

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

Course times: Primarily Wednesdays (see timetable for all day/dates); 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: II / Autumn 2023

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 historical 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).