

# Clothes and Fashion Form of LGBTQ Community: Stereotypes to Self-Expression

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## ABSTRACT:

In the review paper, explored the multifaceted nature of LGBTQ+ fashion, examining how individuals within the community navigate fashion to authentically express their gender identity and sexual orientation. The paper delved into the significance of fashion as a powerful tool for self-expression and celebrated the diverse ways in which LGBTQ+ individuals challenge societal norms and stereotypes. By shedding light on the complex relationship between fashion and the LGBTQ+ community, the review paper emphasized the importance of embracing individuality and diversity in the fashion industry.

**KEYWORDS:** LGBTQ+, Fashion, Self-Expression, Stereotypes, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation.

## INTRODUCTION:

When we dive into the topic of LGBTQ+ fashion and self-expression, it's important to recognize the significant role that fashion plays in allowing individuals to express their true selves. In the past, the LGBTQ+ community has embraced fashion as a powerful tool to break free from societal stereotypes and norms. They have fearlessly celebrated their unique identities through their fashion choices, paving the way for a more inclusive and diverse fashion industry.

By challenging traditional ideas of gender and style, the LGBTQ+ community has not only created space for self-expression, but also sparked important conversations about identity and acceptance. Through fashion, individuals have been able to communicate their stories, experiences, and emotions, creating a sense of belonging and empowerment within the community.

This topic is especially relevant in the context of the fashion industry, as it highlights the need for greater representation and inclusivity. By exploring the journey of LGBTQ+ fashion and self-expression, we gain a deeper understanding of the power of fashion as a means of personal and social transformation. It's truly inspiring to witness how fashion has become a platform for breaking down barriers and embracing diversity.

Fashion plays a significant role in our society, serving not only as a means of protection and comfort but also as a powerful form of self-expression. In the past, there were clear distinctions between men's and women's clothing. However, over the years, fashion has evolved, and the LGBTQ+ community has made a notable impact on fashion trends and styles. Many influential fashion designers throughout history have identified as LGBTQ+, although societal pressures often forced them to conceal their identities. It wasn't

until the 1980s that designers began to openly showcase queer culture in their runway collections. Today, we are witnessing a resurgence of queer fashion led by talented designers who are not only creating stunning designs but also using their platforms to bring visibility and representation to the LGBTQ+ community in the fashion industry.(1)

The study aimed to investigate the impact of LGBTQ+ portrayals in marketing communications of fashion brands on brand image. A literature review was conducted to gather existing knowledge on LGBTQ+ representation, advertising, sponsorship, and Generation Z. Through qualitative online interviews with twenty-three members of Generation Z, in-depth data was collected and analyzed alongside the literature. The findings revealed a significant increase in LGBTQ+ acceptance among Generation Z and changes in attitudes and perceptions towards fashion retailers. The study's conclusions and recommendations provide insights for organizations to engage in LGBTQ+ advocacy through advertising and sponsorship, enabling them to maintain a positive brand image in the highly competitive fashion industry while appealing to younger consumers(2)

The relationship between dress and gender identity is a fascinating and important topic, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community. Clothing and fashion choices can play a significant role in expressing one's gender identity and can serve as a powerful tool for self-expression and empowerment. Many individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community use clothing and fashion as a means to challenge traditional gender norms and to authentically represent their true selves. It's wonderful to see how fashion can be a form of self-expression and a way to celebrate diversity and individuality (3)

The study aimed to examine the apparel consumption practices and embodied experiences of Indian LGBT individuals in relation to fashion, style, and the body. Specifically, the research questions revolved around the experiences of Indian LGBT individuals in navigating the fashion system and how they perceived their own embodiment through their clothing choices and appearance. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was employed to address these research questions. Through solicitation for participation, three gay men and seven transgender women were interviewed using a semi-structured format. The data analysis revealed four themes that encompassed two main areas of focus: embodiment and the fashion system. In terms of embodiment, participants shared their diverse experiences with bodily practices and encountered challenges with finding well-fitting clothing. The other themes centered around participants' knowledge and desires related to the fashion system. Within the fashion system, participants expressed awareness of fashion brands and a need for brands that catered to the LGBT community, as well as affordability being a significant barrier to clothing purchases. Overall, the study highlighted that transgender women and gay men in India, despite facing gender oppression, expressed interest in gender-neutral or LGBT-focused brands, underscoring the significance of fashion in shaping their identities(4)

Previous studies have explored the experiences of transgender individuals with clothing and gender expression. In a study conducted by Reilly et al. (2019) with participants from Ireland, Canada, and the United States, it was found that clothing played a crucial role in expressing their gender identity. The researchers also highlighted the issue of clothing fit, which was important for revealing or concealing body parts consistent or inconsistent with their gender. Similarly, Chauhan et al. (2019) conducted research in India with transgender individuals and gay men, and they also emphasized the significance of clothing fit.

Participants in their study faced the challenge of fitting their assigned-male-at-birth bodies into garments designed for an assigned-female-at-birth body. Interestingly, although communicating their gender identity was not a central consideration in their appearance decisions, these individuals expressed an interest in utilizing gender-neutral garments to express themselves. These findings demonstrate the importance of clothing in self-expression and identity for individuals across different cultures and contexts (5)

The power of inclusivity was truly remarkable. When inclusivity was embraced on a personal level, it made any group feel valued and loved. And when that inclusivity extended to a larger, more influential platform like the fashion industry, it had the potential to empower and encourage marginalized groups, allowing them to proudly express themselves. Fashion played a significant role in welcoming the LGBTQ+ community, especially after the important milestone of decriminalization. Through its bold expression, fashion was able to challenge societal norms and embrace a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. The inclusion of the queer community in the glamorous world of fashion became a global revolution, quietly yet powerfully breaking the barriers of the gender binary and pushing the boundaries of conventionality. It was truly an exciting time filled with fresh ideas and a renewed sense of freedom (6)

The worlds of fashion and queer culture have always had a special connection. Clothing has played a vital role in shaping and expressing identities, especially for those whose identities are marginalized or threatened. This year's Met Gala theme and Costume Institute exhibition, *Camp: Notes on Fashion*, beautifully explores this connection. It takes inspiration from Susan Sontag's iconic 1964 essay, which delves into the concept of camp. Camp has deep roots in gay culture, with its aesthetic relying on elements like pastiche, subversion, and high drama. Throughout history, camp has been a way for individuals to express their sexuality through their unique choices in fashion and behavior. But camp is more than just that. It's been described as a language and a particular way of seeing the world. It's truly fascinating how fashion and queer culture intersect in such a powerful and creative way (7)

Fashion served as a means of externalizing one's internal identity. It allowed individuals to express their unique style, aesthetic, and fashion sense, serving as a reflection of their true selves. This process was particularly challenging for LGBTQ+ individuals, who often faced the need to suppress their identities due to internalized homophobia, fear of rejection, and unsafe environments. A study conducted by Baams et al. in 2018 explored the impact of these challenges. The study surveyed 267 sexual minority youth aged 16-22 and found a connection between internalized homophobia and depressive symptoms, mediated by feelings of perceived burdensomeness. Perceived burdensomeness referred to the participants' belief that others saw them as a burden, regardless of the truth. However, fashion played a unique role within the queer community. It became a visual marker that allowed individuals to recognize and be recognized as queer, even without engaging in conversation. Fashion could act as a shield, protecting individuals from confrontation, or as a bold declaration of self-love, empowering them to define their own identity rather than relying on others' perceptions. It offered the freedom to be seen as they wished, embracing their true selves without limitations (8)

Fashion and beauty have always gone hand in hand in challenging societal taboos. The LGBTQ+ community has played a significant role in both industries, pushing boundaries and breaking barriers. It is

undeniable that fashion and beauty transcend age, gender, and societal norms, allowing individuals to express themselves freely. These industries have served as platforms for queer individuals to showcase their talents, creativity, and unique perspectives, without facing discrimination. They have been catalysts for empowerment and self-expression, paving the way for a more inclusive and accepting society (9)

Fashion, symbolized by the capital 'F', and the LGBTQ community have always shared a deep connection. LGBTQ creatives and entrepreneurs have played a pivotal role in the success of the fashion industry, contributing their unique perspectives, facing challenges, and achieving remarkable milestones. In celebration of Pride month, the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) and Google collaborated to create a written discussion on Accelerate with Google. This panel-like discussion highlighted LGBTQ designers who are making significant waves in the industry and online (10)

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of consumer innovativeness and personal identity on the online engagement and attitude towards cosmetic brands among gay consumers. A quantitative approach was employed, and a total of 494 online surveys were distributed to members of the LGBTQ community in South Africa. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS 27 for descriptive statistics and AMOS 27 for inferential statistics. The results revealed that all five hypotheses were supported. Specifically, consumer innovativeness had a significant influence on personal identity, brand attitude, and online engagement. Additionally, personal identity significantly influenced both online engagement and brand attitude. Therefore, consumer innovativeness and personal identity were identified as strong predictors of online brand engagement and attitude towards cosmetic brands among LGBTQ consumers. The research presented implications and discussed further opportunities for future research (11)

Jonny Cota expressed his perspective on fashion for the LGBTQ community and the potential for designers. He emphasized the importance of real equality, which entails equal access, treatment, and opportunities for all individuals regardless of their race, gender, sexuality, or socio-economic status, without any form of discrimination. In his efforts to promote inclusivity, Jonny initiated a highly acclaimed project where he designed masks for the LGBT center in Los Angeles. He further emphasized that equality means marginalized individuals, such as gay individuals, Trans individuals, or Black individuals, should have the same social contract and agreements with their surroundings, community, and authority as the dominant population in those same surroundings (12)

That study conducted a research to explore the apparel consumption practices and embodied experiences of Indian LGBT individuals in relation to fashion, style, and the body. The research questions focused on understanding how these individuals navigate the fashion system and experience their own embodiment through their clothing choices and appearance. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used, and participants included three gay men and seven transgender women who completed semi structured interviews. Through data analysis, four themes emerged, which revolved around embodiment and the fashion system. Participants shared their diverse experiences with bodily practices, including a mix of positive and negative feelings, as well as challenges with finding clothing that fits well. They also expressed awareness of fashion brands and a desire for LGBT-centered brands, while affordability was identified as a barrier to purchasing clothing. Overall, the study highlighted the participants' interest in

gender-neutral and LGBT-focused brands, despite the gender oppression prevalent in India. It's encouraging to see their desire for inclusivity and representation in the fashion industry (13)

Fashion houses had to adapt to the rising popularity of gender-fluid clothing while staying true to the unique aesthetics of various LGBTQ subcultures. This presented them with a challenge, but it also allowed for more flexibility in clothing styles across the spectrum. According to exhibitors, gay designers played a significant role in this movement, earning admiration for their definitive designs. They skillfully blended traditional styles with added sex appeal and glamour, creating pieces that catered to bold individuals. In essence, gay designers pioneered a fashion language that now holds sway in the industry. It's truly inspiring to witness their creativity and influence in shaping the world of fashion (14)

When luxury fashion intersects with queer culture, the concept of cultural appropriation becomes multi-faceted. The distinction between "art" and "commerce" in the realm of luxury fashion further complicates the discussion surrounding the appropriation versus appreciation of queer culture. Queer culture has long been intertwined with the fashion industry, making it challenging for contemporary designers to neatly separate the influences into distinct categories of "queer influence" and "fashion influence." In many cases, it is impossible to determine which came first. However, over the past decade, there has been a noticeable increase in the incorporation of gender and sexual orientation politics on mainstream catwalks, making the connections more evident. It is fascinating to observe how these dynamics have evolved within the ever-changing world of fashion (15)

In the past, there was a belief that clothing should be determined by a person's gender. However, many young people today, regardless of their LGBTQ+ identity, no longer adhere to these stereotypes. The traditional rules of associating blue with boys and pink with girls are being challenged and discarded. This shift towards gender-neutrality has brought a sense of freedom and relief that was previously unrecognized. It is now widely accepted to buy unisex products online or explore clothing options from the opposite gender's collection in stores. Fashion companies have taken notice of this societal change and are focusing on creating goods that cater to these new standards. This not only boosts sales but also meets the increasing demands of a diverse population. Witnessing the fashion industry adapt and evolve to these shifting norms is truly exciting (16)

It's commendable to advocate for gender equality within a queer, feminist, and intersectional framework. By integrating available evidence on the antecedents and consequences of gender-based discrimination and harassment (GBDH) against women and LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace, the authors aimed to explore the roots of this issue. They proposed a model that considered an inclusive definition of gender and combined the queer-feminist approach to HRM with an intersectional perspective. This framework can be valuable for HRM scholars and practitioners seeking to address sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination in organizations. It's inspiring to see research efforts focused on promoting inclusivity and equality in the workplace (17)

The LGBTQ+ community has had a significant impact on modern fashion, with their influence extending to breaking gender norms and advocating for diversity and inclusivity. Fashion designers, models, and consumers worldwide have been inspired by their unique styles and perspectives, resulting in a more

accepting and expressive fashion industry. Androgynous fashion, for example, emerged as a trend that blurred the boundaries between traditional men's and women's clothing. It encompassed a range of comfortable, unisex garments like tailored suits, oversized t-shirts, and baggy pants, emphasizing a departure from conventional gender roles. Additionally, the rise of gender-neutral clothing lines, often initiated by LGBTQ+ individuals, introduced inclusive options that could be worn by anyone, irrespective of their gender identity. These lines featured clothing items such as t-shirts, jeans, and hoodies that were not specifically marketed towards a particular gender. The LGBTQ+ community's impact on fashion has been truly transformative, promoting acceptance and creativity within the industry (18)

Gay fashion has often faced stereotypes in pop culture, but its history is far from ordinary. Let's take a stroll down memory lane and explore its evolution. Fashion has always had a strong connection with the LGBTQ+ community, with specific designs and clothing choices being associated with these stereotypes. However, over time, these prejudices have evolved and changed. What was once categorized as strictly "gay fashion" is now embraced and enjoyed by individuals of all sexual orientations. It's fascinating to witness how fashion has become more inclusive and diverse, breaking down barriers and celebrating personal style for everyone to enjoy (19)

LGBT fashion has certainly garnered a lot of attention for its luxurious appeal. It swiftly challenged conservative attitudes, leaving no room for denial. The evolution of queer fashion over the years has been a cause for celebration and joy. And let's not forget about gender fluid fashion, which effortlessly combines comfort and uber-cool style that secretly appeals to everyone. It's an opportunity to express oneself and experience the confidence that comes with wearing such unique and inclusive clothing (20)

## CONCLUSION:

I explored the fascinating evolution of LGBT fashion and how it has broken stereotypes and embraced inclusivity. From its premium appeal to its ability to challenge conservative thinking, queer fashion has come a long way. I've also touched on the rise of gender fluid fashion, which offers comfort and stylish clothing that many secretly desire to wear. It's truly inspiring to see how fashion can be a powerful tool for self-expression and promoting equality. Keep embracing their unique style and spreading positivity.

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