion and gender, what kind of inequality exists, and predicts how cross dressing will possibly be regarded in the future.

Fashion, the Embodiment of Gender

According to Dohi, on understanding the relation between fashion and gender, a concept known as the gender schema explains how people choose to dress in the manner that they do. The gender schema, introduced by Sandra Bem in 1981, draws an individual's attention towards gender-related phenomena and encourages us to categorize them into one of the two genders, or sex-types them, as "masculine" or "feminine", and enforces the memorization and reenactment of the phenomena based on gender (Kashio & Dohi, 2000). Bem explains that one's individuality is stipulated in respect to the gender schema. If one's gender schema is clearly defined, that individual is highly conscious of their gender and inflicts the idea of how one's behavior will differ depending on the gender of others. In other words, if a male individual has a clearly defined male gender schema he will think that one should be 'manly', both in fashion and behavior, in order to be a man, and anything else is not acceptable in the gender spectrum. It is also shown in Bem's and Dohi's research that every individual has different tendencies of masculine and feminine gender schema, and if one's gender schema is not clearly defined, the individuality is minimally affected by sex-typing and the individual being both masculine and feminine simultaneously (Kashio & Dohi, 2000).

One's gender identity, however, as shown in Kashio & Dohi's research, is not subject to a single factor such as the gender schema, but multiple factors, particularly in personality traits and modes of dress. This is due to one's identity, which after all is not limited to gender, being constructed on the basis of maximizing one's potential and maintaining social relations (Kashio & Dohi, 2000). From another perspective, Judith Butler argues, "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (Butler, 1988, p.520). Individuals are compelled to "perform" gender in the polarity known as the gender binary, and society is the agency sanctioning adherence to or deviance from the binary gender system. At the same time, Butler brings up an interesting point: if gender is not the starting point but the result of an accretion of performative acts, then the possibility exists that a different repetition of acts over time would produce a different gender (Butler, 1988). Every individual is to some extent biologically different, yet it can be argued that every individual is essentially forced into one of two categories, male or female, to be accepted as a member of society. In other words, one's gender identity is constructed based on what is acceptable in society. Only recently has society become more accepting, albeit to a certain degree, towards those who struggle to gain acceptance. The exact limits of what an individual is allowed is not within the scope of this paper and

thus is not explored here except to note that in terms of fashion and the gender spectrum, as long as one stays within the boundaries of the gender schema, one can express oneself freely.

This raises the question: what are the boundaries of the gender schema? According to Dohi (1998), one's orientation to the gender schema seen in fashion can be explained through the balance of masculinity and femininity. The gender schema tries to push one towards either gender, however every individual's gender identity is a mixture of both sets of qualities associated with each gender. Depending on which is more pronounced, the result of fashion leans towards being perceived as either masculine or feminine. At the same time, there can be two additional possibilities of fashion; unisex, and cross-sex (see figure 1).

Unisex fashion is defined as the style that occurs when one dresses without a specific gender in mind, let alone the opposite's. On a scale of masculinity and femininity, unisex fashion would be near zero on both ends. Unisex encourages both genders to dress in this fashion, but simply because it can be worn by both genders.

Cross-sex fashion, on the other hand, depends on the individual being aware of certain clothing's association with the opposite gender. On a scale of masculine and feminine, cross-sex fashion would be both clearly masculine and clearly feminine at the same time. This is mainly recognized by the cross dresser and by others close enough to understand the individual's state of mind. Because cross dressing is based on one's realization that he or she is dressing in a fashion that is generally associated with the opposite gender, most cases are that the individual possesses a hermaphroditic gender identity, which enables the individual to switch between male and female fashion with little to no discomfort caused by the gender schema (Dohi, 1998).

Dohi's observation states that the aforementioned hermaphroditic gender identity exists in real life not only as an extension of individuality; she explains that it also has the effect of social appeal. According to Murstein's SVR theory, introduced in 1976, the appeal that people find in others begins in the *stimulus* from appearance, and deepens through realizing similarities in *value*, and eventually realizing his or her *role*. Dohi argues that similarities among individuals stem from shared values and actions, and as more people appeal to individuals that have a hermaphroditic gender identity, there is

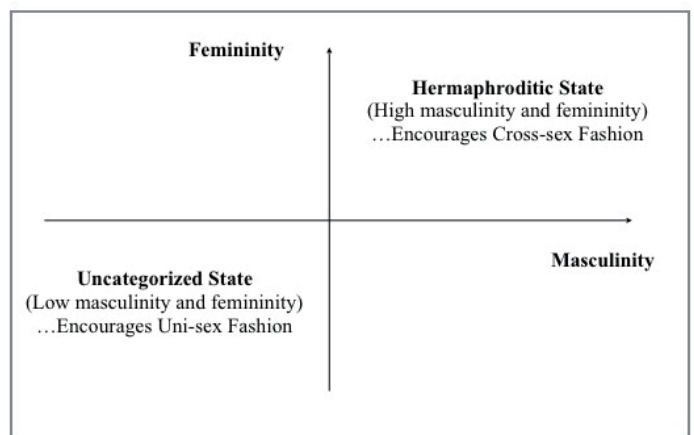


Figure 1: Identities that Encourage Uni-sex and Cross-Sex Fashion (Dohi, 1998)

the possibility that more people would explore their gender concept in the direction opposite to their gender (Dohi, 1998).

She also predicts that, because people have such varying gender identities, as unisex and cross-sex fashions become widely accepted among society, more variations will appear. Interestingly, Dohi's predictions are based on strong social trends toward equality for men and women. Because men and women are increasingly equal at work and at home, and the difference in spoken and body language has shrunk, the social differences between men and women are, albeit to a certain degree, becoming more and more unclear. She also states that an individual with a hermaphroditic gender identity will be preferred in society, as that individual will not be constrained by the gender schema and thus can switch between masculine and feminine according to each social situation (Dohi, 1998).

“Sexchange Day”

The concept of gender identity consists of many aspects. The performative aspect, explored by Butler, presented the possibility of a gender emerging through repetition of a different set of acts over time. From the aspect of self-concept, Dohi presented the possibility of individuals appealing to a hermaphroditic gender identity which incorporates qualities and similarities exceeding the existing gender construct. The key concept which bridges these aspects is the gender schema, because it is what shapes the form and limitations gender which each member of society shares as a general understanding of reality. The relevance of “Sexchange Day” lies in how the event came to be: the key point is that it was an event which was conceptualized by, executed by, and consisted of high school students.

It is hard to determine what had motivated them to create and partake in the event, however clearly the current young generation, including these students, is experiencing gender representations in ways that previous generations often have not. This statement is backed up by statistics from YouGov, which show one in three Americans over age 65 regard transgender as morally wrong, where only one in five Americans share the same view under age 30 (Beinart, 2016). More and more of them are recognizing that gender regarded as a basic binary is one of society's fundamental yet outdated ideologies. They see so many exceptions, whether in people producing media content, or wielding power in government posts—in short, people in various walks of life, as well as neighbors and family members, colleagues and friends whose gender identities are diverse, some in obvious and others in nuanced ways. Rather, they regard gender as a spectrum, a continuum, with every individual inheriting and developing both masculine and feminine aspects at different rates.

As previously stated, the idea of gender is based on performance, and through the performance of gender, it can be understood that the gender schema is reinforced. The purpose of “Sexchange Day” was to gain a fresh perspective on everyday life, but was that the only result? Could not “Sexchange Day” be proof that the hypotheses are becoming reality, and might we not see more events wherein men and women experience qualities of another gender? In the abovementioned school event, around 40 percent of the high school’s students (117 boys and 182 girls) participated. Despite the exact numbers of male or female students not being clear, it is noteworthy that far fewer boys than girls chose to take part in pure numbers. It cannot be determined whether this directly links to the gender schema without the total number of students of each gender, however men are generally more susceptible to the restrictions triggered by the gender schema. Since its effects are stronger on men, the male students may have subconsciously been prevented from participating due to the fear of being thought of as “not being manly”. Forty percent of students *were* willing to take part, on the other hand, which could be a sign of the gender schema shifting into something different from that of older generations, something which is more accepting towards diverse and nuanced gender identities, even if it is within 40% of the students.

Another indication can be found in the fact that “Sexchange Day” was introduced, planned and conducted by the high school students themselves. The fact that it was an original project initiated by students could be additional proof of a new trend: Gender not as a constraint on individuals, but rather as a means of expression. It is possible that the school was somehow unique and unconventional in certain ways compared to the average of Japanese high schools, but at the same time the event’s relative success suggests the potential willingness of high school students in Japan (or at least forty percent) to partake in a similar event.

It is further worth observing that high school students tend to be in the midst of identity construction, including gender identity, and among the 40 percent of students some may have been only experimenting in cross dressing as a one-time experience. Nonetheless, it is also important to note that the students were willing to participate, regardless of what they may have felt or how they would be perceived by their peers after the event, which suggests they had less defined gender schema tendencies. If this is indeed true, we may see more explorations and experiments with converged gender identities in coming generations.

Conclusion

If “Sexchange Day” is indeed evidence of a newly emerging gender spectrum among younger generations, what can be expected as a social trend? To reiterate Dohi’s research, cross-sex fashion requires a hermaphroditic gender identity due to its nature of defining the idea of how one can express as well as differentiate oneself from others. A hermaphroditic gender identity enables an individual to switch between masculine and feminine fashion with very little influence of the gender schema; individuals with such a gender identity would be ideal in a truly equal society. This is because not only would they be affected by a gender schema strictly following a gender binary, enabling them to shift their fashion according to social situations, but also because they can appeal to a broader group of people without being predetermined by their sex. If “Sexchange Day” or similar events are held and more and more people experience or interact with cross-sex gender identities, then the gender schema as we know will change in favor of diversity and inconclusiveness.

The gender schema is what keeps most people within separated boundaries of male and female in current society. However, the current gender schema may in the future be regarded as a representation of extreme sexism. Fashion would be a bricolage of bits of both gender fashions, freeing individuals from the limits of expression created by the current gender schema.

It is difficult to assume that the concept of gender itself will perish, as it is the basis of many social systems and much of social life. The gender schema will continue to exist in the future as well because it is the basis of one’s gender identity, as well as the basis for social categorization of fellow members of society. However, if cross-sex fashion became more apparent in society, then the greatest change to every individual would be how we perceive each other. Individuals who are not as strongly affected by a binary-based gender schema would no longer be considered to have a mental disorder, which is a big step for equality among all members of society, properly reflecting the diversity of mankind. With “Sexchange Day”, perhaps Japanese society has made the beginning steps in the shift towards a more inclusive gender concept.

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