



BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: “Dress Codes – How the Laws of Fashion Made History”

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1. General Review

Dress regulations have existed since the dawn of time. When it comes to the fashion industry, it's been used as a weapon in the fight for social change, and dress regulations have been used as an instrument of political control. If you're going to get an idea of what a specific period's clothes signified, Ford says, look at their limitations, much as a fossil exposes the form of the living thing that once generated it. At its core, Dress Codes provides the fascinating narrative of the evolution of fashion legislation and societal conventions over more than 600 years. The line between personal and political life, or between the individual and the state, is more permeable than when it comes to what we wear.

So much of what we need to discover about a civilization can be gained from Richard Thompson Ford's history of dress code. He recalls the "rigorous and elegant" father who "*endured my sartorial misadventures (asymmetrical "new wave" haircuts, nylon parachute pants, the "punk" look, which comprised of purposefully ripped clothing held together with safety pins or duct tape) in silent sorrow.*" Ford's father, a professional tailor, instilled in him a passion for sharp suits, immaculate shirts, and polished dress shoes, and he is now a professor of law at Stanford University. An unsuccessful 2009 bid to reach the final five in Esquire magazine's Best Dressed Real Man contest led to the publication of this book (he was number six). When he was asked

about his own style in an interview, everything went wrong, "I could not explain why I wore what I wore to save my life." By tracing the development of style in Europe and the United States from the 14th century onwards, he has corrected the problem.

People have been celebrated and punished for their attire throughout history. There were sumptuary laws in mediaeval and Renaissance times that allocated clothes according to social standing and regulations in American slave states that forbade black people from wearing "above their situation." He cites Joan of Arc like an exemplar of a person's attire being a life-or-death choice. "One of history's first fashion victims" about 1431, she was killed at the stake after being judged guilty of heresy for wearing traditionally male garb in combat.

In addition to examining how gender roles affect clothing norms and their inherent inconsistencies, Ford examines religion, politics, ethnicity, and class in relation to dress regulations. "*A hooded sweater is menacing on Trayvon Martin yet lovely on Mark Zuckerberg*," for example. Similar is the story for high heels! It is fascinating to know that they began as men's riding shoes, evolved into a method of gender control by "physically hobbling" women, and are today often associated with self-assurance and a sense of personal authority. The mere fact that fashion is so adaptable acts as an addition to its allure. In the book, black and white images show how the "wearable language" may be exhilarating and puzzling, menacing or soothing, depending on the viewer's perspective.

For Ford, the evolution of fashion from a legal and social standpoint is a well-researched and well-written book. The author is informed and enthusiastic about his subject matter, whether he is discussing cultural appropriation, complimenting Ruth Bader Ginsburg's lace neckwear, or warning social media users that "*every triumph or crime of fashion lives on in a digital archive*". When it comes to understanding what others are wearing "*A dress code can be the Rosetta Stone to decode the meaning of attire*".¹

Readers will get a fresh perspective on how and why we dress, as well as a critical eye as he has a knack of detail. From the well-dressed young people who sat at lunch counters during the civil rights period to the "quasi-military style that combined berets, aviator sunglasses, bohemian

¹The absurdity of fashion history, Tom Kuipers, 22 August, 2021 at https://www.news-gazette.com/arts-entertainment/books/book-review-the-absurdity-of-fashion-history/article_95a047c2-16aa-50e6-adb5-854ecb8323df.html.

turtleneck sweaters, and long, sleek leather jackets" worn by the Black Panthers, we follow his gaze with great interest and anticipation. Ford's references span a long period of time. Since Ford is a lawyer, it should come as no surprise that he enjoys a good debate. His pages are littered with lawsuit citations including the wearing of cosmetics, dreadlocks, hairnets, miniskirts, and baring of the midriff, all of which were banned during Louis XIV's rule. A key point made by Ford is that formal dress regulations have a tendency to target those who are least powerful—women and minorities and the poor—and may act as a way to diminish self-esteem. A "timeline of key clothing rules and historical events" is also provided by the author. A logical, fascinating discussion of how and why we dress is provided for both the bargain hunter and the jeans-clad alike.

There are parts in *Dress Codes* that seem hurried, and condensing six centuries of history into a single book is a huge accomplishment. Some fads, like the much-maligned drooping trousers of the early 2000s, get less historical information than the famed red-bottom shoes of Christian Louboutin. In spite of this, *Dress Codes* is able to accomplish much of what they set out to achieve. In the book's epilogue, Ford adds that when he brought up the project with his colleagues involved with more "serious" issues, he was often received with "puzzled stares and bewildered faces." In fact, Ford's argument is familiar to everyone who has used a pair of boots or a short as an act of civil disobedience who has deliberately picked a costume to help them fit in. Both strategizing and self-expression may be found in fashion. It is a microcosm of society and the individuals that inhabit it, residing at the intersections and conflicts between the two.

2. Chapter Wise Review/Summary

The book is divided into 17 chapters with detailed emphases on nuances of relation of attire with law, sex, religion, gender and such similar contemporary issues. The Chapter 1 titled as *Encoding Status*, is about how the effluent's position was under jeopardy, and fashion was a means to protect it. Medieval cultures were ruled by hierarchical order and characterized by spectacle, making merchants and butchers' wives public adversaries. Nobility wore silk, velvet, and fur, and the "trunk hose" style of ballooning pant was frowned upon as a threat to social order in Tudor England. When the Renaissance-era Florentine patriarch, Cosimo de Medici said,

"A gentleman may be made from two yards of scarlet fabric," he meant it. Dress standards have changed throughout time to reflect social and political ideas, but they have always been a reflection of power battles. It was prohibited for Black people in South Carolina in the early 1800s to dress "above their situation" because of the "Negro Act." Workplaces around the country outlawed the haircut and form-fitting dresses of free-spirited flappers in the 1920s, and the baggy zoot suits worn by Black and Latino males in the 1940s sparked riots across the country. Chapter 2, 3 and 4 are about *Self- Fashioning*, *Signs Of Faith And Sex Symbols*, respectively. When sumptuary regulations were initially created in the 1200s to guarantee that only nobles may wear specific fabrics, colours, and embellishments, the growth of the middle class permitted them to copy parts of these trends. This is what he shows us via this lens. A long time ago, fashion was reserved for the rich and famous who sought to show their social position. As a result, the nobility was allowed to wear pearls the size of chickens' eggs on their bodices, or trunk hose, or colours and textiles that could only be worn by the aristocracy. It's little surprise that Victorians fetishized nuns' habits or that earrings, worn by prostitutes in 15th-century Italy, became sex symbols for the Venetian upper crust because they were worn by prostitutes. Dress regulations based on "stolen" styles still pique our interest.

Enlightenment-era school of thinking led to a contemporary individual "with personalities that transcend our social standing, employment, and familial lineage," Ford argues convincingly. A merchant's wife could wear an emerald crown, or a slave could wear the same dress as an antebellum belle, or Walweyn could wear "monstrously extravagant" trunk socks usually reserved for the nobility—the original meaning of a garment was undermined and transformed by the rise of individualism in society. A unique opportunity was given by fashion since it could convert the body into a tool for political persuasion, according to Ford.

The author draws the canvas of how dress Codes don't even include Tignon regulations, which is odd as decoded in the *Great Masculine Renunciation* under Chapter 5. However, Ford spends more time in the era after the Great Masculine Renunciation in the late 18th century, which continues to define masculine fashion as we know it today, than it does in Walweyn and Bradshaw's run-ins with Elizabethan sumptuary regulations. Rather of enforcing strict rules on who could and couldn't wear ermine, the rich and well-bred were instead celebrated in the tiniest of details. The importance and the instances which ensued due to gender cross-dressing has been

discussed in a very rational manner. Cross-dressing-like lavish apparel and other "vanities"-were connected with sexual transgression and were considered as indications of immorality, "concubinage, "or prostitution. It is interesting to read how in 1395 John Rykener, who dressed as a woman by using the moniker Eleanor, was prosecuted for engaging in sexual activity with another male; he testified before the governor and city council members of London that he discovered from prostitutes how to dress and to have physical intimacy as a lady and that he had had several more sex partners, which include "a fair number of priests and nuns".

Ford narrates another incident where, Katherina Hetzeldorfer was drowned in the German town of Speyer in 1477 when it was revealed that she had posed as a male and had sexual intercourse with another woman. This chapter lays down details about the most recorded incidents of unauthorized cross-dressing included women suspected of prostitution or "anarchic" sexual conduct. In the Italian cities, female prostitutes regularly dressed as men, indeed, according to Bennett and McSheffrey, cross-dressing "*so signaled a woman's sexual availability... that, when books depicting fashions became common in the later sixteenth century, the typical Venetian courtesan was shown wearing men's breeches beneath her womanly skirts*".² Likewise, in 14th and 15th century London, more than a transgression in itself, cross-dressing was considered as a signal of women's sexual illness. There is a psychology behind how women's height was associated with how they dressed back in the day, and this helps readers grasp it. Instilling instances are used by Ford to demonstrate his point of view, catching and keeping the reader's attention.

Rejecting the aristocratic clothing norms of Versailles, his chapter 7 on *Sex And Simplicity* ponders on how fashion became about women and why men left this post of fashion to be determined by women? French Republican government on October 29, 1793, declared "everyone may wear the garment or costume fitting to their sex that they like."³ Declarative clothing served to highlight social stratification, as highlighted by historian John Carl Flügel that "*the ostentatious splendour and complexity of attire, which so perfectly embodied the aspirations of*

²Judith Mennett and Shannon Sheffrey, *Erotic and Alien: Women Dressed as Men in London*, History Workshop Journal, February 10, 2014 at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265835617_Early_Erotic_and_Alien_Women_Dressed_as_Men_in_Late_Medieval_London.

³Michele Majer, *Fashion History Timeline*, Aug 1, 2017 at <https://fashionhistory.fitnyc.edu/1790-1799>.

the ancient monarchy, was repugnant to the Revolution is hardly unexpected."⁴ New dress codes emerged as a result of political equality and a newfound appreciation for the labour force. This chapter helps to assimilate the relation of sexual appeal with clothing.

Further, the laws that were passed in various countries to bring a uniformity in the dress codes and their impact thereof have been scrutinized. Strict clothing restrictions have created several confrontations over national and ethnic identity. Ethnic clothing may be used to distinguish ethnic groups within a nation. The impression that individuals are free to wear whatever they want, wherever they want, and whenever they want is shattered by the events told in the book, which reveal that attire that seemed to identify one's race or ethnic origin was restricted by various dress codes. It was in 1746 that the British Parliament adopted what is now known as the Dress Act of 1746, which was afterwards known as the Act for the Abolition and Proscription of Highland Dress, the Tartan Act, the Disclothing Act of 1746 or the Abolition Act laid down that

*“save for members of His Majesty's Armed Forces, no one living in Scotland could wear or put on what are usually known as Highland Clothes (i.e., the Plaid, Philabeg, or small Kilt, Trowse, Shoulder-belts or any portion thereof) under any pretence.”*⁵

The concept that all mature men should wear uniform clothes was a recurring minor dispute of the eighteenth century historian Daniel Leonhard Purdy says. It appeared to many that allowing people to choose their own clothing was a sensible response to the previous regime's strict hierarchical laws, but others desired even more enforceable equality: a national uniform, to be worn by all citizens of the Republic.

The Rational Dress Movement under Chapter 8 and the *Flapper Feminism* under Chapter 9 are my personal favorites. They discuss the consciousness which instilled in women against the dress codes which society expected them to adorn. Across the Atlantic, in 1888 and 1889, English women founded the Rational Dress Society, which managed a clothing store supplied with “underclothing, rational corsets, and divided skirts” and published a quarterly newspaper. The Rational Dress Society's Gazette, published in January 1889, began with the following statement of purpose: “*The Rational Dress Society protests against the introduction of any fashion in dress*

⁴Flügel, John C. Unpublished transcript of a talk given by Flügel on BBC Radio, 26 June 1928.

⁵Disclothing Act of 1746 or the Abolition Act at <https://medievalscotland.org/clothing/refs/disclothing1746.shtml>.

that deforms the figure, impedes the movements of the body, or in any way tends to injure the health."⁶ According to a women's newspaper, *The Lily*, the organization will "help in the transition of woman from servitude to liberation from the domain of fancy, fashion, and foolery to the reign of reason and morality."⁷ There were protests against the wearing of corsets. Ford has elaborated on the drawbacks of wearing corsets and how the norms of the society were leading to deleterious effects on women. The eighteenth century gives additional sartorial justice to males but never to females, and as a result, the gender gap widened. Despite the blooming of egalitarian idealism, the nineteenth century was also, in some ways, a period of backward in gender equality, defined by a growing concern with an idealized feminine virtue.

It is safe to say that Ford is an excellent cultural analyst, and he is at his best when tracking the shifting winds that gave rise to modern dress rules. A section on the growth of the Midtown Uniform confining to slacks, a Patagonia vest, and a collared shirt as the go-to clothing for financiers convincingly argues that it re-creates the precise uniformity that the suit was meant to resist. His depiction of the influence that Jazz Age flappers played in altering gendered dress standards that had bound women in thrall to corsets and "cocoons of tulle and taffeta" is equally fascinating. He pays close attention to how marginalised individuals utilise fashion to either adapt or reject the dominant culture, focusing on all of it from the use of dignity to the use of sex.

Chapter ten, eleven and twelve reflect on *racial stereotype, resistance and subordination*. It details the changes in dress rules and fashion law during times of rapid social change. It stands to reason, then, that these dress standards frequently regulate sexual expressions or aim to construct visible boundaries between ethnic, religious, class, and gender groups. Jewelry was condemned as showy vanity in fifteenth-century Italian regulations, which also obliged Jewish women to wear earrings to actually endorse themselves, visually associating the sin of conceit with Judaism. Recent legislation, like as the CROWN Act, which prohibits hair discrimination, demonstrates the opposite impulse, banning rather than maintaining the existing quo that suggests that European ideals of beauty are superior and synonymous with proficiency. Because race was a social standing defined primarily by external appearance, a sharply dressed Black person constituted a serious challenge to a misogynistic country. Similarly these chapters detail

⁶The Rational Dress Society's Gazette, January 1889, *The Rational Dress Society*, 1866.b.9.(10.).

⁷*The Lily*, Amelia Bloomer at <https://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/the-lily/>.

the tactics resorted to by women who donned masculine clothing to assert men's social advantages, well-adorned African Americans made a sartorial expression that they merited and would insist on the regard and respect that their outfit conveyed. At the same time, personal investment in sophisticated wardrobe extended beyond social protest: being well-dressed offered a sense of personal pleasure and psychological comfort: the political was personal as well as political. This mix of political message and self-assertion became a powerful and persistent, if sometimes neglected, component of the twentieth-century history of social revolution. It is shocking to know that as recent as in 2013, Tiana Parker, aged 7 years, was sent home from Deborah Brown Community School in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for sporting dreadlocks, in violation of a uniform policy that stipulates "dreadlocks, afros, mohawks, and other faddish forms are banned." Butler Traditional High School in Kentucky banned "extreme, distracting, or attention-getting hair styles" in 2016, citing "dreadlocks, cornrolls (sic), twists," and "afros more than 2 inches in length." Black students at Durham, North Carolina's School for Creative Studies were advised in 2016 to take off their African-inspired head coverings. In 2017, the Mystic Valley Regional Charter School in Boston asked that African American pupils Mya and Deanna Cook "correct" their long, braided hair in order to conform with school policy.

Today, many activists derisively refer to "the politics of respectability" as elitism and scorn for the less fortunate—the twenty-first-century equivalent of what Frazier condemned in the Black bourgeoisie of the mid-twentieth era. However, it is not how the scholar who invented the phrase sees it. In her 1994 book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church*,⁸ 1880–1920, Harvard historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the term "respectability politics" to characterise a fervent, unrelenting, and dignified political activism that compelled the respect of those who witnessed it. Higginbotham described civil rights fighters who command attention by acting and wearing appropriately.

The chapter 12, *Sagging To Subordination*, details how marches and rallies for racial justice erupted across the country in the spring of 2020 in response to many terrible murders of African Americans at the hands of police that year. The majority of the demonstrations were coordinated through social media. Many had seemingly spontaneous outbursts of fury and despair. Protesters

⁸Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Harvard University Press (1990).

from all walks of lives and, most importantly, all races took to the streets in the United States and throughout the world to demand racial equality, justice for victims of police violence, and structural reform in policing. There was no dress code: individuals arrived as they were, and the range of costume represented the diversity of a quickly rising movement, as style critic Robin Givhan of the Washington Post described it as “*There is no cohesion in the look of the marching multitudes, which is part of the deep resonance of these images. Humanity is arrived in its countless forms. No one is costumed to play the game of respectability politics.*”⁹ This helps us to understand the transformation which has been bought through the years.

The next chapters of Part 4 of the book explain how women accepted, challenged, and negotiated new dress limitations in a variety of ways. The part collectively titled as politics and personality lays that there will never be a style that will appeal to everyone. Rather than an established expectation, the new feminine ideal like the previous one was used as a pretext for constant and unrelenting regulation: women's attire, like women's labour, was never finished. In the twentieth century, changing gender norms have spawned some of the most significant advances in fashion—and some of the most forceful implementations of clothing standards. Feminism inspired women in the late twentieth century to demand social, economic, and political privileges formerly held for males. Styles that incorporated and repurposed earlier sartorial symbols with remarkable creative liberty represented their newly gained freedoms. The personal and the political were interwoven, as the famous feminist slogan argues, in this case as well. The chapter 13, how to dress like a woman, explains how and why clubs and restaurants such as Hooters and Playboy require waitresses to always wear orange hot pants and skintight, low-cut blouses.

It is informative to know that when cocktail servers in Reno and Las Vegas protested against dress standards that demanded high-heeled shoes, they held banners that said “Hey Boss, Kiss My Foot.”¹⁰ Why should women have to endure physical anguish for the sake of men's sexual pleasure? said one cocktail waiter. The Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, which owns the Foxwoods casino in Connecticut, compelled cocktail waitresses to wear heels in 2013. Cocktail servers staged similar objections in 2013. Further, Ford has tried to encapsulate recent instances as

⁹Robin Givhan, Senior critic-at-large, The Washington Post at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/robin-givhan/>.

¹⁰Martin Griffith, Women to rally in Reno against casinos' high-heel policy, The Las Vegas Sun Times, Saturday, May 13, 2000 at <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2000/may/13/women-to-rally-in-reno-against-casinos-high-heel>.

examples. Like in 2015, numerous ladies were barred from the Cannes Film Festival for wearing flat shoes in contravention of the event's formal dress code.¹¹ One participant claimed that “even elderly ladies who can't wear heels for medical reasons” were turned away from the event because of the dress code's inequitable gender stereotypes. Several A-list women made an effort to wear flat shoes or even walk barefoot the year after at Cannes. Kristen Stewart's question, "Does a guy have to wear heels? perfectly encapsulated the protest spirit. Even though it's a black-tie event, either flats or heels should work.”¹²

Further under the chapter, *Piercing The Veil*, the political and religious connotations depicted via help of fashion has been detailed out. Traditional religious observances, anti colonial resistance, postmodern identity politics, and global fashion sense may be combined in a particularly contemporary combination in late twentieth and early twenty-first century religious wear. In today's world, even old religious garb has found a place in the eclectic self-expression that is contemporary fashion. Dress codes that demand or forbid sectarian iconography have unexpected consequences because of the muddled meanings provided by religious attire. For his part, Ford has theorised on the controversies surrounding the hijab/veil and what it has signified throughout the centuries. The author compares and contrasts the perspectives of several writers on hijab. For example, hijab was referred as a “barrier between woman and her elevation, and therefore a barrier between the country and its advancement” in Tahrir al-Mar'a, or The Liberation of Woman, published in 1899.¹³ Other incidences lay the shocking journey of how bikini became accepted from being considered as a scandalous affair in the United States around 1963 to its present acceptance. In the words of Times magazine, “It was considered "nearly square" in 1965 not to wear a bikini.”¹⁴

Further the concluding chapters of the book titled as, *Decoding dress codes*, lays down the dress codes requirement alterations companies are going through with the changing nature of workplace. It states that fashion's late-twentieth-century heyday was marked by an emphasis on

¹¹Cannes Film Festival 'turns away women in flat shoes', BBC News, 19 May 2015 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-32792772>.

¹²Elana Fishman, Kristen Stewart continues to protest high heels policy at Cannes, May 18, 2018 at <https://pagesix.com/2018/05/18/kristen-stewart-continues-to-protest-high-heels-policy-at-cannes>.

¹³Amin, Qasim. The Liberation of Women: Two Documents in the History of Egyptian feminism, American University in Cairo Press, 2000.

¹⁴Katie Honan, Before Times Square's Topless Ladies, Wearing a Swimsuit Used to Be Banned, DNAInfo, September 1, 2015 at <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20150901/rockaway-beach/before-times-squares-topless-ladies-wearing-swim-suit-used-be-banned>.

self-expression and individuality. Rather from being utilized to denote social position or even gender distinctions, sartorial cues have become tools for constructing and expressing individuality in a new way. Resistance to clothing standards that perpetuated previous social hierarchies arose as apparel became more intimately identified with individual character's personality. Specialists in financial services have worn a business suit for decades. Pinstripe suits were initially designed to imitate the lines on an accounting ledger, as some claim. However, suits, have fallen out of favour in recent years.¹⁵

The book concludes on how fashion snobbery is the latest new trend. Many clothing businesses and services now cater to the IT industry, offering to take the labour out of work wear, "so you can spend your time doing wonderful man things." Suddenly, one wonders what it may entail. T-shirts from the BlackV Club, a company that specializes in black V-neck T-shirts, are sold with the slogan "You're Too Busy to Worry about Clothes: the world's most successful individuals don't waste time picking what to wear."

The book is a reflection on anybody who wasn't proficient in this nuanced language of fashion faced a myriad of paradoxes and obstacles. And that's why, in his(author's) opinion, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), like Morehouse, should take precautions like stressing the subtleties of business attire in their orientation programmes. There are still many obstacles that women in leadership confront, as shown by this sartorial change. Feminine clothing norms have traditionally been associated with a lack of authority, with bright colours, adornment, and vivacity seen as the clothes of the weak.

Though trends may change, fashion is a changeable subject. Ford also makes a persuasive case for the idea that fashion is an ever-evolving language. It is those who are ready to defy the existing norms who compel the rules to evolve. They compel the transfer of power or, at the very least, the gradual distribution of authority.

3. Critical Review/ Takeaways

¹⁵Suzanne Kapner, Men Ditch Suits, and Retailers Struggle to Adapt, The Wall Street Journal, March 25, 2019 at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/men-ditch-suits-and-retailers-struggle-to-adapt-11553511602>.

Every new outfit is a strategy, aiming to have an impact, in terms of the political, professional, and social repercussions of what we wear. However, we hardly ever dress strategically since it also represents how we really feel about ourselves, so it's always a mix of both. Colonial Americans wore simple homespun to avoid British imports, but they also wore it because it reflected their individual sense of thrift and modesty; civil rights activists wore their Sunday best to set an example of respectability, but they also wore it because elegant attire made them feel good about themselves and their social position. Each and every fashion criticism is thus a sort of character assassination as well as an evaluation of a strategy; every clothing code is a tool of social control and, maybe an insult to the wearer.

Until I learned about the history of dress rules, I, along with many other attorneys who care deeply about important social concerns like equality and justice, underestimated the extent to which certain clothing standards may damage one's self-esteem. There are many examples of workplace dress requirements that I disagree with, but I don't believe they are oppressive enough to violate civil rights, such as the dress restrictions that Renee Rogers and Chastity Jones challenged in court.¹⁶ When everything is said and done, it's just a hairstyle and a lot of individuals of all races have to change their hair and clothing for work.

Men have a long history of deviousness when it comes to dressing well. Fashion has given them control and elevated their status, all the while sending a message of beautiful rejection via their clothing. It's a common misconception that males are too consumed with "serious" endeavors like business, government, technology, and other fields to be interested in fashion. Repetitive dressing in fitted suits, khaki pants, and golf shirts sends the idea that they've given up frivolousness as a sign of respect for their gender. The women are responsible for fashion including its lovely folly. And it has worked quite beautifully for males.

Fashion not only expresses our thoughts and feelings, but it also gives us a tangible representation of our hopes and objectives. The introduction of new clothes altered people's everyday lives in a subtle but profound manner, and this in turn sparked societal transformation. The appeal of fashion, the continuing concern about it, and the omnipresence of laws regarding it may all be attributed to the visible and tactile part of clothes. Scholarly analyses of social

¹⁶Alexia Fernández Campbell, A black woman lost a job offer because she wouldn't cut her dreadlocks, *The Vox*, Apr 18, 2018 at <https://www.vox.com/2018/4/18/17242788/chastity-jones-dreadlock-job-discrimination>.

interactions and political events seldom recognize the special relevance of clothing. Materialism is to some extent responsible for this, placing more importance on money and resources than on cultural values, reputation, and psychological well-being.¹⁷ It's fashionable these days to argue that apparel and the physical body are no longer important because of innovation, social networking sites, and the increasing influence of online and "virtual" interactions. Text messages have replaced face-to-face interactions, and digital avatars have taken the place of real-life, clothed people. Social media, on the other hand, has made the significance of clothing more prominent. For example, Instagram's content is dominated by personal photographs still or moving that are frequently painstakingly constructed and edited in order to present a convincing self-image. When it comes to a person's self image, it's evident that many social media users take just as much care about what they dress as a fashion fanatic planning for a night out at Fashion Week.

The terrible inadequacy of disembodied relationships was rendered unavoidable by the shelter-in-place orders issued after the breakout of COVID-19 in 2020. It was much more depressing than normal to sit in on meetings at work, and online talks with friends and family served as a sad reminder of how much I missed social interaction. Real social connection requires the presence of another person, even in the virtual world, where "virtual cocktail parties" (log in, pour your own glass of wine!) with casual acquaintances or strangers were dreary and unpleasant. The desire to avoid the confines of isolation and seek out the companionship of others is understandable. Taking the garbage out to the curb became a social event for some suburbanites, who looked forward to the opportunity to mingle with their neighbours and exchange small talk. This soon became a worldwide sensation, with Instagram accounts and Facebook groups dedicated to it. Neighbors you'd never talked to before were more enjoyable than an online acquaintance, even with a rosé glass perched on the top of an old garbage can.

Not only do we require our bodies, but our awareness is also shaped by our bodily experiences, thus our innermost selves are inextricably linked to our physical selves. A person's self-perception is shaped by their appearance and how they choose to express themselves. Fashion has the power to transform us into citizens; it can turn our interactions into a competition for

¹⁷Fashion Gender and Dress, Susan O. Michelman and Kimberly A. Miller-Spillman at <https://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fashion-history-eras/fashion-gender-dress>.

enlightened excellence from animalistic survival; it can elevate our sexuality into an expression of poetic connection; it can transform a social obligation into a glamorous adventure; it can turn the lonely daily grind into a stylish personal biography. Our body and the way we portray ourselves to the world are inextricably linked to our thoughts, feelings, and values.

The customary criteria for human beauty, especially with regard to women, are rather restricted and unsophisticated, as one would argue of standards of beauty more broadly. It is my belief that the lack of refined sensitivities is mostly due to the fact that we've been conditioned to believe that our looks is irrelevant. Feminism is right to attack the typical, cartoonishly simplistic ideal of feminine beauty, but it is also important to consider the rich and varied ideals of beauty that inform the fine arts, architecture, design and fashion (including the bold, challenging styles developed outside the fashion industry from which fashion designers take much of their inspiration). These methods may help to broaden people's conceptions of what constitutes attractiveness and professionalism, which in turn might lead to more appropriate clothing regulations.

Every time we put on a beautiful jacket, a tough pair of boots, an attractive sport coat, a sultry dress, a dashing scarf, or a sophisticated pantsuit, we reap the benefits of fashion's success. It is a tiny success for human flourishing when someone picks her clothing with care and purpose and wears it with conviction and confidence. I'm a fan of avant-garde, polished, austere, tacky, and seductive looks, whether they're from haute couture or the streets of New York. This does not imply that I am a fan of all eye-catching outfits or that I believe someone else should be either. When it comes to fashion, even clothing choices that seem obnoxious, oddball, or ill-advised may have a profound impact on people's perceptions of themselves, as well as on public culture. Cross-dressers, Elizabethan upstarts, Renaissance courtiers, and colonial American slaves dressed above their circumstances are just a few examples of the people who have influenced the history of dress codes. The history of dress codes describes the tale of Victorian dandies and Industrial-era social climbers; of seriously sexy flappers and disenchanted beanie stylists; of sincere agitators in their Sunday greatest, chic radicals, and women's rights activists; of blonde African American bombshells and natural blondes in dreadlocks; of hipster hijabis, preppy street gypsies, and radical feminists. Despite the fact that many of them were misunderstood and derided throughout their lifetime, they have all left us with something priceless.

But fashion's history isn't just defined by aristocratic attire, haute couture, and multinational firms' worldwide marketing operations, even if they all played a role. Most importantly, the audacious and subtle, genuine and artificial, skilful and faltering self-fashioning of billions who wore their own goals on their sleeves. Humans like Richard Walweyn, whose attire so upset the power structure of Elizabethan times that the sheriff's deputy was dispatched to track him down, and the Chevalier d'Éon, who unearthed feminist virtue through the sartorial rigour of a corset and petticoats, are the heroes and heroines—or at least central lead characters the history of dress codes. In the face of injustice and exploitation, fashion isn't an answer. The response to them, in fact, is fashion, which asserts that human happiness is more important than the aspirations of the strong, the weights of tradition, or moral authority's prescriptive rules of conduct."

Humanity's adversaries may not be helped by fashion. Even so, it provides us a taste of what we're battling to achieve!
