

# Physical Discipline and Physical Liberation Masculine Clothing as an Example

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**Abstract.** The body-mind dualism has led to a focus on the spiritual and neglect of the physical, while intersecting with gender factors, resulting in the extreme devaluation of women and their bodies. As a result, the female body becomes an important site of discipline for women, through dress and grooming. This study attempts to elucidate how women's physical discipline and physical liberation occur by masculine dress. Starting from symbolic violence, the study elaborates on the regulation of women's bodies by masculine clothing in terms of both capitalism and gender; it also explains how women can liberate themselves through dressing masculine by rebelling against traditional images, breaking the consistency of biological gender and social gender, and escaping the domination of the male gaze. Therefore, when women have a more thorough understanding of dressing itself, they can better perceive their position and its complexity, and promote women's liberation through individual practice.

**Keywords:** Physical discipline, Physical liberation, Masculine clothing.

## 1. Introduction

Freedom of dress is a very popular term in social media today, and it is mainly used by women to defend their right to freely choose the clothes they wear. However, when a woman thinks she is freely choosing an outfit, it is worth considering to what extent is this act really free and whether there is an element of discipline that the women are not yet aware of. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the relationship between women and society, using masculine clothing as an example, to reveal how dress disciplines the female physical body and to clarify how women use clothing as an attempt at self-liberation.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 Mind-body Dualism

The imagination of the body has changed throughout history. Plato believed that the body obscures our knowledge of the world, that its senses are unreliable, and that it constantly induces us to mistake the temporal and the illusory for the eternal and the real; Schwartz believed that the body and its passions prevent us from releasing our "inner" life [1]; Mechanism created in the 17th century argued that the instincts possessed by the body mean that the body is a purely mechanical and biological system that can be quantified and theoretically controlled [2]. However, the same thinking exists in the different imaginations of the body, which constructs the body as something separate from the real self, whether soul, mind, spirit, will, creativity, freedom, etc., and makes the speech of the self wear out. What is not the body is the best, the highest, the noblest, the closest to God; what is related to the body is treated as a burden and hinders the realization of self-worth.

### 2.2 Gender-Mind-body dualism

According to the gender-mind-body dualism, the male corresponds to the spirit, while the female corresponds to the body. Thus the male is noble and active, and the female is subordinate and passive.

From this, it could be seen that body/spirit, active/passive, man/woman, each binary opposition has one element in a dominant position and the other in a subordinate position, while the man is always associated with the word in a dominant position and the woman is always associated with the

word in a subordinate position, the symbolic order of binary oppositions in which power relations are implied. From this symbolic order that the superiority of men over women is one of the manifestations of mind-body dualism.

### 2.3 Logocentrism

Logocentrism believes that there is a first signified, that any phenomenal world, any civilization, comes from the same origin, the same archetype, the same Logos father, even if what this Logos exactly vary from reason, absolute spirit, etc. Logocentrism subordinates second nature to the first by establishing its priority. It assumes that all human beings are universal, undifferentiated as well as stable subjects [3].

### 2.4 Phallogocentrism

The male corresponds to the spirit, which in turn belongs to the Logos, so the male is the human, the universal subject, the first item, the first signified, while the female is the body, the second item, always subordinate to the first. Thus, Logocentrism is in turn associated with androcentrism, forming phallogocentrism [4].

Derrida argues that the inner structure of metaphysics built around the Logos dominates the entire Western tradition as if it were a great invisible net from which no man or kind of thought can escape, and it becomes the destiny of Western thought [3]. Therefore, phallogocentrism is a kind of ideological hegemony, and breaking this hegemony is conducive to promoting gender equality [3].

Both the body-mind dualism and the gender-mind-body dualism and its combination can be seen as a kind of logocentrism, phallogocentrism that combines gender and mind-body, where the material body must be guided by the soul in order to have meaning, and where the woman, who is as physical and material, awaits the domination of the male, who is thought as spiritual. Therefore, breaking the phallogocentrism can start with the female body.

The beauty of the female body is not fixed and homogeneous but has different stages. In Western countries, the hourglass body was popular in the 19th century, while in the mid-1960s a boyish slim style emerged [1]. In today's China, there is also a strong emphasis on the "slim" beauty of women. This change in the standard of beauty for women's bodies corresponds to the change in the different styles of clothing and the change in women's choice of clothing. The change from clothing that reflects women's curves and is not convenient for production to men's clothing that does not highlight curves and facilitates movement reflects both society's discipline of women's bodies and women's efforts to liberate their own bodies.

## 3. Physical Discipline

### 3.1 Symbolic Violence

Symbolic violence is accomplished through an act of both recognition and misrecognition, which is beyond the control of consciousness and will, and could be regarded as an idea hidden deep within consciousness and will. Symbolic violence is a power that constructs reality, which tends to establish order in the social world; secondly, symbolic violence acts both as a tool of knowledge and as a means of domination at the same time. It emphasizes that social actors are cognitive actors who, even when they are subject to the mechanisms of social determination, can "do their part" in the effectiveness of those mechanisms by shaping the mechanisms that determine their lives, and that the effects of domination almost always arise from the "coincidence" between the determinants and the categories of perception that constitute people as social actors. The effect of domination almost always depends on the "coincidental" relationship between the determinants and the perceptual categories that constitute people as social actors [5].

Masculine dress is a form of symbolic violence. As a social product, it arises from various social factors, so it is not only material but also a cultural presence, and by wearing it, people represent a recognition of the social values and social order behind it, even if they are not aware of it, but do

potentially accept these premises and reproduce them through their own behavior. Next, the study will sort out what social factors are involved in masculine clothing, and show the layers of symbolic violence embedded in masculine clothing by sorting out the different influencing factors.

### 3.2 The Body of Production

In consumer capitalism, the producer's ego is controlled by the work ethic, which manifests itself in denial and repression of desire, thus the contemporary aesthetic ideal of a slim body is a metaphor for the proper management of desire, and thus slimness is a socially constructed aesthetic, whose formation is strongly influenced by capitalism. As a result, clothing has been transformed into a masculine style that is easy to produce and does not accentuate the curves, thus characterizing the demands of consumer capitalism on the producer.

### 3.3 Gender

Men correspond to the spirit, self-management, self-control, to an energetic nature, while women correspond to the body, and to spontaneity such as hunger, emotion, and sexuality. Therefore, on the surface, this is contrary to the metaphor of women's slim figure as a management of their desires. In the dominant Western religious and philosophical tradition, the management of the body has always been owned by men, so, from this point of view, consumer capitalism appears to loosen the structure of gender-mind-body dualism. In reality, however, gender-mind-body dualism goes hand in hand with the metaphor of the slender female body, which metaphorically reinforces gender-mind-body dualism.

When a woman is in the traditionally masculine sphere, her masculine dress establishes a symbolic connection with masculinity, meaning that the neutralized body and dress are symbols of "masculinity" and that women do not enter the sphere of production as persons with "feminine values" but rather, as persons with "masculine values". Women do not enter the production field as people with "female values", but after entering the production field, they symbolize themselves as men and produce as "men". Therefore, all those who produce are "men", and production requires the management of bodily desires, so those who manage the body are also "men". Therefore, masculine style dress still assigns the production sphere to men, reproducing the gender structure of "men - production sphere, women - family sphere". At the same time, it assigns the management of women's bodies to men's sphere, reinforcing the gender-mind-body dualism. Masculine dress is in fact symbolic violence, which implicitly recognizes the chain of production - control of desire - masculinity, which is not only not dissolved but is constantly reproduced by women wearing the masculine dress. At the same time, society places extra emphasis on the female body and dress as a means of male domination over women in a patriarchal society. When women focus a lot of energy on their bodies and what they wear, it prevents women from investing in traditionally masculine fields such as the productive and academic fields, and therefore it makes it difficult for women to improve themselves. As long as women are always tied to their appearance, science will be more associated with men than women, so masculine dress once again reinforces the traditional gender order.

## 4. Physical Liberation

### 4.1 Masculine Clothing: Rebellion Against the Traditional Image of Women

Since the 19th century, the dominant female image in the West has been the hourglass figure, which emphasizes the voluptuous hips and breasts and devalues the fragile, slender waist, a symbolic form of maternal femininity that also implies fertility and, moreover, a symbol of women's confinement within the family [1].

And after the 1960s, the dominant aesthetic ideal in society changed from the hourglass figure to the slim, neutral body, and since society at this time was a consumer-capitalist society whose requirement was the development of productivity, it was also, therefore, a representation of such a figure and dress as a productive human being. Body figure was also linked to gender traits, and the

productive body was at the same time a male body, so for women, severing their ties with the maternal body meant escaping from such a restricted and constrained construction of femininity as reproduction and caring for the family; wearing white, male dress, i.e., masculine dress, would allow women to feel empowered and able to enter the productive sphere and the opportunity to demonstrate qualities that are highly valued in our culture, such as control, self-possession, etc.

Therefore, when women choose to wear masculine clothing, this choice is also filled with personal initiative. Patriarchy confines women within the family and devalues domestic work as a form of gender oppression, and women express their dissatisfaction with this existing gender division of labor by changing the symbolic dimension; women's attempts to gain ownership of their self-control through dress express women's resistance to the construction of women in the gender-mind-body dualism. Women are aware of the existence of gender inequality and try to re-empower themselves through their individual practices; therefore, changing their dress is an individual daily resistance full of dynamism.

#### **4.2 Masculine Clothing Breaks the Consistency Between Biological Gender and Social Gender**

Biological gender refers to the differences between men and women in terms of biological structure, and social gender refers to the gender characteristics and differences formed by the social and cultural construction of male and female based on biological sex, as well as the group characteristics and behaviors of females and males formed in social culture, which are expressed as fixed expectations of society regarding the roles played by males and females in the fields of life, marriage, culture, education, economy, politics, etc. In the gender order, there is considered to be consistency and continuity between biological sex and social gender. Biological sex, as the biological cause of gender, leads to various representations of gender, and because it is considered biological and therefore natural and unchangeable, sex-gender is constructed as a causal relationship that cannot be shaken.

The female body is both a biological and a cultural being. In order to realize the dominant and compulsory standardized aesthetic ideal of the culture in which they live, women work on shaping the body itself, trying to make it conform to this aesthetic ideal so that the body is more of a cultural being than a natural one.

The appearance of the body is closely tied to femininity, and gender cultures construct the hourglass figure and link it to the domestic sphere and fertility, binding women to the home and devaluing their abilities. Here, the female body is seen as a purely natural being, the female body is hourglass-shaped, and this shape is natural and unchangeable, and because the female body is causally linked to femininity by gender culture, the female body is seen as the unchangeable cause of women's confinement to the domestic sphere. The body, in turn, is linked to dress, and feminine clothing that accentuates curves is therefore linked to the female function.

However, the change of women's body and dress into masculine means that women's body is not unchangeable but can be shaped, and thus the premise is dissolved that women's body is natural and unchangeable. Social gender is constructed.

The above discussion is based on the fact that biological sex exists and is natural. However, biological sex is also a social construct. Judith Butler suggests that sex is inherently constructed as "non-constructive" and that one way to successfully secure the inherent stability and binary framework of sex is to construct the duality of biological gender as a pre-discursive field [6]. Therefore, even though women wearing masculine clothing does not deconstruct biological sex itself, since the premise of the above argument is also constructed, it is added here to avoid a tacit acknowledgment of the existence of sex.

#### **4.3 Feminine Beauty: Effort to Escape the Male Gaze**

The "male gaze" refers to the scopophilia pleasure that male heterosexuals enjoy as viewers through various media and channels, and the viewer is the second sex, the female. Laura Mulvey argues that women are objects of male desire when they are viewed and that this desire is related to

the desire for scopophilia, which is not merely the pleasure that comes from watching, but a process of turning the other person into the object of one's own controlling gaze [7]. Moreover, scopophilia is driven by sexual desire, an act of "transforming other people into objects of sexual stimulation through vision". Foucault argues that the gaze is a mechanism of power that gives the gazer a self-identified subjectivity and monitors and regulates the thoughts, words, and actions of the gazed [8].

Under the "male gaze," women exist as disciplined individuals, and women's desires are dominated and constructed by the male gaze, as John Berger mentioned, "women look at themselves through the male gaze". Therefore, the definition of female beauty and physical beauty is in the hands of men. On the one hand, women's aesthetics are shaped, yet on the other hand, because of this discourse, women's dynamic role is easily ignored.

In the midst of structural domination, women still have critical expressions of resistance, and masculine clothing is one of them. By wearing masculine clothing that does not highlight the breasts, hips, or waist, women resist the male gaze to reject the so-called "masculine" image of women who have "hourglass" figures that highlight their curves.

In addition, women also try to escape the male gaze by changing the narrative, for example, by claiming that they wear traditional clothes that accentuate their curves because they personally like them, thus highlighting their individual likes and dislikes. If men's preference is to reject such clothing altogether from now on, the range of options available to women does not increase but rather decreases. At the same time, this approach still does not escape the male gaze, and women are still looking at themselves through the male gaze when considering what to wear. Therefore, the important thing is not to wear clothes that are not "eroticized" under the male gaze, but to shift from a male perspective to a female perspective, where the woman as a subject considers what is beautiful, gradually taking the definition of beauty out of the hands of men. Wearing masculine clothing can also have this meaning, as women do not wear masculine clothing because men do not like it, but because women wear it because they see it as beautiful through the female gaze, thus achieving a more critical personal practice of resistance.

Thus, there are two levels of resistance to wearing masculine clothing: the first is under the male gaze, the second is trying to escape the domination of the male gaze, and the same practice can have different degrees of criticality due to different personal narratives, and individual resistance cannot be generalized. As Foucault puts it, "there is no center of mass rejection, no core of rebellion, no root of all betrayal or pure law of revolution. Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of which is a special case." It is this partial resistance that allows women to be subjected to as little as possible to the standardization of their bodies by the power of regulation, allowing women's bodies to transcend the male gaze and establish the conditions for possessing subjectivity.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, dress, as a cultural symbol, disciplines the female body and, to some extent, becomes a thing used by women for their self-liberation. Foucault emphasizes the analysis of the mechanisms of power, which should be seen not as a kind of ownership but as a strategy; its dominant effect should not be attributed to "possession" but to dispatch, scheming, strategy, technique, and action. Discipline power is one of these power mechanisms. It achieves the purpose of domination and control through daily discipline, inspection, and training, and exercises the function of power, turning people into objects and tools of power manipulation through standardized training. Under this mechanism, the monitor puts the monitored person in power control through gaze, and each monitored person, under the pressure of this gaze, will gradually and consciously become his or her own monitor, so as to achieve self-imprisonment [9].

In the process of examining themselves and shaping themselves to conform to the standards of ideal beauty, women also accept the value system behind the standards, such as mind-body dualism, gender order, capitalism, etc. Therefore, dress has a disciplinary effect on women. Foucault not only reveals the deep "domination" under the phenomenon of "rationalization", but also proposes

strategies to resist the operation of power. He proposes a program of local struggle. The local struggle is a microcosmic struggle that targets a specific technology, a specific form of power - the environment closest to people and directly acting on them. Through the individual practice of wearing masculine clothing, women aim to break the chains of gender, escape the male gaze, and even resist the domination of gender discourse [10].

However, the dress is not the same from one dress to another, and its discipline and liberation cannot be generalized. Women's clothing that accentuates curves is denoted as erotic because women's sexuality is first eroticized, and the clothing that wraps or accentuates them is further eroticized as an index of sexuality; whereas masculine clothing is gender oppression through women becoming "men" and thus entering the field of labor. Thus, each type of female dress is different, but they are all related to the gender order. Therefore, being alert to each type of dress and contemplating the chains hidden behind each dress helps women to understand their situation better and thus to make more autonomous decisions, both in relation to whether or not to wear certain dresses, but also in relation to the personal narratives and attitudes hidden behind the dresses, which are expressed through language, thus revealing the subjectivity of women.

Individual practice is important and gender is related to practice. Judith Butler argues that gender is a kind of performance, that gender is a fragile identity built in the course of time, that it is established in a superficial space through stylized and programmed repetitive actions, and that gender is a constructed pattern of social temporality [6]. Thus, the practice contains the possibility of deconstructing or reconstructing gender.

However, while women seek gender liberation through the expression of dressing, they should be alert to the possibility that language can also become a form of invisible gender oppression. This study does not focus on the aspect of how can liberation be achieved within language, which is now saturated with gendered power relations and which distorts the real, thus achieving a kind of symbolic violence that is everywhere within the discourse. It still needs to be constantly explored whether it further contributes to the reproduction of gender oppression through constant discourse. The road to women's self-emancipation is long and difficult.

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