

## AESTHETICS AND SYMBOLIC MEANING OF ANDROGYNOUS AND CO-ED STYLE TRENDS IN MEN'S FASHION

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### ABSTRACT

*The research aimed to understand the aesthetic value and symbolic meaning of the co-ed and androgynous trends in men's fashion. The problem discussed was how the aesthetic value and symbolic meaning of co-ed androgynous trends were in men's fashion today. Co-ed and androgyny were one of the phenomena in men's fashion trends today. The co-ed androgynous style featured a gender-fluid fashion concept; that was, the blurring of the binary gender opposition boundaries. Gender discrimination is a phenomenon of social problems that often surfaced. Fashion was often used as an instrument in reproducing gender identity in social systems. The development of men's fashion had undergone significant changes in recent decades. Men's clothing trends had become more attractive, dynamic, and no longer monotonous like conventional men's fashion styles. The research applied a qualitative research method by collecting library data, observation, and interviews with practitioners and experts. The approach and theoretical basis used in analyzing the objects and variables were postmodern aesthetic approaches and Barthes' semiotic theory. The object sample was the clothing designed by Alessandro Michele for the Gucci brand. The result indicates that the symbolic meanings of androgynous and co-ed trends are able to reflect social problems, such as reproducing gender identity, overhauling heteronormative stereotypes, changing gender roles, and freedom of expression without discrimination. The concept is expressed through a dynamic and free postmodern aesthetic.*

**Keywords:** aesthetic meaning, symbolic meaning, co-ed style trend, androgyny trend, men's fashion

### INTRODUCTION

One of the crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the order of the world's fashion industry system, as reported in one of the online fashion media, Vouge (Phelps, 2020). Phelps has written in her article that the sustainability of the fashion industry should adapt to the crisis with adjustments in several aspects. Even if business conditions return to normal, change will constitute a new normal as a form of adaptation in the fashion industry. Adjustment due to crisis is a form of natural selection in business, such as shrinking outlets in department stores, many designer brands that are no longer producing for good, to system adjustment for organizing fashion shows.

One form of adjustment currently being carried out is changing the system of organizing fashion shows (Deeny, 2020). Phelps (2020) has said that Alessandro Michele, creative director of the Gucci brand, would cut fashion shows from five to two shows in one year. The purpose is to cut costs for business efficiency and sustainability. Alessandro combines women's and men's fashion shows in one show since 2020. The concept incorporation of 'gender fluid' in one fashion show is known as 'co-ed'. Not only limited to efficiency in the fashion show system, but Gucci also launched a new fashion concept with a co-ed style gender-fluid theme through the Gucci Mx brand (Brain, 2020).

Co-ed is a fashion trend phenomenon these

days. Not only Gucci, some fashion brands such as Maison Margiela, Burberry, to Korean fashion brand Blindness have also carried co-ed style in its design concept. The non-binary gender concept in the fashion world is not something new (Pambudi, Haldani, & Adhitama, 2019). The concept of gender-fluid in fashion has existed and reflects the social system of its time (Lee & Kwak, 2020). Before co-ed, the terms androgynous and unisex style was known as fashion trends. Androgyny and unisex styles are reflections of gender identity change in society. Gender discrimination is a phenomenon of social problems that often surface (Sumerau, Mathers, & Moon, 2020). Gender issues in society are caused by different perspectives and ways of thinking about culture and beliefs. These differences result in the deprivation of rights and obligations of minorities by the majority.

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, feminists rose to fight against inequality due to gender discrimination. They rose to fight for their rights and obligations to fulfill equal social positions. The struggle of the feminists in the last century has shown significant results for gender equality in social roles in society. However, the paradigm of second-class sex still occurs in some underdeveloped areas, where it is influenced by the ideology and beliefs that restrain it so that they cannot think forward and openly.

Gender discrimination these days also occurs in the third gender (LGBTQ/Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community. The impact of this discrimination is injustice and deprivation of freedom to show existence as a whole human being. Pressures from the majority to the minorities often lead to deprivation of freedom and tragedy in humanity. One of the efforts to express existence and identity is through what is worn, which refers to fashion (Akdemir, 2018b). The struggle against discrimination in gender issues is also marked by dress-up and make-up styles (Jairath & Daima, 2021). Fashion is closely related to lifestyles. Fashion chosen by a person can reflect his/her lifestyles and social identities (Im, 2018). A fashionable person has a modern lifestyle and always follows trends. Lifestyles can help a person determine attitudes, values, and social status. Fashion acts as a communication medium in reflecting messages in a particular community's lifestyle in social life (Lundén, 2020). Thus, fashion is a medium to express a certain identity in society and as a means of conveying social criticism (Kim & Yim, 2015). Androgynous and unisex styles are a reflection of gender identity reproduction in society.

Co-ed is a fashion trend that carries the concept of gender fluid, where the boundaries of conventional feminine and masculine dress styles are not clear. The co-ed trend that obscures gender stereotypes is an alternative fashion concept in the future, as uploaded in the October 2020 Vogue article (Kessler, 2020). Co-ed offers a combined concept of women's and men's clothing in one fashion show. As previously explained, the co-ed concept in fashion shows is considered to be more efficient, sustainable, and environmentally

friendly.

Co-ed gives new nuances to the fashion industry in reproducing meanings on gender identity in the social system these days. Many parties can accept the co-ed style trend, but some oppose the idea. Gucci, as one of the big brands in the fashion industry, has launched a special division carrying non-binary concept and gender-fluid fashion with Gucci Mx as the label in Fall/Winter 2020 season. Gucci Mx, designed by Alessandro Michele, would represent collections that can be worn by both genders. It is not specifically intended for one of the genders, as reported in the Hypebeast.com online article in July 2020 (Brain, 2020). Gucci Mx is a new concept from the fashion house in creating fashion collections that deconstruct values and prejudices from binary gender. The concept of the collection aims at emphasizing the dissolution of gender value boundaries on behalf of the freedom of expression of each individual, where the conservative value between masculine and feminine is very relative. One criticism of Gucci Mx's new concept is the opinion that co-ed style is toxic masculinity, especially aimed at men's clothing collections that adapt the concept of the feminine in their appearance.

The problems discussed in the research are how the aesthetics in men's fashion follows and applies the co-ed style trend and the symbolic meanings of the co-ed and androgynous style trends in contemporary men's fashion. The research aims to investigate the aesthetics in men's fashion through co-ed and androgynous trends. Moreover, it also aims to investigate the symbolic meanings of the co-ed and androgynous style trends in contemporary men's fashion. The focus and discussion of the research are concentrated on men's fashion styles with the scope of the trend span of the past two years and the prediction of the trend in the next two years.

## METHODS

The research applies a descriptive qualitative methods through triangulation (combined) data collection techniques, covering several ways such as literature review, observation, and interview. Literature data are obtained from reference sources in the form of books and articles from journals of art, design, and social sciences. The topics of library data materials include the theme of fashion studies, gender performativity, fashion as a medium of communication, semiotics, and postmodern aesthetics. Observational data are obtained through observing co-ed and androgynous trend phenomena through online media in the form of mass media and social media such as Vogue, Youtube, and Pinterest. The results of the observations include trend element data consisting of design elements in the form of color, texture, material, decorative details, as well as how clothing mix-and-match forms a gender image. The collection of supporting data is carried out using the purposive sampling method through interviews with ten

respondents from fashion practitioners and academics of the Indonesian Fashion Chamber. The interview content is in the form of questions connected to the image of the research object, namely the design of men's clothing with the theme of co-ed androgynous. The data obtained from the interview are in the form of symbolic meaning interpretation and aesthetic value of the object of research.

The research method is carried out through multidisciplinary and multidimensional investigations. A multidisciplinary investigation on the co-ed androgynous trend phenomenon is based on design, history, and socio-cultural science. This approach is used to better understand the emergence of co-ed and androgynous trends to become mainstream phenomena in the world of men's fashion. Multidisciplinary and multidimensional investigations are used by the researcher to understand better the subversive potential of co-ed and androgynous trends, where these trends are considered capable of overhauling heteronormative values. In addition, it is considered capable of changing conventional gender roles in the social order of society.

The approach and theoretical basis used in analyzing the research objects and variables are the postmodern aesthetic approach and the semiotic theory by Roland Barthes. In accordance with the natural character of fashion, which is very visual, the semiotic analysis method becomes easy to use to understand the aesthetic values and dissect the existing socio-cultural structure through the surgical process of the visual elements contained in it. The data analysis technique used is Barthes' semiotics, namely semiotic code and two stages of denotative-connotative sign reading. The semiotic codes used are gnomic codes (cultural codes), semic codes (connotative meanings), hermeneutic codes, proairetic codes, and symbolic codes. The supporting data analysis uses visual metaphors to clarify the relationship between signs and their meanings. The postmodern aesthetic approach used in analyzing the aesthetic element is the concept of deconstruction and postmodernism's aesthetic idiom, namely pastiche and parody.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Before going into a deeper discussion, it is necessary first to understand some of the definitions regarding co-ed, androgyny, and men's fashion. Androgyny comes from Latin words *aner/andr* and *gyne/gune*. *Aner* or *andr* means male; meanwhile, *gyne/gyne* means women. Androgyny means a combination of feminine and masculine characters. It is a word used to obscure feminine and masculine impressions in one character (Hao & Zi, 2019). Androgyny is a concept of character ideas without gender or genderless (Saha, Akanksha, & Basu, 2021). The word androgyny in Oxford English Dictionary (OED) means partly male and partly female in appearance, of indeterminate sex, having the physical characteristics of both sexes.

Co-ed is originated from the word coeducational, which in the Oxford dictionary has a meaning, of a school or an educational system, where girls and boys are taught together. Co-ed was initially a term that became popularly used after the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the education system did not separate schools or education systems based on gender as in previous times. Currently, the term co-ed is adapted into the fashion field. Co-ed can explain the fashion show system where the presentation of women's and men's clothing is presented in the same fashion show. In addition, co-ed is also used to explain a pop culture style concept with the concept of gender fluid, non-binary.

Men's fashion is identical to the context of masculinity. The masculine stereotype is different in each era (Lascity, 2020). The concept of masculine fashion and current men's clothing began at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, then it developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The concept of masculinity in men's fashion in that era became very rigid with the limits of its values. The image of men's masculine fashion is identified by the use of trousers, shirts, and suits, with a limited variety of types and styles compared to women's fashion. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, fashion was binary, separated between men's and women's fashions with masculine and feminine stereotypes. The 'peacock revolution' in the 60s finally has changed the concept of men's fashion. Masculine stereotypes are no longer the same by the adaptation of feminine elements to men's clothing (Sprecher, 2019). Conventional masculine concepts are obscured by the androgynous style that appears in suburban styles such as bohemian hippies, glam rock, punk, and new romantic styles.

Men are not born with masculinity; instead, men are acculturated by those gender categories, complete with the supporting social codes. The theory of performativity states that the concept of masculinity is a social and cultural construction through fashion. One's gender can be revealed through actions and behaviors, including the practice of dressing up and the clothes they wear (McIntyre, 2018). Today, many fashion designers are trying to build new perspectives on the concept of masculinity in men's fashion (Jung & Lee, 2020). However, the audience's appreciation of androgynous style in men's fashion and clothing is still limited. Most men still show a sense of discomfort and dislike for men's fashion style that is out of the convention of normative masculine stereotypes (Stines, 2017).

Furthermore, the postmodern aesthetic approach is used in examining the co-ed and androgynous style of men's fashion. Postmodern aesthetics is built on the idea that there is no single truth (therefore, it is impossible that truth claim emerges), the heterogeneity of language games, and the rejection of ethical and political questions of the reality of truth and falsehood (Isitman, 2018). Since there is no center of truth and beauty, then beauty belongs to the fashion user/audience. The aesthetics of androgynous fashion can



be studied through Derrida's deconstruction theory. Deconstruction reading is carried out in two stages, namely the binary opposition reverse, and thoughts elimination dictated by the binary opposition. The perspective of aesthetic value deconstruction in the appearance of androgyny fashion styles can reproduce gender identity and change the heteronormative gender-binary context (Di Sandro, 2020).

Deconstruction is a term born from philosophy and then globalized and entered various scientific fields. Deconstruction is used as an approach and theoretical basis in the fields of law, history, theology, literary studies, politics, and the realm of art and design (Linfante, 2020). The root words, *de'* and *construire* (French for the noun: deconstruction), presumably deconstruction represents a desire and aspiration to dismantle an established building, removing every part of a construction. Derrida, through deconstruction, criticizes the logocentrism that is developing in the realm of western thought. Logocentrism creates oppositions that create hierarchies, ending up in a position where one is dominant. Derrida argues that deconstruction is not destruction, that is, the annihilation of order, but rather, it describes two actions, namely a process of changing/shuffling and rearranging concepts, systems, and values.

The modern era with a logocentric concept emerges a binary opposition view of masculine and feminine. The binary opposition values of masculine and feminine are also reflected in men's and women's dress-up styles, for example, the concept of masculine style in men's fashion, which is identical with the use of pantaloons pants, shirts, and jackets in minimalist cuts with dark neutral tones such as gray, brown, khaki, black, and white. It is a masculine stereotype that becomes a trend in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The stereotype has developed as a concept of masculinity until now. On the contrary, feminine stereotypes are represented by wearing dresses, skirts, corsets with feminine attributes such as lace, ribbon, ruffle, and fluffy volume. The fashion style represents masculine and feminine characters as a binary opposition; masculine symbolizes domination, active, and firmness, while feminine symbolizes passivity, fragility, and tenderness.

Androgyny as a fashion trend emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It became a new fashion stereotype at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly in the 20s (Reilly, 2021). Androgyny arose to deconstruct feminine stereotypes in fashion and women's clothing at that time. Androgynous style as a fashion trend at that time was motivated by the emancipation movement of women in demanding gender equality (Pearson, 2020). The masculine element of men's fashion is adapted in women's fashion and clothing. Androgyny trends in the 20s include the H silhouette, low waistline, short haircut, and the borrowing of masculine attributes into women's fashion, wearing pants and blazers.

Androgyny not only reconstructs the concept in women's fashion but also deconstructs masculine stereotypes, especially after a massive movement

called the 'peacock revolution' in the 60s, in which then many subcultural fashion styles emerged. Similar to women's fashion in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, men's fashion during the peacock revolution and afterward borrowed many feminine attributes, such as tight silhouettes, thin, even transparent materials, feminine colors, floral hues, and other feminine attributes. Entering the new millennial of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, masculine stereotypes in men's fashion trends are far different from 19<sup>th</sup> century men's fashion concepts (Barry, 2018). The emergence of the co-ed style trend as a form of evolution from an androgynous style in men's fashion two-three years back indicates that the concept has increasingly obscured binary opposition to masculine and feminine gender today (Jordan, 2017).

Based on these explanations, the concept of beauty and aesthetic value in men's fashion has undergone an overhaul. The aesthetic concept of men's fashion, which initially portrayed masculine gender hegemony, is deconstructed by new values (Chung, Yim, & Suh, 2018). The use of pink or lace details might have been considered odd in the construction of men's fashion in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; furthermore, it is considered abnormal because it has deviated far from the convention of masculine concepts. On the contrary, it is considered aesthetic from the perspective of today's fashion standards (Lee, Kim, & Ha, 2020). Such is the aesthetic value based on a deconstructive approach, where the current aesthetic value is a form of reorganization from previously established values. The values that are currently formed provide space for a new aesthetic concept in the future.

In the postmodern era, there is a practical effort to prioritize 'tickling' aspects of expression, such as comedy, parody, puns, or irony of meaning, all trying to play free games in giving aesthetic signs. Postmodern aesthetics generally involve idioms such as *pastiche*, *parody*, *kitsch*, *camp*, and *schizophrenia*. The current co-ed androgynous trend in men's fashion cannot be separated from using these idioms to realize aesthetic values in a men's fashion design. Figure 1 shows the comparison of men's fashion styles in 1913 and 2020.



Figure 1 (a) Men's Fashion Style in 1913; (b) Gmbh Spring Collection 2020

Figures 1(a) and 1(b) have different concepts of aesthetic values. In Figure 1(a), the men's suit design appears very masculine and elegant. The design seems to prioritize function in accordance with the aesthetic concept of the modern era. However, it looks different from Figure 1(b), where the concept of aesthetic value has shifted. At least, there are two postmodern idioms identified in picture 1(b), namely pastiche and parody. Pastiche, as a piece of work that contains borrowed elements, has a negative connotation as a work of art that lacks creativity, originality, authenticity, and freedom. The pastiche idiom is found on the double breast long coat model with a modified detailing cut on the collar. Moreover, the use of parody idiom is fascinating. Parody is an art in which an artist's unique ideas, styles, or expressions are played in such a way to make it appear absurd. This imitation is ironic and critical and even has political and ideological implications. The parody idiom can be identified in the use of shocking pink in men's suits in Figure 1(b). Pink is a color that is identical to the feminine character in western culture (Hong & Joo, 2020). The paradoxical impression displayed is an ideology as well as a criticism of the already standardized male fashion concept and as an attempt to find newness. Fashion wants to deconstruct gender stereotypes in the context of wearing styles (Geczy & Karaminas, 2020). Also, this means that fashion aims to blur the masculine/feminine divide because of the idea which argues that garments have no gender (Akdemir, 2018a).

The semiotic theory approach is also used in assessing the aesthetic value of co-ed and androgynous trends in men's fashion. The semiotic view used is obtained from various perspectives from several experts such as Saussure and Barthes. The semiotic approach is used in interpreting the meanings found in the different signs of the visual material for androgynous and co-ed fashion. The researcher highlights the implications in the broader realm of contemporary socio-cultural scenarios, issues of the reproduction of social class, race, and discrimination against gender differences and complexity.

The meaning of the socio-cultural context can be understood through the codes contained in it. Codes in structuralism and semiotics involve systems that allow viewing certain entities as meaningful signs. Roland Barthes states that there are five codes contained in a text. Textual markers (lexia) in a text can be grouped into one of these codes. Barthes' five semiotic codes consist of the cultural code (gnomic code), hermeneutic code, semic code, symbolic code, and proairetic code.

Fashion, in this case, refers to clothes/clothing and dressing styles not only as body cover; covering of genitals, and mere decoration, but also as a means of communication to represent self-identity, social, and culture (Akdemir, 2018b). Fashion as self-identity shows a person's personal character, fashion in a social function shows the character of a communal identity, while fashion in a cultural function represents national and cultural identity. Discussing the aesthetic value of

men's fashion in communicating identity cannot be separated from the assessment of the meaning that is reproduced.

Ferdinand de Saussure states in his theory that there is a dichotomous concept of sign, namely signifier and signified. The signifier is a material aspect of a sign that is sensory, while signified is a mental aspect of a sign which is usually called an ideational concept contained in speakers' minds (Budiman, 2011). Roland Barthes then develops Saussure's theory and presents his thoughts on fashion as a sign system in his book *The Language of Fashion*. Barthes develops the concepts of language and parole into fashion by saying that language is a dress (clothing), while parole is a dressing (how the clothes are worn). Fashion as a language refers to social rules governing clothes, such as the model/type of clothing and social rules behind it so that something can be defined as clothing. Meanwhile, parole is an act of an individual in terms of dressing or the expression of each individual in choosing and wearing his/her clothes. Barthes argues that there are two meanings of signs: denotation as the first order of the semiological system and connotation as the second-order of the semiological system. Denotation is the direct meaning expressed from a sign that can also be said as a special description of a sign. Connotation is the meaning connected with social and cultural values, or it can be said that it is the implied meaning of a sign.

The semiotic approach is used in dissecting the meaning of co-ed and androgynous trends in men's fashion and clothing. Figure 2 presents Alessandro Michele's menswear designs for the Gucci brand from the 2019 - 2020 collections.



Figure 2 (a) Harry Styles Wears Gucci's Design in Met Gala 2019, (b) Gucci Mx 2020 Collection

Figure 2 is an example of co-ed and androgynous styles that can represent one of the references of today's men's fashion trends. Figure 2(a) is a photo of Harry Styles' appearance when attending the Met Gala event in 2019. He wears the design of the Gucci brand with the 'co-ed androgynous' concept. Figures 2(a) and 2(b) are text, which contains lexia (textual markers). The meaning of the text can be understood

by analyzing the lexia into Barthes' semiotic code. The transparent blouse lexia in Figure 2(a) can be analyzed using semic code, representing the figurative meaning in feminine, gentle, and innocent context. The lexia can also be interpreted in the context of freedom. Black pants lexia in Figure 2(a) can be grouped into a symbolic code whose meaning can be analyzed through the antithesis of binary opposition. Pants are identical to the masculine context, but the mix-and-match of transparent pants and blouses presents the concept of masculine versus feminine, forming a new symbolic meaning structure, namely androgyny. Lexia sling bag in Figure 2(b) is a semic code related to the connotative meaning of feminine. Pants and shirts are semic codes that contain masculine figurative meanings. Metallic green elements tend to be semic codes associated with feminine contexts. The mix-and-match clothing style presents the concept of a blend of masculine and feminine styles so that the reading of the textual markers can use a symbolic code that represents the androgynous concept.

Harry Styles is also the lexia in Figure 2(a). Lexia Harry Styles as a user will raise a question in the minds of the image readers; why is Harry dressing up like that, and what is the reason behind it? This lexia can be classified into a hermeneutic code that requires an interpretation of other supporting semiotic codes to understand the meaning of reproducing gender identity. The proairetic code in Figures 2(a) and 2(b) can be seen from the anti-mainstream action taken by Harry in dressing up out from the conventional masculine concept. The same thing can also be observed in Figure 2(b). This action indicates freedom to appear as individuals who are not shackled by conventional definitions of gender identity.

The cultural code is a semiotic code embodied in a collective voice that comes from human experience and is authoritative. Fashion trend is lexia that can be classified into a cultural code. The co-ed androgynous style is a lexia that represents the popular culture of a dynamic, open, free, and individualistic society. In Figures 2(a) and 2(b), the recycling of new romantic and retro trends can be observed, which are reminiscent of the revolutionary movement to dismantle the gender binary opposition through performances known as the Peacock Revolution. The changes in the level of masculine-feminine values can also be seen through the cultural code in the figure. The meaning evoked through the cultural code is that clothing is not shackled by gender boundaries, while users can take advantage of clothing attributes to express their uniqueness as free individuals.

Identifiable signifiers in Figure 2(a) are a transparent blacktop/blouse in tulle, with lacy ruffle and ribbon details. The bottom is high-waisted pants, black, with a semi-baggy style. These signs in the first order of semiological system (denotation) refer to signified, namely 'a two-piece party suit in co-ed androgynous style'.

The more interesting part is the second order of the semiological system, which Barthes calls a

'connotation' where the myth lies. All signifiers, along with the signifieds in the previous order, will change positions as signifiers that refer to the new signifieds. In this case, image rhetoric appears in the form of symbolic meaning whose existence is based on certain cultural codes or conventions against certain stereotypes. In Harry's appearance, it is clear that the feminine element is adapted in his dressing style. A transparent blouse with lace details, ribbons, and ruffles are feminine stereotypes. High waist pants that seem to use a cropped corset (girdle) also display a feminine image. The question is, why does Harry come up with an image concept that breaks masculine stereotypes? The ideology, in this case, the signified images that connote, can come from the fashion's creator, user, or connoisseur. Co-ed androgynous rhetoric (signifier) has the meaning of changing and overhauling conventional binary gender identities (Tormakhova, 2019). There is a possibility of a desire to convey self-expression ideology, anti-discrimination of the marginalized gender, and overhaul the heteronormative system (Stines, 2017).

Figure 2(b) shows an image of the 2020 Gucci Mx design, a men's casual fashion style look with a retro touch. The identifiable signifiers in Figure 2(b) as the first order of semiological system (denotation) are a men's shirt fitted with a long-sleeved silhouette, bell-bottom trousers in metallic green, black loafers, and the iconic 1961 Jackie sling bag. An identifiable signified at this order is men's casual wear with a touch of co-ed androgynous style. At the semiological system at the second-order (connotation), it can be observed that the rhetoric of mixing feminine gender concepts is adapted to masculine styles. Adaptation of feminine stereotypes can be seen in the bell-bottom trousers and the sling bag marker. Thus, a symbolic message can be observed in the form of a concept of gender identity reproduction through the concept of gender-fluid appearance.

The co-ed androgynous trend emerges as a product of popular culture. Since its appearance until now, it has been continuously referred to texts as a popular culture code that is used as a symbol of gender identity reconstruction. Androgyny can be said as a culture in the realm of fashion that has continued to develop over the last century and has created a paradigm shift towards gender stereotypes and their role in the construction of social systems. The co-ed androgynous trend is a cultural code lexia that reflects the open-minded character of the millennials and generation Z with the characteristics of having a complex gender identity. Co-ed androgynous men's fashion is a representation of fluidity in popular culture. The fashion design in Figures 2(a) and 2(b) reflects the popular culture that develops flexibly and is not bound by certain standard rules, but on the other hand, forms a new convention value on the performative gender concept.

The context of symbolic meaning in gender-fluid fashion trends can also be analyzed through the visual metaphor approach. Metaphor, briefly, can



be understood as an implicit comparison (implied comparison) between two things (Levinson in Budiman, 2011). Metaphor is a model of the relationship of signs in a system that has similarities and can explain each other's meanings. The main foundation of the metaphor is the elemental likeness or rhetorical trope. Thus, a visual metaphor represents something (people, objects, ideas, and abstract feelings) into a visual image or form that shows certain associations through some similarity context (Bolognesi & Vernillo, 2019).

Roman Jakobson argues that the poetic function (or when speaking about the visual context that is more accurately with the term aesthetic function) projects the equivalence principle from the selection axis to the combination axis. This is actually derived from the concept of Ferdinand de Saussure regarding two types of sign relations, namely syntagmatic relations and associative (paradigmatic) relations (Budiman, 2011). The aesthetic function referred to by Jakobson can be crystallized through metaphorical and metonymy rhetorical figures. Metaphor is a rhetorical figure produced by similarities. Metonymy is a rhetorical figure formed by contiguity or coexistence.

Visual metaphors are often found in fashion design concepts, especially in co-ed androgynous fashion design (Uno, Matsuda, & Indurkha, 2019). The semiotic method is used as an approach in analyzing metaphorical elements as sign phenomena. Analysis of the phenomenon of signs and the borrowing of signs such as how the context of gender identity is, culture, psychological aspects, freedom, humanity, and other social aspects can be represented through visual design elements such as lines, colors, textures, shape, and pattern (Bolognesi, 2017).

Semiotic analysis using a visual metaphor approach is also used in dissecting the symbolic meaning of Figures 2(a) and 2(b). The approach used is to understand the phenomenon of signs in the two images with the Jakobson approach. As previously discussed, the following is an analysis of visual metaphors to clarify the relationship between these images and the meaning of the gender-fluid context in men's fashion. The analysis can be started by examining Figure 3.

An analysis in visual image Figure 2(a) is in verbal form; a male celebrity is wearing a black transparent blouse and baggy pants with a high waist cut. Diagram (A) analysis in Figure 3 discusses the association of blouse with the feminine context. On the selection axis or paradigmatic axis, the concept of similarity or equivalence can be observed. The words soft, flowy, transparent, tulle, lace, and ribbon have a paradigmatic relation. Based on the feminine word diagram analysis, it can be produced based on similarity with words in the selection axis. Feminine traits are associated with softness, flowy, or swaying. This impression in fashion design can be represented by the use of soft/delicate fabrics, falling, transparent, and waving such as tulle and chiffon. Lace and ribbons are stereotypes of accessories/decorative elements associated with feminine contexts. The conception of

feminine association relationship with those aspects is derived from conventions that have been in effect at the cultural level so far.

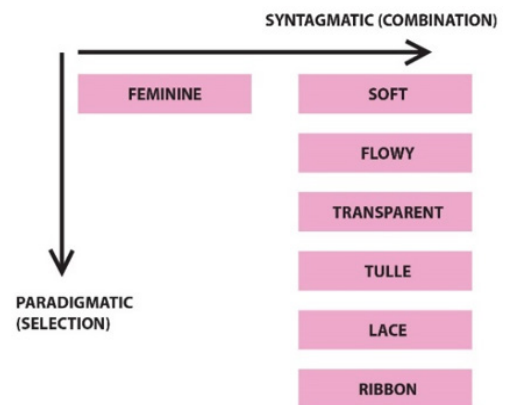


Diagram A

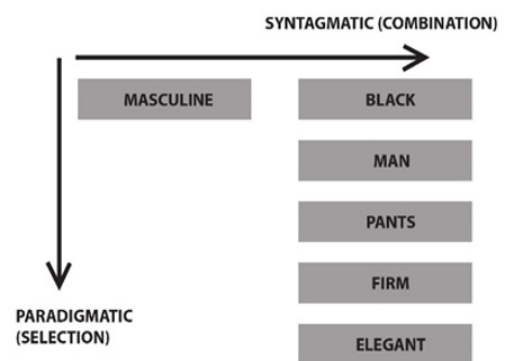


Diagram B

Figure 3 Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic

Diagram (B) in Figure 3 shows that the paradigmatic axis has equivalences with the words black, man, pants, firm, elegant, that has a similar relationship with masculine contexts. Black is identical to the concept of men's formal wear. This comes from a western traditional conception of male formal wear, which is identical to a black tuxedo or coat. This concept began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until today. Furthermore, masculinity is a gender identity that is associated with male sexuality. Likewise, pants are fashion products that are identical to masculine stereotypes, which come from historical sources of clothing and western culture. Although pants are currently also used by women, this type of clothing is still identical to male masculinity.

The visual image of the blouse model made of transparent material is an important sign phenomenon to be analyzed. It can be observed that the sign is exposed sufficiently, or it is the main focus in the context of the overall design. Transparency, apart

from being associated with feminine contexts, can be associated with paradigmatic axes such as freedom, expressiveness, self-confidence, honesty, and rebellion.

Based on the visual metaphor analysis with the selection axis equivalence approach to the Jakobson combination axis, a hypothesis can be generated that the meaning of the co-ed androgynous design style in Figure 2(a) is the death of the conventional binary gender identity concept with the formation of a new gender identity concept that carries the concept of gender fluid. This is strengthened by the blurring of the masculine and feminine concepts through rhetorical figures as the signified.

In Figure 2(b), it can be observed that some rhetorical figures such as what has been previously described in the explanation of denotation-connotation semiotic analysis. Based on the analysis of the visual metaphors, the gender fluids concept can be seen clearly from the retro styling associated with the unisex fashion in the peacock revolution (Bardey, Achumba-Wöllenstein, & Chiu, 2020). Peacock revolution is a topic that focuses on the discussion of unisex fashion for men. The unisex trend for men's fashion ranges from the re-emergence of romantic styles with velvet jackets and soft flowing shirts to eclectic pastiche styles adapted from Africa and Asia. Peacock revolution style is a term representing flamboyant style in men's fashion at that time. The controversial men's fashion style is the response to the movement to demand equality and freedom for gay people (Barry & Drak, 2019). Until now, fashion trends can be used as an expression instrument for LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) people in fighting for equality. Although visually, the fashion style image in Figure 2(b) is not as flamboyant as the peacock revolution fashion style in the 60s-70s, the use of the iconic 1961 Jackie sling bag accessories is strong statement for the gender fluids fashion concept.

Qualitative research data are also obtained through interviews conducted with ten respondents consisting of designer practitioners and academics in the fashion sector through the purposive sampling method. Eight out of ten respondents recognize and follow the information on the development of co-ed androgynous trends in men's fashion. The average of respondents' answers about analyzing Figures 2(a) and 2(b) is that all respondents answer the fashion style related to the concepts of gender fluids and genderless fashion. Respondents analyze through the adaptation of feminine attributes into men's clothing. These attributes merge with masculine elements, which emphasizes the androgynous appearance. Furthermore, the respondent's answers about whether the co-ed androgynous style depicts the reconstruction of gender identity moderately approved the statement.

The aesthetics of the co-ed androgynous trend in men's fashion and the meanings implied in it are naturalized through the development of plastic contemporary culture. The plasticity of culture today is illustrated through concepts such as determination-

liberation, order-disorder, dialectic-destructive-deconstructive, and traditional-futurism. Co-ed androgyny can be accepted and become a trend when the discourse is continuously referred to and displayed for public consumption so that, in the end, it determines market behavior.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research focuses on the learning processes of four science teachers who start as out-of-field novices. Androgyny and co-ed are part of men's contemporary fashion trends. In order to understand the aesthetic concept and symbolic meaning in that fashion style, it can be described through a postmodern aesthetic and semiotic approach. Co-ed and androgyny are contemporary aesthetic concepts depicted through cultural tendencies that are rife today. The aesthetic concept identified in this trending phenomenon is subversive to the conventional male fashion stereotypes. Co-ed and androgynous trends reflect efforts to negotiate identity through fashion. This trend is considered positive, active, productive, and acceptable to the public. Androgyny and co-ed are considered capable of changing the traditional paradigm of gender representation. Co-ed androgynous is a social instrument to suppress and reproduce the majority's privileges. It is described as diversity messages and strength of the gender minorities, delivered in an ideal normative style.

The results of the research contribute to the field of fashion studies to analyze gender performativity changes through the reconstruction of gender identity by using fashion as a medium of communication.

The research also contributes to enriching the insight and understanding of new aesthetics in the development of men's fashion today. The limitation of the research results is only in the discussion and analysis of aesthetic concepts and the symbolic meaning of the co-ed androgynous trend related to the development of gender issues in the socio-cultural context by using a limited sample of research objects. The limitation of the research results opens up future research opportunities, such as the implications of the co-ed androgyny trend on user mapping based on behavioral and psychological developments in identifying the diversity of gender identities.

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