

Women and Power through Fashion: Past and Present
Arts A0630
Spring 2023

Course times: Wednesdays; Lectures and seminars – 13:00-16:00

Classroom: Varied (See timetable below)

Credits: 3 ECTS (26 contact hours/54 independent work hours - seminar/lecture reading and prep, and weekly and final assignments)

Period: V

Course instructor: Dustin M. Neighbors (PhD, University of York), Fashion History Lab, Aalto University

Responsible teacher: Paula Hohti

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Course overview and content:

This course will introduce students to the ways that fashion was used by and against women in the projection of power, the cultivation of influence, and the exercise of authority from the Renaissance period to present day. Special topics include ruling women and Renaissance fashions; female bodies and Victorian dress conformity; fashioning women's liberation; media and the rise of female politicians; women's fashion and mass consumption; and more.

Historically, women's rights and ability to wield power were significantly limited, including even their ability to communicate and use their voice to change their circumstances. Yet, throughout history, women have historically been a "force" because they have been able to exercise various forms of power and exert influence through different spaces and mediums. There is one form of influence that has long been synonymous with women and power, both past and present – fashion and dress. For women, fashion and dress have been a tool for power, self-expression, identity, and resistance, reflecting a unique sense of style or even a social/political statement. Consequently, fashion and dress have also been a means of regulating female behaviour and their bodies, a subject used to criticise or minimise women's achievements, or a weapon employed to diminish women's authority and agency. As such, the connections between women, fashion and dress, and power has been fundamental to the creation, production, marketing, and social and cultural reception with today's fashion industry. These connections will be explored throughout the course.

Learning outcomes and course objectives:

This interdisciplinary course will explore themes central to historical and fashion research, including ideas about fashion and dress, gender constructions and expectations, cultural practices and symbolism of clothing, and fashion consumption and consumerism. The course is relevant and useful to students from a variety of disciplines at Aalto University including (but not limited to) fashion and costume design; cinema production; media culture; and business and marketing. This relevance is based on the fact that the course will provide a contextual foundation for fashion design and construction, production and marketing, and emphasise a shared global cultural history.

The course aims to provide students with a methodological introduction of how to interpret and obtain new knowledge from a range of visual, material, and written evidence in a broad interdisciplinary context. Through this framework, students will be able to:

- Identify key developments of women's fashion, clothing, and fashion design concepts from the 1500 to the present day
- Understand historical clothing and its multiple social, political and economic meanings in society
- Acquire theoretical knowledge of fashion concepts and evaluate the meaning and significance of the term 'fashion' in historical context
- Explore issues of women's fashion and dress in relation to gender, race, class, social and cultural expectations, and apply them in historical and material culture studies
- Obtain new knowledge about the cultures, aesthetics, politics of women's fashion and dress.

Assessment methods and course work:

I. Lectures, activity and seminar discussions, with occasional guest presentations

II. Weekly writing assignment – *Women and Power Journal*

- Each week you will look for portraits, images or news related to women's fashion or forms of dress and the projection of power, authority, or the use of gender tropes. You will write a minimum of one paragraph (no more than a page) that analyses the piece or image you have chosen and also addresses the following questions:
 - How does the piece deal with women and power through fashion?
 - Is women's position or agency described as passive or assertive?
 - What fashion influence/style is being discussed or portrayed in the piece?
 - What conclusions do you have regarding the piece? (Do you agree/disagree with a written piece? How do you interpret the artist and subject in the image)

III. Final assignment – *The Power of Women's Fashion Project*

- A visual project with a short report. You may choose any medium for the visual component (painting, digital art, drawing, photography, video, etc.). Choose a female figure (historical or modern) and describe/define their fashion evolution through a visual medium. In a short, written report to accompany the visual component, students will analyse the chosen female figure's fashion evolution by answering the question: How does the figure's fashion and dress history intersect with power and influence in their respective period? The report should be a minimum of 1 full page and a max of 5 pages.

Key text: Joanna Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).

Course timetable and outline:

Week 1: <i>Early Modern Women and Renaissance Fashion – Status, Court, and Politics (1500-1700)</i>		
26 April 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding questions: How was fashion constructed and understood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? How did women, like Queen Elizabeth I or Queen Christina of Sweden, use fashion to cultivate power and exert influence? What are distinct fashion features from this period? How were elite & non-elite fashions connected? • Guest speaker: Professor Paula Hohti • Primary reading(s): (PDF) Susan Vincent, “Fashioning Appearances”, in <i>Dressing the Elite</i> (Berg, 2003), pp. 23-41. (PDF) Paula Hohti, “Dress, Dissemination and Innovation”, in <i>Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textile, and Innovation in Europe, 1500-1800</i>, edited by Evelyn Welch (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 143-165. 	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) U401
Week 2: <i>Extravagance, Drama, and Nineteenth-Century European Fashion – Revolution in Dress and Consumerism (1740-1830)</i>		
3 May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding questions: How did the French Revolution influence women and fashion? Why did the fashion economy take off in the 1800s? Was fashion used to control women’s bodies? • Guest speaker: Dr Sarah Bendall (Australian Catholic University) • Primary reading(s): Hannah Greig, “Faction and Fashion: The Politics of Court Dress in 18th-Century England”, <i>Appearance(s)</i> 6 (2015), pp. 1-19. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/17/t-magazine/fashion/fashion-as-protest-french-incroyables.html 	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) M134
Week 3: <i>From Victoria to the Gilded Age - Changes in Feminine Silhouettes (1837-1900)</i>		
10 May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding questions: How did women adapt fashion styles to navigate societal expectations and cultural shifts in the nineteenth century? In what ways did Queen Victoria of England, Empress Eugénie of France, Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, or Mary Todd Lincoln use or influence fashion in connection with power or politics? What role did colonialism and slavery have in the development of fashion? • Primary reading(s): (PDF) Matthew Storey and Lucy Worsley, “Queen Victoria: An Anatomy in Dress”, <i>Costume</i> 53:2 (2019), pp. 256-279. https://www.vogue.com/slideshow/gilded-age-fashion-as-seen-through-the-covers-of-vogue 	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) U401
Week 4: <i>Art Deco Style of the Roaring Twenties and World War II Fashion (1900-1940)</i>		
17 May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding questions: How did women’s fashion change in the early twentieth century? What role did the women’s suffrage movement have on fashion? How did fashion icons Coco Chanel, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich and Josephine Baker utilise the power of fashion? • Primary reading(s): (PDF) Annamari Vänskä, “Gender and Sexuality”, in <i>A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Modern Age</i>, edited by Alexandre Palmer (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), pp. 107-130. https://www.stylist.co.uk/fashion/suffragette-movement-fashion-clothes-what-did-the-suffragettes-wear/188043 	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) U401
Week 5: <i>Women’s Liberation, Youth Culture, and Maximalism - The Rise of Personal Fashion (1950-2000)</i>		

24 May 2023	<p>Guiding questions: How did fashion contribute to women’s liberation in the late twentieth century? What role did the different First Ladies of the United States play in fashion culture? How was fashion influenced by minority cultures? What were the factors behind the rise of women’s fashion, female models, and mass consumption in the late twentieth century?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary reading(s): (PDF) Joanna Entwistle, “Power Dressing & the Construction of the Career Woman”, in <i>Fashion Theory: A Reader</i>, edited by Malcolm Barnard (Routledge, 2020), pp. 285-296. https://www.nytimes.com/1977/08/28/archives/feminisms-effect-on-fashion.html 	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) Y308
Week 6: Politicians, Celebrities, Influencers - The Modern Woman and Fashion Trends (2000-2022)		
31 May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding questions: Why is fashion and style important in today’s society? How does fashion help and/or hinder modern politicians? How is fashion and dress connected to politics and power? What historical influences are still evident in today’s fashion and dress? • Primary reading(s): (PDF) Sarah Baker, “Jacinda Arden, New Zealand Premier: Fashion and Performing Gender”, in <i>Fashion, Women, and Power: The Politics of Dress</i>, edited by Denise Rall (Intellect Books, 2022), pp. 45-58. 	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) U401
Week 7: Final Assignment		
TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final assignment prep and discussion seminar 	TBC