

**Women and Power through Fashion: Past and Present**  
**Arts A0630**  
**Spring 2024 (Period V)**

**Course times:** Mostly Thursdays with one Friday; lectures and seminars – 13:00-16:00

**Classroom:** Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) Y346

**Credits:** 3 ECTS (15 contact hours/65 independent work hours - seminar/lecture reading and prep, and weekly and final assignments)

**Period:** V / Spring 2024

**Course instructor:** Paula Hohti, Aalto University and Dustin M. Neighbors (PhD, University of York), University of Helsinki

**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
- Recognize some of the multiple social, political and economic meanings of historical clothing and in society.
- Acquire theoretical knowledge of fashion concepts and evaluate the meaning and significance of the term 'fashion' in historical context.
- Describe some of the ways in which women's fashion and dress relate to gender, race, class, social and cultural expectations.
- Obtain new knowledge about the cultures, aesthetics and 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 Fashions – Part I: Status, Court &amp; Politics (1500-1700)</i>		
25 April 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guiding questions:</b> 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 &amp; non-elite fashions connected?</li> <li>• <b>Primary reading(s):</b> (PDF) Susan Vincent, “Fashioning Appearances”, in <i>Dressing the Elite</i> (Berg, 2003), pp. 23-41. (PDF) Eleri Lynn, “Introduction”, in <i>Tudor Fashion</i> (Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 12-21.</li> <li>• <b>Assignment:</b> Write and submit weekly writing assignment</li> </ul>	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) Y346
Week 2: <i>Renaissance Fashions Part 2 - Novelties, Innovation and Everyday Women</i>		
2 May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guiding questions:</b> How were non-elite women connected to fashion? What kind of new textile innovations circulated in the period? What kind of construction practices were used? How were women involved in the practices of construction of fashion? What do we learn from fashion through reconstruction and hands-on experiments?</li> <li>• <b>Primary reading(s):</b> (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. (PDF) Sarah Bendall, “The Queens’ Dressmakers: Women’s Work and Clothing Trades in Late Seventeenth-Century London”, <i>Women’s History Review</i> 32:3 (2023): 389-414.</li> <li>• <b>Assignment:</b> Write and submit weekly writing assignment</li> </ul>	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) Y346
Week 3: <i>Extravagance, Drama, and 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup>-Century European Fashion – Revolution in Dress and Consumerism (1740-1830)</i>		
(Friday) 10 May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guiding questions:</b> 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?</li> <li>• <b>Primary reading(s):</b> (PDF) Hannah Greig, “Faction and Fashion: The Politics of Court Dress in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century England”, <i>Apparence(s)</i> 6 (2015), pp. 1-19. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/17/t-magazine/fashion/fashion-as-protest-french-incroyables.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/17/t-magazine/fashion/fashion-as-protest-french-incroyables.html</a></li> <li>• <b>Assignment:</b> Write and submit weekly writing assignment</li> </ul>	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) Y346
Week 4: <i>From Victoria to the Gilded Age - Changes in Feminine Silhouettes (1837-1900)</i>		
23 May 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guiding questions:</b> 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?</li> <li>• <b>Primary reading(s):</b> (PDF) Matthew Storey and Lucy Worsley, “Queen Victoria: An Anatomy in Dress”, <i>Costume</i> 53:2 (2019), pp. 256-279. <a href="https://www.vogue.com/slideshow/gilded-age-fashion-as-seen-through-the-covers-of-vogue">https://www.vogue.com/slideshow/gilded-age-fashion-as-seen-through-the-covers-of-vogue</a></li> <li>• <b>Assignment:</b> Write and submit weekly writing assignment</li> </ul>	Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) Y346
Week 5: <i>Roaring Twenties, World War II Fashion, Women’s Liberation &amp; the Rise of Personal Fashion (1900-2000)</i>		

<p><b>30 May 2024</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Guiding questions:</b> 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? What role did the different First Ladies of the United States play in fashion culture? How was fashion influenced by minority cultures?</li> <li>• <b>Primary reading(s):</b> (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. (PDF) Joanna Entwistle, “Power Dressing &amp; the Construction of the Career Woman”, in <i>Fashion Theory: A Reader</i>, edited by Malcolm Barnard (Routledge, 2020), pp. 285-296. <a href="https://www.stylist.co.uk/fashion/suffragette-movement-fashion-clothes-what-did-the-suffragettes-wear/188043">https://www.stylist.co.uk/fashion/suffragette-movement-fashion-clothes-what-did-the-suffragettes-wear/188043</a></li> <li>• <b>Assignment:</b> Write and submit weekly writing assignment</li> </ul>	<p>Kandidaattikeskus (Otakaari 1) Y346</p>
<p><b>Week 6: Final Assignment</b></p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final assignment work</li> </ul>	