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  Mission Statement
P R O L O G U E
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2024

Table of Contents

Academic Writing

The Ethics of Getting Dressed, Charvi Beniwal......................................................1
Consultant & Writer Reflections. ................................................................. 8

Transgender Women in the Athletic World, Corvus Endo ..................................9
Consultant & Writer Reflections. ................................................................. 16

Beyond the Binary: An Exploration of the Implications of Gender Binaries in Fashion and Choice, Taylor Hardin.................................17
Consultant & Writer Reflections. ................................................................. 25

Normativity as the Root of Secrecy and Moral Degeneration in Ellen Hart’s “A Whisper of Bones”, Ava King.........................................................26
Consultant & Writer Reflections. ................................................................. 31

“Disability Porn”: A CBS Sunday Morning News Special, Tahlia Little ..................32
Consultant & Writer Reflections. ................................................................. 39

Contributors & Acknowledgements

Meet the Writers & Consultants ................................................................. 40

Acknowledgements....................................................................................... 41
The Ethics of Getting Dressed
Charvi Beniwal
This paper was originally developed for a Writing 101 course taught by Dr. Kelsi Morrison-Atkins.

Research Question

How do the historical transitions in fashion norms contribute to the emergence of sustainable fashion, and what are the implications for contemporary fashion consumers in terms of their choices and the broader societal and environmental consequences?

Introduction

The world of fashion undergoes profound evolution with time. They reflect societal changes, technological advancements, and shifting cultural values. In recent years, a new paradigm has emerged that challenges the traditional norms of clothing designs, sales, and usage. The focal point of this transformation has been the rapidly growing concept of sustainable fashion. Through this research paper, first I want to see the historical transition that gave birth to current norms of clothing designs, sales, and usage, and as I do so, I will highlight the challenges that emerged and analyze why they in turn called for sustainable fashion measures. Broadly speaking, during the course of this research I realized that every human is part of today’s fashion emergency in some capacity. However, this particular research paper aims to reach fashion ‘consumers’ and make them aware of the consequences of their choices to them and others. This research aims to trace the evolution of fashion paradigms, pinpoint crucial obstacles that have prompted the move toward sustainable fashion, and emphasize how important it is for consumers to be aware of and make conscious decisions when it comes to solving the urgent issue of modern fashion.

The History of the Apparel Industry and the Emergence of Fast Fashion

I believe that understanding the “ways and methods” of the past helps us understand the “ways and methods” of today. So, it is important to look at what happened in the past that has today led to the emergence of sustainable fashion (the latest in the fashion industry). The biggest evolutions in the fashion industry occurred during the 18th century. A revolution took place in
Britain and the Americas which broadly paved the way for mass production of ready-made clothing, a popular variant of this idea is called ‘fast fashion’ today.

In pre-Industrial-Revolution Britain, the rise of slop shops, akin to modern-day thrift stores, was a catalyst for the demand for ready-made clothing (Linden). These shops were mostly frequented by working-class individuals who lacked the time and resources to make their own clothes. This trend normalized the purchase of pre-made garments. Their popularity created a shift in consumer preferences, establishing a burgeoning market for ready-to-wear clothing. This transformation significantly predates common perceptions, laying the foundation for the eventual mass production of apparel and marking a crucial turning point in the history of the clothing industry.

Meanwhile, the garment industry also began to expand in the United States post-industrialization (Linden). The foundation for the same was laid by the American South's utilization of slavery to meet Britain's demand for raw cotton. This reliance on slave labor grew significantly in the early 1800s, following Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793. At this point, due to technological advancements, cotton was efficiently getting processed in European factories, particularly after the power loom's invention around 1801. Consequently, the supply of cotton in the States increased throughout the first half of the 19th century, which in turn caused the prices to dip. This affordability factor allowed individuals from the lower economic classes to access cheaper fabrics, thus, contributing to the growth of a thriving garment industry in the United States from the mid-1800s onwards (Linden).

However, as time progressed, the landscape of manufacturing changed back then, as rising operational costs prompted companies to seek cost-effective solutions, leading to the outsourcing of production to countries offering cheaper labor. This shift also marked a significant transition in the industry's trajectory, influencing not only the production process but also shaping global trade patterns.

It is interesting to note here that there were evident historical ties between the US and British apparel sectors and they attest to the industry's critical role in the advancement of national economies. They demonstrate how the sector developed into a significant economic force from its beginnings in the production and trade of cotton. Furthermore, its evolution reflected sociological shifts in addition to industrial and economic developments. Changes in socioeconomic status and demography were major factors in forming the consumer landscape.
As a result, the consumer base became more diverse, which profoundly changed the dynamics of the fashion industry.

Now, entering the era of fast fashion—an outcome of outsourced production and evolving consumer preferences. Fast fashion has revolutionized accessibility to trendy clothing by offering high-fashion styles at significantly lower prices. However, this affordability comes at a cost. The products of fast fashion are typically characterized by their low quality and disposability, lasting only a limited number of washes. But, all in all, that has marked a departure from the earlier fashion industry models that focused on limited but higher-quality product offerings.

**Modern Day Fast Fashion trends**

Modern-day fast fashion is spread across the globe, however, the major reflection of the fast fashion industry lies in prominent Western countries. The Western world benefits significantly from globalization, thus, offering a surplus of fashion trends through giant retailers, both in physical stores and online. For many in the West, shopping for clothes has evolved into a leisure pursuit, providing not just utility but also entertainment and pleasure. In 2007, a research team from MIT, Stanford, and Carnegie Mellon conducted a study that used fMRI technology to examine how the brain reacts when consumers from Western countries shopped for clothing. They discovered that the brain shows greatly increased activity when we shop (Knutson et al.). The researchers concluded that consumers gain direct pleasure from shopping but they gain an even greater pleasure from receiving a bargain. This aspect of seeking affordability and style is central to the appeal of fast fashion. At the core of it, fast fashion's core objective revolves around optimizing the supply chain and leveraging globalization to access low-cost labor and international markets.

To provide a preview of how MNCs work with intricate consumer input and the latest trends within seconds, here is a case study of Zara, one of the biggest fast fashion brands in the world. They use various methods to keep up with the current trends. Zara's distinctive strategy revolves around agility and customer-centricity (Ledezma). With 300 in-house designers and feedback from global store managers tracked via information technology (IT), Zara swiftly collects and utilizes real-time sales data and customer demand insights. This data informs designers, enabling the rapid creation of new designs, swiftly outsourced to factories for production. Zara's seamless process ensures a constant stream of fresh fashion designs,
bypassing traditional cycles and meeting consumer demands promptly. This approach solidifies Zara's position as a fast fashion leader, consistently delivering the latest trends to an ever-changing market.

Understandably so, it is evident that this poses numerous implications for both the producers and the consumers in the fashion industry. Producers might face pressures related to supply chain efficiency, environmental responsibility, and ethical considerations in labor practices. On the other hand, as a consumer personally, I enjoy affordable and trendy clothing but face implications related to frequent consumption, environmental impact, and ethical awareness. As the industry evolves, balancing these implications becomes increasingly crucial for sustainability and ethical practices within the fashion ecosystem.

Environmental and Consumer Responsibility

Bin Shen (2014) found that famous fashion brands such as Benetton, H&M, Zara, Adidas, and C&A were blamed for the non-sustainability of the environment. Nonetheless, many companies are much more conscious of the conservation of the environment and green practices. As the fashion industry has a huge impact on the global environment, conscious consumers are growing social and environmental awareness which has a direct influence on co-fashion consumption. Consumers have begun to gain the understanding that if the supply chain is sustainable then more natural resources will be used with the least carbon dioxide emission in the environment.

With more than 3100 stores across 53 markets, the Swedish company H&M launched a campaign called "Conscious Action" that has increased employment opportunities in developing nations, increased the use of recycled resources in production, and taught consumers to be more ethical. All of these factors have combined to make the market more sustainable in terms of the economy, society, and environment. Nevertheless, the changing dynamics of the fashion industry have forced retailers to cut the cost of design, production, and even the profit margin which ultimately added speed to the market. Following the 1990s, there was a significant shift in the global fashion sector that coincided with environmental concerns about fair trade and the green market of the future.

Additionally, it showed that buyers were willing to pay a premium price for environmentally friendly products. The rise of eco-consciousness among consumers presents a
significant opportunity for the fashion industry. Multinational campaigns that successfully integrate environmental responsibility can benefit both fashion and the environment, while also paving the way for promising research and development (R&D) for companies like H&M.

Studies have shown that young consumers in Canada and Hong Kong, in particular, exhibit a strong awareness of environmental sustainability when it comes to fast fashion (Annamma Joy et al, 2012). This growing trend presents a valuable market segment for companies that can demonstrate a commitment to eco-friendly practices.

There's a clear corporate social responsibility (CSR) for fashion companies to embrace eco-friendly production methods. By implementing sustainable practices throughout the production process, companies can attract environmentally conscious consumers and further motivate them to make eco-conscious purchasing decisions. Research from the Korean Society for Clothing Industry supports this notion, indicating a positive correlation between a company's environmental values and consumer purchasing behavior (Byung-Sook Hong, 2010).

However, it's important to acknowledge that the impact of CSR efforts can vary geographically. Other studies suggest that corporate social responsibility initiatives may have a differing impact on a nation's socioeconomic culture depending on the specific context. Therefore, companies need to be mindful of tailoring their sustainability efforts to resonate with the specific values and priorities of their target markets.

**Conclusion**

Growing up, I reveled in the thrill of chasing fashion trends, my wardrobe a revolving door of fast fashion finds. But everything changed during college when a documentary exposed the darker side of the industry. Suddenly, my passion for fashion was overshadowed by guilt and a newfound sense of responsibility. Determined to make a change, I delved into the world of sustainable fashion, educating myself on eco-friendly materials and fair labor practices. It wasn't easy to break away from the allure of fast fashion, but with each conscious decision, I felt a sense of empowerment.

My journey mirrors the industry's shifting landscape. While fast fashion still dominates, there's a growing movement towards sustainability. Even giants like H&M are pivoting towards more responsible practices. In conclusion, consumer consciousness plays a pivotal role of in
reshaping the fashion industry. By making informed choices and supporting ethical brands, we wield significant influence. Together, we can steer the industry towards a more sustainable and socially responsible future.

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Consultation Reflections

Charvi Beniwal  Writer

My passion for writing and my interest in fashion were well-established before I came to Denison. But what really piqued my interest in this area was the "Ethics of Getting Dressed" W101 class taught by Dr. Kelsi Morrison-Atkins. My eyes were opened to the nuanced ethical issues weaved throughout the fashion industry by investigating the complex intersections of gender, sexuality, religion, and more. When the time came for our final research paper, I was drawn to the topic of sustainable fashion. The inspiration came from Lucianne Tonti's book "Sundressed," which offered a glimpse into a future where natural fibers reign supreme, gleaned from Tonti's firsthand experiences in diverse settings like farms and fashion houses.

My goal was to trace the evolution from fast fashion to sustainable fashion while addressing the nuanced challenges inherent in this transition. To diversify my understanding, I delved into academic scholarships on fast fashion and analyzed the consumer consumption model within the industry. It became evident that the rapid turnover of trends in fast fashion came with harmful implications, prompting me to explore both the steps taken and those yet to be implemented to mitigate these effects.

Initially, my ideas were scattered across the page in my first draft. However, after seeking consultation from the writing center, I was able to organize my thoughts and craft a more cohesive research paper. The revision process benefited from the expertise of the writing center consultants, who provided valuable suggestions to polish my final paper and address technical issues such as citations. My strengths were mostly the well-articulated arguments about topics but they needed to be elaborated more in some areas. I managed to work on those things and submit a well-versed paper. All in all, the journey from initial inspiration to the completion of my research paper was very fulfilling and I think I have grown a lot as a writer.

Henry Shaw  Writing Center Consultant

“The Ethics of Getting Dressed” immediately caught my attention when I first read it thanks to the incredibly well written research analysis. The essay covered the changes in fashion norms and consumer culture over time as there has been increased consciousness around environmental/sustainability concerns with the industry. Charvi displayed a ton of interest in the subject that reflected in her writing, and I was thoroughly impressed by the quality research that was performed and displayed to support her claims. When reading through her essay, I thought that overall it was a strong work, but there were a handful of small tweaks that could help the writing grow. During our consultation, we had a really positive conversation about the writing process. We covered working on establishing a more concrete timeline of the evolution of fashion in her paragraph covering the background information. A highlight of our consultation was figuring out ways we could put more of her voice and personal experience with fashion into the essay. In the initial draft, she talked about herself a little bit, but we both agreed that her writing on the subject of fashion could be strengthened if she made her coverage more personal. We also worked on strengthening the conclusion, pushing through to find the best ways possible to put a cap on the already great writing. This consultation felt like a great example of how the Writing Center helps students express themselves within their writing. We encourage writers to be themselves, and strive to express their personality through their work the best that they can.
Transgender Women in the Athletic World

Corvus Endo

This paper was originally developed for a Writing 101 course taught by Dr. Chris Crews.

Introduction

Transgender women and the legitimacy of their womanhood are under constant scrutiny in the modern media. The issue of their belonging in the athletic world further inflames this scrutiny. Those who are opposed to transgender women being included in women’s events argue that there is an unfair biological advantage, specifically in terms of the physical strength of a transgender woman in comparison to a cisgender woman, due to a difference in their birth sex.

In this essay, I will use the following terminology: cisgender (cis) means people who identify with their sex assigned at birth. Transgender (trans) means people who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth. For example, a trans woman is a person born male who then transitions into and identifies as female. Assigned female at birth (AFAB) is an umbrella term for people whose sex is female at birth but then later transition and identify with a gender different from their sex. Assigned male at birth (AMAB) is an umbrella term for people whose sex is male at birth but then later transition and identify with a gender different from their sex. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) refers to the replacement of one's biological sex hormones for the other. Gender-affirming surgery can mean either top surgery, a surgery that feminizes or masculinizes the chest, or bottom surgery, a surgery that changes the sex of the patient’s genitalia. Transmisogyny is a term that is defined as when a trans woman is ridiculed for not fitting into societal gender norms for women or expressing masculinity (Serano 2016, 14).

Oppositional sexism is defined as “the belief that female and male are rigid, mutually exclusive categories” (Serano 2016, 13). Those in opposition to trans women in women’s sports believe that being born a male and having undergone male puberty, the male hormones and muscle mass make trans women superior to cis women. Some even argue that even after trans women take HRT for one year, not even the best female athletes can compete against them. This paper focuses on the question of whether or not transgender women genuinely have an unfair biological advantage over their cisgender counterparts and if athletes who were born male are still athletically superior to women post-transition.
Scientific Data and Research

The debate around the physical advantage transgender women have in sports primarily focuses on comparing the difference in testosterone levels between cisgender and transgender women. The consensus in the scientific community is that cis men have a physical performance advantage over cis women because cis men typically have higher testosterone levels than cis women. (Jones et al. 2016, 713) found that after trans female athletes undergo 12 months of HRT, testosterone levels decrease significantly and are comparable to those of an AMAB individual who is castrated. Additionally, the muscle mass of the trans female patient decreases after a year of HRT (E. Alliance). This data is crucial to supporting the argument that once undergoing HRT for a year, a trans female athlete should not only be allowed to compete in women’s events but also be justified as it proves their strength to be comparable. Safer (2022, 2) suggests that prepubescent trans children should compete in the category they prefer since there is no athletic difference between AFAB girls and AMAB boys before puberty. The typical male puberty consists of a rise in testosterone levels and a lowering of estrogen levels, which contributes to a bigger stature post-puberty. The issue, however, lies in the fact that those opposed to trans women competing in women’s events argue that even after undergoing HRT post-male puberty, trans women would still have an advantage over their cis competition. Hilton and Lundberg (2020, 201) affirm that cis men perform better athletically than cis women because of the testosterone boost during male puberty, which tends to get extrapolated into the argument that trans women still have a biological advantage in strength and endurance over their cis counterparts since 12 months is not a long enough timeframe to suppress the male advantage. Hemoglobin counts are higher in the cis male population than in the cis female population, but after three months of HRT, most trans women experience a decrease in hemoglobin levels comparable to the level of cis women (Cheung et al., 2023, 4).

Hemoglobin count is especially significant for endurance sports since it transports oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. The more hemoglobin prevalent in a person’s bloodstream, the longer they can endure. However, after undergoing HRT for only 3 to 4 months, hemoglobin levels in trans women are depleted and equal to those in cis women. They are consistently maintained at that level, according to some studies that lasted up to 36 months (Harper et al., 2021, 7). Harper et al. (2021, 6) speculate that lean body mass (LBM) and strength decrease significantly after a trans woman undergoes anywhere between 12 and 36 months of
HRT. However, in some cases, the strength values are still higher than those of cis women. E. Alliance (2021, 5) affirms that HRT does decrease a trans woman’s strength and concludes that the levels of LBM and strength are still within the normal distribution for cis women. Cheung et al. (2023, 7) concluded that trans women who have been on HRT for roughly 39 months have fat mass and lean mass that is comparable to that of their cisgender counterparts. Conflicting conclusions between scientific sources make the debate surrounding trans women in sports confusing because the effects of HRT are not the same for every trans woman. However, it is undeniable that society’s perspective on trans women is what makes or breaks their inclusion in women’s sports.

**Cultural Issues and Societal Gender Norms**

People typically focus on the science behind transitioning because of the societal norm that masculinity and femininity are separate and unchangeable.

This harsh and unfair judgment of trans women is rooted in transmisogyny since they are expected to uphold femininity and reject all traits of masculinity, including muscular strength. Hargie et al. (2016, 255) interviewed both trans male and female athletes and found that both experienced adverse mental and physical health problems when excluded from the preferred gendered event. Exercise becomes complicated when one is discriminated against when stepping onto the field. Trans women especially undergo immense social pressure from the media to look feminine enough to pass as female. However, they are also accused of simplifying femininity down to wearing dresses and makeup (Serano, 2016, 15). The argument that femininity is based on physical appearance is crucial since many people will criticize the physical appearance of trans women in sports.

When reviewing all of the sources in this paper discussing the science behind the strength of a trans woman after over a year of HRT, there is a common weakness: the lack of data. Trans athletes are a new topic in the scientific community, and not many studies have reliable test subjects or tests. Thus, it is difficult to argue whether trans women are comparable to their cis counterparts after only 12 months of HRT. What is not difficult to argue, though, is how society’s take on trans women can influence the debate of whether or not they belong in women’s sports.
Main Analysis

Testosterone, LBM, and hemoglobin are the three central values most scientific researchers are concerned with when determining the advantage trans women have over cis women. Testosterone is an important hormone that can boost lean muscle mass, muscular strength, and hemoglobin levels (Harper et al., 2021, 1). This hormone is the value most often brought up because it enhances many different aspects of the athlete. Due to the testosterone boost cis men experience during puberty, cis men have a physical advantage over cis women that is so significant that it is crucial to have events separated by sex to promote fair competition (Hilton and Lundberg, 2020, 201).

The effects of cis male puberty are not irreversible, however. Some trans women who undergo HRT for just 12 months experience a substantial depletion in LBM, and their levels are comparable to those of a cis woman (E. Alliance). As mentioned previously, after undergoing only 3 to 4 months of HRT, the hemoglobin levels in trans women are depleted and are comparable to cis women. As a result, the depletion of hemoglobin levels is consistently maintained after continuous HRT treatment (Harper et al., 2021, 7). Some trans women, however, may still have an advantage over cis women since it may not deplete LBM and strength at all in a span of 1 to 3 years (Harper et al., 2021, 8).

When analyzing the science behind transitioning, it seems logical that trans women, after anywhere between 12 and 36 months, should be allowed to compete in women’s events. The “biological advantage” they are perceived to have is reduced significantly or eliminated, depending on the patient. Regardless of the science, however, many people seem to be fixated on trans women’s biological birth sex instead of accepting that HRT can indeed create a level playing field for trans and cis women. This begs the question: if the science behind transitioning supports trans athletes, why are people still opposed to trans women in women’s sports? The answer lies in the cultural and societal norms that influence this debate.

Even after undergoing intensive HRT, trans women are held under the societal bias that they will have superior athletic ability over cis women because they were born male (Safer, 2022, 1). This societal bias plays into the concepts of transmisogyny and oppositional sexism. Trans women are questioned about the legitimacy of their identity through both biological and societal means. As a result, transmisogyny is incredibly harmful since trans women are ridiculed whenever they show any trace of masculinity but are also mocked by cis men for losing their
masculinity (Serano, 2016, 17). This also becomes an issue when even cis women are accused of being trans because they have “masculine” traits such as being “too tall” or “too strong” for a real woman. Oppositional sexism and transmisogyny go hand-in-hand because oppositional sexism is what supports transmisogyny. Without believing that there are distinct differences between cis men and women, you cannot criticize someone who is trans and expressing both masculine and feminine traits.

This constant criticism from transphobic people can make exercising difficult for trans women and men alike since it can feel like their every move is being observed. Trans people are more discriminated against and violently attacked than other LGBT identities, which causes an increase in psychological distress, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts (Hargie et al., 2016, 226). This predisposition to having poor mental health makes trans people more likely to avoid public areas and situations where they can be harassed for being trans, such as gyms (Jones et al., 2016, 702). Exercise and maintaining a healthy body weight are crucial for gender-affirming surgery, but having a fear of being at a public gym and not exercising has additional negative physical and mental health effects (Hargie et al., 2016, 229). For example, the fear of being outed at a public gym is terrifying enough for trans people. Specifically for trans woman athletes, the fear of being scrutinized, outing, and legislatively barred from competing in women's events threatens not only their participation in sports but their athletic identities and careers, illustrating a dire need for more inclusive and protective measures in sports and exercise spaces.

To reiterate, all sources and scientific data on this essay and the subject of trans women in sports and the effects of HRT overall are scarce, as the subject is relatively new. This, unfortunately, makes the spread of misinformation more prevalent in the discourse surrounding trans women in sports. Typically, conclusions like “transwomen [sic] competing in sports may retain strength advantages over cisgender women, even after three years of hormone therapy” (Harper et al., 2020, 8) will be cherry-picked as evidence by anti-trans activists. Any evidence that supports trans women being able to compete on the same level as cis women will be ignored and dismissed. This is a dangerous practice that can make those uneducated on the topic of trans women in sports believe that trans women have an unfair advantage. This is not only scientifically untrue but also morally untrue as no trans woman transitions with the sole purpose of winning athletic competitions. Having as many people with a pro-trans stance as possible can allow for trans healthcare advocacy to spread and eventually become widespread across the
United States. If there is enough public outcry and support for anti-trans bills, however, it can be harder for trans female athletes to obtain any healthcare to allow them into women’s sports. The International Olympic Committee’s trans policies dictate the NCAA and professional sports’ trans policies. Even if America’s federal government bans legal HRT, that decision does not change the Olympic Committee’s policies. This would indicate that trans women would not be able to compete unless they obtain HRT through any means which would be illegal and also dangerous. The FDA would be unable to regulate what hormones are being used in HRT, meaning trans women obtaining hormones from illegal means would not know about what they would be injecting into their bodies.

Trans women athletes face significant challenges in professional sports, not only due to the physiological adjustments required by hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for fair competition but also from the compounded effects of transmisogyny, oppositional sexism, and legislative obstacles that amplify discrimination and jeopardize their inclusion in women's sports. After anywhere between twelve and thirty-six months, their testosterone, LBM, and hemoglobin levels may either be equal to or above those of cis women. Trans women experience transmisogyny and oppositional sexism, two forms of discrimination pushed onto trans women that work together to put an even larger target on trans women’s backs. The scarcity of data can lead to misinformation, political bias against trans women in women’s sports, and finally, more anti-trans bills as politicians are bombarded by an onslaught of anti-trans activists. The gap in knowledge on the topic of the biology of trans women and HRT likely won’t be closed in the next decade, but hasty decisions should not be made because of this gap. For the time being, however, trans female athletes must play the waiting game to see the fate of their inclusion in women’s sports.
Bibliography


Consultation Reflections

Corvus Endo  Writer

This paper was originally written for my Writing 101: Power, Ethics and Justice class with Professor Chris Crews (W101-23). I have always loved writing since I was very young, but I unfortunately have not learned any grammar skills. In high school I took AP English Literature which was the only difficult English course I took. Since coming to Denison, my writing skills have improved exponentially and I think it can only improve from here. The paper I am submitting for Prologue is my first-ever research paper which is thrilling. Because it was my first research paper, however, this was a very difficult undertaking. I was concussed when the first two drafts were due so I gave an incredibly barebones outline for the submission of the first draft and added the first few paragraphs on the submission of the second draft. I had to get help from my professor to complete the minimum requirement for scientific articles, but that was mainly due to the topic being niche and scarce in research articles. I procrastinated finishing this research paper until midnight the day before it was due. I wrote for 7 hours straight, sent it to a friend for revisions before going to sleep, woke up a few hours later, edited the paper, and then finally submitted it.

My experience with consultation, revision, and editing with my advisor Tenzin Kunga was phenomenal. I believe my original paper was strong in that I covered all of my bases and ensured the scientific articles I used were relevant to the topic and the thesis I had written. The time crunch I had imposed upon myself was the ultimate weakness, and I think I could have been more thorough in my commentary. Tenzin was fantastic. She complimented my strengths in the paper and pointed out my weaknesses with suggestions on how to improve it. Tenzin herself is a very persuasive person and writer and suggested very strong edits that have helped me polish my paper. She was very supportive, warm, and encouraging throughout the entire writing process. Since I am open to advice and suggestions, revision is always an easy process for me. Tenzin made it even easier with her kindness and her strong skills in writing.

Tenzin Kunga  Writing Center Consultant

During my consultation with Corvus, we focused mainly on refining the clarity and depth of the arguments presented in his paper titled "Transgender Women in the Athletic World." My favorite parts of the consultation were working through general modifications to phraseology together- Corvus and I are very similar in our enthusiasm for “satisfying” word/sentence combinations, so we had a lot of fun brainstorming creative synonyms and phrases together. He’s also just an incredibly strong writer and is open to any and all suggestions, so it was really gratifying to his ideas crystallize into even more polished and persuasive arguments as our session progressed. By engaging in a collaborative dialogue that encouraged Corvus to explore alternative phrasings and refine his arguments, we upheld the center's commitment to developing critical thinking and effective communication skills.
Beyond the Binary: An Exploration of the Implications of Gender Binaries in Fashion and Choice

Taylor Hardin

Paper originally developed for a Writing 101 course taught by Dr. Kelsi Morrison-Atkins.

There is a pretty good chance that everyone reading this paper will have one thing in common: they are wearing clothes. Clothing serves a greater purpose than simply avoiding public nudity; clothing can say a lot about a person, and people can use their clothing to say a lot about themselves. But, what happens when someone’s choice in clothing tells a story that others do not want to hear, cannot understand, or refuse to respect? What if the ways in which a person chooses to dress contradict the ways in which they are perceived by others? In instances such as these, a person may feel that their gender identity is invalidated, simply because of the clothes they wear. Although we may not think about it, our clothing choices, and perceptions of others based on their clothing choices, are heavily influenced by internalized gender binaries perpetuated by gender norms. Gender binaries, gender norms, and gendered stereotypes can create expectations which govern people’s fashion choices. This can be especially harmful for those whose fashion choices do not fit into the stereotypical categories of “boy” or “girl,” “man” or “woman.” Because of laws which mandate clothing in the United States, everyone is subject to the harmful effects of gender binaries, norms, and stereotypes influencing their choices in fashion. Essentially, people do not have the freedom to choose how they want to dress independently of the influences of gender norms and gender binaries. Fashion freedom can be taken away as soon as someone walks into a gendered clothing store, decides to wear something which doesn’t quite align with outside perceptions of their gender identity, or dresses their daughter in blue and orange and lets their son wear a dress. This problem, this lack of autonomy, affects us all and, unless a change is made, it will continue to affect future generations’ relationship with clothing, choice, and gender.

There is a limited quantity of scholarship interrogating the topic of choice and gender binaries, but, nonetheless, pre-existing scholarship can help us understand the implications of gender binaries on choice. Paoletti (1949/2012) defines gender as “cultural differences between men and women, based on...biological differences...” (p. 1). Gender shapes the ways in which people are perceived by others. This is important to understand because the subconscious attribution of gender norms to people creates expectations surrounding the ways in which
different people should dress based on their gender. Gender norms are traditional roles associated with people based on their gender identity or society's perception of their gender identity. For instance, whenever you see a woman, you may subconsciously attribute her with cultural and societal gender norms for women; the same goes for men, nonbinary, and gender-queer people. Gender is directly correlated with fashion because clothing is used as the outward expression of one’s identity. If you saw that same woman wearing a tuxedo, you might attribute her with masculinity and label her as gender-queer or nonbinary because the idea of a woman in a tuxedo goes against traditional gender norms. As a result, the woman could be negatively affected by your projecting your ideas of gender norms onto her. For many people, like this imaginary woman, gender identity is heavily expressed through their clothing choices and interactions with clothing, dress, and fashion in general. Moreover, someone’s relationship with clothing may or may not align with their gender norms. However, because gender norms have helped create the idea that different genders should have their own relationship with fashion, gender binaries are imposed on fashion. Gender binaries refer to the stigma surrounding the idea that there are only two genders (biological male and female) which group people's behavior into traditional male/female cultural, traditional roles (Eisend & Rößner, 2022). Not all people identify as either male or female, and not all people dress within the boundaries of gender norms. Therefore, my work aims to bridge the gap between the pre-existing literature and findings related to gendered clothing in order to see where choice fits into the relationship between clothing and gender norms.

Understanding the definition of gender, gender norms, fashion, etc. are important to the understanding of this paper as a whole; therefore, a glossary is provided following the conclusion of this paper. These definitions help the reader understand my position on the topic of gendered fashion and my central argument which is that people living in the United States do not have complete autonomy over their clothing choices. I attest that this is largely because of the ways in which gender binaries shape the perception, production, and consumption of fashion in the United States. However, because of this topic being under researched, I advise further reading from scholars I have not included in this paper.

Historically, clothing trends have been shaped by the gendered perception of fashion, clothing, and dress. This can be seen when looking at the history of children’s clothing. This might sound strange, but, you think about it, doesn’t children’s fashion always try to imitate adult
fashion? According to Paoletti, this is exactly what happened in the late 1880s. By looking into the history of gendered fashion as it moved from Europe to the United States through the years 1880-2011, Paoletti (1949/2012) found that children’s clothing served primarily in transitioning more indifferent ideas about clothing to very opinionated, gendered ideas about clothing. Through her investigation, Paoletti (1987), found that, although we may think of clothing, especially children’s clothing, as customarily, historically, and traditionally, gendered this is not entirely the case. In the past, children were not subject to the gender roles they are today, and the majority were dressed in long, white, genderless dresses from birth until he or she could walk (Paoletti, 1987). These dresses were then replaced with shorter, looser dresses until the ages 2-3 when they were replaced with another dress or suits with short skirts until the child turned 6 (Paoletti, 1987). Around age 6 is when clothing began to differ between boys and girls, but all children’s dress from that time period would be associated with femininity and women’s wear today. In fact, children’s clothing did not start becoming gendered until the 1920s, despite the “rules” which govern adult fashion having been around and observed since the mid-1800s (Paoletti, 1987). There is not a known reason for the shift, but historical events such as the women’s liberation movement and the gay rights movement as well as political affiliations contributed to the movement towards gendered children’s clothing (Paoletti, 1949/2012). I hypothesize that these historical events led to a push for reiteration of gender norms in more conservative spaces, but more research is needed to fully understand why children’s clothing became gendered.

Because of the change during the 19th century in which children’s clothing became gendered, and consequently reflective of adult dress, the days where babies are all dressed the same, regardless of their sex, are largely in the past (Paoletti 1949/2012). The implications of this cultural shift, from genderless to gendered children’s clothing affected all of fashion from the 1920s on because children began being raised in households where men and women dressed differently and distinctly; child’s clothing mimicked this change. As a result, children grew up with gendered clothing ideals subconsciously ingrained in their minds, and generations after them have continued to dress largely based on their respective gender norms (Paoletti, 1949/2012). The effects of this can be seen in the fashion industry today (think of onesies which read “Daddy’s Girl” or “Momma’s Boy” (Paoletti, 1949/2012) and help explain the collective loss of autonomy for our fashion choices. What is reiterated by the media, pushed by companies,
and perpetuated by advertisement becomes “normal” to us. In the case of clothing, gendered clothing has become the norm and continues dominating the fashion industry today.

Another aspect of fashion, color, plays into the gender binaries which shape perceptions of fashion and limit fashion freedom, because colors themselves have become gendered. For example, many people associate the color pink with girls and/or femininity and the color blue with boys and/or masculinity (Hurlbert & Ling, 2007). This is due to historical ideas about gendered color dating back to Nazi Germany which pushed the association of pink with femininity in the 1930s (Paoletti & Kregloh, 1989). Additionally, post WWII, men’s uniforms were almost exclusively blue. Thus, blue became associated with masculinity and, from the 1940s onward, pink and blue set the standard for gendered colors (Frassanito & Pettorini, 2008). Despite the idea that there are sex differences between color preferences is debunked by a survey conducted by Hurlbert & Ling (2007) who found that the correlation between sexes and color preference is not strong at all. Yet, largely because of gender norms, the idea that color can be gendered remains. The idea of gendered color is reiterated in our society by the fashion industry who uses gender norms to its advantage.

The fashion industry seeks to use gendered colors to appeal to different types of people, betting on the fact that girls and women will buy more colorful, smaller, tighter clothing, and boys and men will buy baggier, more neutral clothing. Additionally, personal experience shows that the children’s sections of clothing stores are heavily gendered. Oftentimes, the “girl’s” clothing section contains “feminine” colors such as pink and purple while the “boy’s” section contains “masculine” colors such as blue, red, and green. This not only limits the fashion freedom from parents or children who might not want to adhere to gendered fashion norms, but it contributes to gender stereotyping and the subconscious gendering of fashion in people’s minds.

For example, a mother may struggle to decide whether to let her daughter wear looser, more comfortable, and more modest “boy’s” clothing or adhere to gender norms and dress her daughter in smaller, tighter, uncomfortable “girl’s” clothing to avoid questioning, teasing, and bullying at school. In an effort to spare her daughter from inappropriate questions about her gender identity, the mother subconsciously reinforces gender norms, and her daughter learns that clothing choices need to be made with one’s gender identity in mind. In situations such as these, whenever we adhere to fashion norms, specifically gendered ones, we are reiterating the stereotypes which perpetuate gender norms in fashion for generations to come.
The children’s section of clothing stores isn’t the only place where gendered clothing shows up. In almost every department or retail store I have been in, all of the clothing being sold is marketed towards a specific gender. Some stores such as Macy’s even have entire floors dedicated to “men’s” and “women’s” clothing. Because my gender identity and biological sex both align, I am privileged enough to feel comfortable shopping in the ‘Women’s Clothing’ section at pretty much any store. Not everyone shares this privilege, though, and some people may feel very uncomfortable shopping in gendered clothing sections. Some feel uncomfortable shopping for the clothing itself if the clothes they like defy the norms of their gender identity. However, it isn’t always the gendering of the clothing store which creates discomfort but the ways in which gender norms dictate people’s shopping habits.

Reilly & Barry (2020) argue that gender expression and fashion go hand-in-hand. This translates into gendered relationships with fashion between women, men, and everyone inbetween. Gupta & Gentry (2016) add to this by offering the idea that hegemonic gender norms often dictate the ways in which men and women shop for clothing and participate in fashion trends. This means that women, who are seen as more inclined to shop for and be interested in clothing, are given the responsibility to purchase clothing for their families. Men, on the other hand, are not. Thus, gender norms have a major influence on people’s relationship with fashion, and this can cause harm for people who want to participate in fashion but lack the freedom to do so without pushback. Paoletti (1949/2012), elaborates on this by stating that, “Fashion participation is very much a matter of gender. [Typically], women are expected to be aware of fashion, and they buy most of the clothing, not only for themselves but also for men and children” (p. 9). The gender binaries which associate women and the production and consumption of clothing have strengthened this stigma and “…solidified the “natural” conclusion that clothing and fashion [are] feminine...” (Reilly & Barry, 2020, pp. 6-7). In a similar manner, traditional masculinity governs the ways in which men, as well as women, interact with fashion. According to findings from a survey looking at the “…situational construction of male and female identities...when shopping for fashion products...,” (Gupta & Gentry, 2016), gender norms would suggest that men are supposed to have minimum, urgent interaction with fashion (Gupta & Gentry, 2016). According to Gupta & Gentry (2016), “by adopting...urgent buying behaviors, men are able to complete the shopping process in the shortest possible time...and communicate that they are neither too careful nor sloppy about their appearance.” Therefore, the idea of traditional masculinity is maintained and the individual is not perceived to make fashion
choices in the same way a woman would (Gupta & Gentry, 2016). I believe that the work of both Paoletti (1949/2012) and Gupta & Gentry (2016) come together to emphasize the impact that gender binaries have had on people’s relationship with fashion. It can be difficult to go against these gendered expectations and make fashion choices which go against the norm whenever your gender identity could be questioned. Sometimes, the safer option is to preserve your gender identity and succumb to a more limited choice in clothing.

Seeing that the shopping experience in and of itself is a gendered experience and that colors can be a contributing factor towards gendered fashion, it's not surprising that the ways in which people choose to wear their clothing is also a gendered experience. Unfortunately, it’s not uncommon to have your gender identity questioned when the clothes you wear do not fit the societal expectations placed on the biological sexes. Instead of taking the time to get to know someone or asking someone their preferred pronouns, assumptions are made by internal biases largely determined by how someone chooses to present themself through dress. According to Reilly & Barry (2020), this is “[b]ecause dress is the most visible tool to validate the male/female and masculine/feminine binary” (p. 11). Despite all of this, I believe that what has been socially constructed can be reformed. So, I agree with the authors when they state that dress can be used as “... the perfect tool to disrupt and transform it” (Reilly & Barry, 2020, p. 11).

If dress can be used to create harmful, constrictive, gender binaries in fashion, why can’t it be used to oppose them? In order for fashion to become a weapon against the implications of gendered fashion, people must be made aware of their lack of fashion freedom. They must know that the lack of autonomy in our clothing choices are a result of subconscious gendering of fashion in our minds. A transformation and disruption are needed, but gendered fashion has deep, centuries long roots which won’t give easily. If a change is to be made, it must be made through collective action. In order to regain control over our fashion freedom, we must begin to un-gender fashion. This can be done by advocating to rid the fashion industry of the gender binaries which place barriers on people’s fashion freedom. Advocation can happen through social media outreach, boycotting gendered fashion brands, or even educating those around you about the negative effects of gender binaries on fashion. No matter how you identify, everyone deserves to have the freedom to choose how to express themselves through clothing. If we work together, we can create a world in which everyone can wear what they want without having to adhere to gender norms or navigate gender binaries. Then, we will truly have fashion freedom in the United States.
**Glossary**

**Adult/Adulthood**- for the purposes of this paper—adulthood refers to ages 18+.

**Children/Childhood**- for the purposes of this paper—childhood refers to ages 0-7. **Fashion**- for the purposes of this paper—fashion refers to the outward expression of one’s identity, beliefs, and values though clothing.

**Gender**- “cultural differences between men and women, based on the biological difference between men and women” (Paoletti, 1949/2012, p. 1); “...distinctions in role, appearance, and behavior that are cultural in origin, but stemming from an individual’s sex (masculinity and femininity)” (Paoletti 1949/2012, p. 1).

**Gender Binaries**- for the purposes of this paper—gender binaries refer to the stigma surrounding the idea that there are only two genders (biological male and female) which group people’s behavior into traditional male/female cultural, traditional roles (Eisend & Rößner, 2022).

**Gendered Clothing**- clothing which fits into gender binaries; clothing designed or marketed to fit into categories of boy, girl, man, or woman.

**Gender Norms**- for the purposes of this paper—gender norms refer to the traditional roles associated with people based on their gender or society’s perception of their gender.

**Gender Stereotypes**- cultural assumptions about a person based on gender norms and the gender binary; assumptions based on assumed roles of masculine and feminine people which align with their biological sex.

**Sex**- “…biological...[male, female]” (Paoletti, 1949/2012, p.1)


https://openresearchlibrary.org/content/54fa0011-60f9-46b4-b21f-14e03aae2a21
Consultation Reflections

Taylor Hardin

Whenever writing my final paper for my Writing 101 course at Denison, I never anticipated that I would be submitting it to Prologue. I’ve written a fair amount of research papers, but I haven’t had much experience with revising an already completed research paper. So, this experience was very eye opening for me and served as a great learning opportunity. The topic for my research paper is gendered fashion and the implications of gender norms on clothing choice. It has stayed mostly the same even after revisions, but with the help of the Writing Center, I was able to make some small yet impactful changes to my paper. Since my initial paper was written for a class, I had some constraints, such as a word count, which limited my ability to really dive into my topic. Although my initial paper contained the necessary scholarship, some areas lacked the depth of my original thoughts. I worked with Juliana from the Writing Center to come up with more interesting and well rounded ideas to give my paper the depth it needed. Additionally, she encouraged me to take risks and write in my unique style rather than focusing solely on the scholarship. As a result of taking these risks, my confidence as a writer grew, and I was able to make fruitful additions to my paper. Juliana also gave me great tips in general about how to write clearly and fluidly. All of her help made me confident not only in my writing abilities, but in my paper itself. At the end of the process, it was evident that my paper became more personal and true to my writing style. Now, I have a paper that I am proud to share, and I hope others enjoy it too.

Juliana Zeller

In her essay “An Exploration of the Implications of Gender Binaries of Fashion and Choice,” Taylor Hardin analyzes the effects of gender binaries to what she terms “fashion freedom.” Her contextualization of the aspects of society and market that contribute to a lack of choice in the clothing industry call attention to under researched and underrepresented areas of gender studies. While Taylor’s initial draft was endlessly compelling in voice and the strength of its questioning, it lacked deeper exploration of some of its key points. During her first consultation with me in the Writing Center, Taylor worked to further immerse herself into understanding the implications of historical fashion trends and how they are contributing to or have been shaped by society. As a result, her second draft of revisions contained a more focused and specific survey of what inhibits the choices we make concerning the clothes we wear. Her final draft retains and enhances all the best qualities of the original. Taylor’s hard work reflects what I love so much about Denison’s Writing Center, as the changes she made were not simply topical. Our conversations led her to think deeper about what her argument needed, how to best utilize her sources, and even how to rearrange paragraphs to ensure the best parts of her argument were being highlighted at the right moments. Overall, her unique voice presents an investigation that simplifies us to what we have in common—clothing and choice—but digs into the nuances to ultimately question why that divides us.
The Skarsvold house had seemed like such an inviting place to him the first time he walked in the front door ... And yet, as he got to know them better, he’d begun to detect shadows in their relationships, drops of pure, corroding acid that suggested a sickness at the core. (Hart 210-11)

Like many mystery novels, Ellen Hart’s *A Whisper of Bones* places familial secrecy at the heart of her story. As readers eventually discover, in 1978 matriarch Eleanor beat her brother-in-law to death with a baseball bat. Eleanor decides to bury the body beneath the root cellar and allows her son Frank, who injured him with an ax, to believe that he has committed the murder. In her eyes, this action enables Frank to believe that he has behaved as a hero and serves as Eleanor’s way to maintain a veneer of respectability regarding the family and their legacy. Throughout the course of the novel, Eleanor desperately clings to her secret in an attempt to preserve a façade of normality, ironically creating the exact abnormal familial environment that results in the psychological and subsequent moral ruin of her son, Frank. Hart uses this central irony to illustrate the corrosive power of secrets, suggesting that an obsession with “the normal” can be particularly dangerous, especially when a person is willing to justify anything in service of that goal.

Eleanor, however misguided, believes that keeping her secret will protect Frank and allow him to grow from a “normal” boy into a “normal” man, ready to take his place in the family legacy. When bones are found in their root cellar, Eleanor claims that her father nailed it shut to prevent young Frank from getting injured, insisting that “he was a normal boy. If there was something dangerous to get into, he’d find it” (Hart 106). Eleanor regularly characterizes Frank as normal, in contrast to how the rest of the town perceives him. On the outside he is lazy and pathetic - a middle aged man living in his mother’s basement. However, her characterization unintentionally reveals a seed of doubt when she confesses that part of Frank is drawn to the deviant. While she
dedicates all her energies to guaranteeing a “normal” childhood for her son, Eleanor fears any chinks in the armor of the narrative she has spun for her perfectly Midwestern “Minnesota Nice” family (Hart 14). Eleanor encourages her son to exhibit traditional standards of masculinity like professional success and bravery as hallmarks of a “normal” man. Readers learn that Frank’s “mother had encouraged him to attend college [...] she wanted him to get into a respectable, money-making profession” (Hart 51). For Eleanor, Frank’s eventual success will prove that she made the right choice in keeping her secret. Eleanor, hiding the truth from Frank, believes, “he thought he was a hero,” and she “[tells] him as much,” urging Frank to view his crime as a heroic and manly act of protection (Hart 297). Projecting her desire for normality onto her son, Eleanor needs Frank to participate in her view of the family legacy. She tells him, “this is your house [...] it’s what you’ve always wanted” (Hart 231). Eleanor thus views Frank as the next in a long line of morally upstanding Skarsvold citizens who will inhabit their family home. In her mind such a continuance of the patriarchal line preserves a “normal” family. The secret at the heart of the novel, therefore, originates from Eleanor’s fixation with “the normal,” exemplified by her desire for Frank to conform to normality and adhere to her conception of legacy. However, despite all her attempts to preserve a respectable legacy, Eleanor’s secret soon irreparably destroys the family she tries to protect.

As a result of his mother’s secret, Frank grows into a man wracked with self-hatred, prone to violence, and suffocated by his codependency with his mother. In Chapter 6 when Hart introduces Frank’s point-of-view, she immediately reveals that he sees “himself as an underachiever,” trapped in his loveless accounting job, ignoring his dreams of becoming an artist (Hart 51). Perhaps if Frank had not learned so young about the cruelty of the world, he might have had more faith in his own ability to pursue his passion and escape the oppressive force of the secret buried beneath his family home. Although Frank tries to address his belief that he “[doesn’t] deserve happiness,” in therapy, his unwillingness to reveal his secret prevents him from receiving the care he needs to escape his cycle of depression and self-loathing (Hart 57). Frank harbors immense guilt from participating in the murder of Stewart Ickles who he attacked to prevent Stewart from kidnapping his son, Timmy. This guilt is compounded by the shame he experiences in hiding the truth from Wendy, his wife. Frank turns these feelings inward with no one to confide in, resulting in his overwhelmingly negative perception of self. While Eleanor has tried to convince Frank that his actions in 1978 make him a hero, there exists a disconnect in
Frank’s mind between the image his mother has created for himself and what he truly believes, as illustrated by his remark “I’m nobody’s hero. I hate that word” (205). Eleanor’s goal has backfired: instead of raising Frank to be a well-adjusted individual, she has doomed him to a life where he must constantly question what he knows to be true, both about himself and his mother. Frank’s self-hatred, an effect of his mother’s secret, demonstrates how seriously Eleanor’s picture-perfect family has been impacted by her lie.

Perhaps more disturbing is the fact that Eleanor’s secret, instead of providing her son with a “normal life,” results in a type of moral insanity where Frank does not take his own threats seriously, exhibiting a loss of conscience. Frank’s therapist warns him that “if [he] won’t face what happened… there will be consequences. Not just for [him], but for the people [he] love[s]” (Hart 179). Hart reveals one such consequence in Frank’s threat of violence against his wife. Frank has held on to a deep-seated anger ever since “the incident,” and because the wound of his family secret has not been aired out, Frank quickly turns that anger against the woman he loves, who can never understand him because she remains ignorant of his childhood trauma. Frank fears that his moral insanity will result in his harming of Wendy saying, “he was afraid he’d do something he couldn’t take back” (Hart 205). The fear that abounds in Frank’s psyche, stemming from the skeleton inside his closet, both prevents him from confiding in Wendy and has shaped him into this violent person willing to threaten his wife to ensure that his secret remains buried. Hart suggests that the great tragedy of A Whisper of Bones lies in how Eleanor’s decisions and Frank’s complicity have molded him into an abusive and manipulative partner, always more likely to lash out than ask for help. In addition to self-hatred and violent tendencies, Frank grapples with PTSD from the night Stewart Ickles was murdered (Hart 291). This mental health struggle results in his periods of disassociation where he remains somewhat unaware of the violence he enacts. When the dissociation occurs, Frank’s morality crumbles, exhibiting his moral corruption as an effect of the forced secret-keeping. Allowing Frank to believe that he dealt the fatal blow has severely hindered any chance Frank might have had at living a normal, healthy life. Thus, Eleanor inevitably causes her own son’s mental health challenges with the very secret she keeps to protect him.

Through her depiction of Frank’s relationship with his mother Eleanor, Hart reveals how the secrecy around that night in 1978 has created an unhealthy dynamic between the two characters. Eleanor, called “a shameless control freak whose sole mission in life [is] to prevent
[Frank] from having a life of [his] own,” by Frank’s wife Wendy, has damaged their relationship by tying Frank to a past which haunts him in the present (Hart 93). Whether intentional or not, Eleanor has engineered a life for Frank that constantly confronts him with the evidence of his crime. He cannot escape his mother’s basement, a part of the house suggestive of the repressed nature of the Skarrevold secret. His mother encourages him to remain underground to keep the secret, literally when she urges him to move back into the basement and figuratively in how she prevents Frank from unburying their family trauma. The original sin of the corpse buried in the garage has created a life for Frank where “the only world where he’d ever felt safe,” is the world of his own creation - his art (Hart 123). Eleanor’s insistence on normality has resulted in an intensely abnormal relationship where the roles of parent and child remain stuck in their childhood incarnations. Because of their intense codependency, the poison of secrecy bonds Eleanor and Frank together in a relationship that actively harms Frank especially, preventing either character from moving on with their life.

Eleanor’s obsession with normality fuels her delusion, allowing her to justify her own immorality and hypocrisy. Eleanor’s self-perception as a God-fearing, good Christian woman leads to her delusional view that she retains no culpability for the murder she committed. Even while driving away from the place where she disposed of the evidence of her crime, Hart shows us through Eleanor’s first person point of view that she describes herself “like Lot’s wife, [that] she’d turn into a pillar of salt if she dared look back” (Hart 4). The use of biblical allusion demonstrates that Eleanor deludes herself by identifying with biblical morality, thus exempting herself from the reality of her own actions. Eleanor’s need to control her own narrative quickly extends to her sister Lena who she treats like a stubborn stain that refuses to leave the otherwise pristinely white apron of her life. Lena represents a counter-cultural manifestation of what it means to be a woman, which Eleanor resents: “in Eleanor’s opinion, a seventy-year-old woman wasn’t supposed to listen to rock music, use the vocabulary of a sailor, or state her opinions as if they’d been whispered into her ear by God himself” (Hart 14). Lena, in stark contrast to Eleanor’s aprons and caramel rolls, does not abide by the societal expectations set up for her regarding her gender or her age. Thus, when Eleanor kills Lena in the latter half of the novel, this symbolic act represents Eleanor’s inability to accept anything out of the norm. Lena does not fit with the ideal family image she wishes to cultivate, so Eleanor kills her in an attempt to regain normality in the house and protect her secret. This very action reveals Eleanor’s hypocrisy: in a
desperate attempt to preserve her facade of normalcy she becomes a murderer - the antithesis of stereotypical womanhood. Even in the very end, confronted with the reality of her own arrest, Eleanor refuses to admit her fault, which proves detective Jane Lawless right in her statement that, “it almost always started with a story, a fiction that was created out of need and then the individual worked to believe it. Over time, that fiction replaced reality. The moral center collapsed” (Hart 300). Eleanor’s own psychological problems, chief among them her delusion, fuel her hypocrisy, turning her into a person unable to recognize her own abnormality and immorality.

In *A Whisper of Bones*, a mystery novel about the dangers of social norms, Hart depicts how Eleanor’s obsession with normality ironically leads to the total collapse and ruin of one Midwestern family. In doing so, Hart explores the ramifications of a fixation on “the normal” for society at large. While Hart presents Eleanor as the true villain of the novel, examining the motivations behind her lies reveals social conformity as the puppet master responsible for both the criminality and relationship disintegration in the novel. Using the unique format of a queer mystery novel, Hart masks biting social commentary within a murder mystery story; while readers are distracted by intrigue, red-herrings, and plot-twists, Hart encourages them to subconsciously consider the question: Would this tragedy have happened if all characters were not subject to the heteronormative pressure to fit themselves inside a box – to be exactly who society expects them to be? Despite Eleanor’s presumed arrest at the end of the story, Hart suggests that the driving force behind immorality in *A Whisper of Bones* - social normativity - is still very much at large.

**Works Cited**

Consultation Reflections

**Writer**

Ava King

I wrote “Normativity as the Root of Secrecy and Moral Degeneration in Ellen Hart’s *A Whisper of Bones*” for my Writing 101 class Queer Mysteries or Queer Detective Fiction with Dr. Sylvia Brown. My approach to the writing process was usually heavily dependent on the subject or discipline that I was writing for. At Denison, particularly because my Writing 101 class was very interdisciplinary, my writing style matured as I learned to weave together the styles of literary analysis with elements of gender theory and other considerations. For this paper, after reading Ellen Hart’s novel and considering normativity as a theme through which to analyze the novel I went through an editing process where I submitted the piece for feedback once before I received a final grade on it as the first paper of the semester. Then for our final I revisited the paper and with help from Dr. Brown changed the flow of ideas.

With help from the writing center I was able to consider ways in which I could improve my sentence coherence and structure as well as how much plot to discuss and where to place that information. Overall this process has illustrated how much my writing has improved since I started at Denison in the fall.

**Writing Center Consultant**

Lauren Ehlers

In her essay, “Normativity as the Root of Secrecy and Moral Degeneration in Ellen Hart’s *A Whisper of Bones*,” Ava King achieves a nuanced analysis of character, plot, and the psychological impacts of enforced normativity using textual evidence, wielding Hart’s words to drive home her own original argument. During our discussion of her essay, Ava and I focused on clarifying plot details, tightening paragraphs to avoid repetition, and finding opportune locations for the integration of contextual information. My favorite parts of our consultation were the “A-ha!” moments that came when we toyed with different syntax options and ultimately agreed about which worked best. To me, there seemed to be a shared sense that neither of us knew more than the other; we were merely spitballing until we found a version of the sentence that really clicked. I wanted to avoid phrasing suggestions as non-negotiable edits, so, after an instance where I feared I did that, I made a point of welcoming pushback on every proposed change for the rest of the consultation. This amendment speaks to the broader mission of the Writing Center, which is to give writers a place to sort through their ideas and steer their own work, without consultants making rules about what’s wrong and what’s right.
“Disability Porn”: A CBS Sunday Morning News Special
Tahlia Little
This paper was originally developed for a Writing 101 course taught by Dr. Nicole Green.

A rhetorical analysis seeks to explain the effect a piece has on its audience and if this was successful by examining the visual and textual choices an author made to achieve this goal. This kind of analysis focuses on the importance of rhetoric in writing and prompts the reader to consider how an author writes utilizing rhetoric. The following essay is an example of a rhetorical analysis of a multimodal artifact. This analysis of the CBS Sunday Morning News special “A quadriplegic mother on raising twins: Having a disability is not the end of the world” examines the American cultural thinking that disability is a negative thing.

This episode of CBS Sunday Morning News, narrated by Lee Cowan, was aired on June 11, 2023. This is about one year after the release of the documentary “Dani’s Twins” on May 28, 2022. The hit documentary prompted the news story following a young mother, Dani Izzie, and her family consisting of her husband, Rudy, and their twin daughters. The news story, targeted towards the typical Sunday Morning News audience, is a heartwarming piece that serves to inspire its audience to adapt and overcome their own challenges. In this video, CBS News interviewed Rudy and Dani, who, at the age of 23, slipped and fell on a bathroom floor, sustaining injuries that left her paralyzed from the chest down. The interviews mainly focus on Dani and how she has adapted to her disability to get married and raise twin girls. The news story shifts between interviews and clips of Dani adaptively living her everyday life, including working from home, doing household chores, and playing with and raising her children. Dani shares that throughout her life with disability, she has experienced a high level of scrutiny, as she has not shied away from sharing her story. Despite strangers questioning her, Dani and her husband, Rudy, are determined to change the mindset that living with a disability is inspiring. Dani’s mission is not to be a marvel to others but to be seen on the same level as everyone else.

While Dani states that she sees herself as an ordinary mom, the video repeatedly emphasizes that she is far from the typical parent and that experiencing motherhood with a disability is an extraordinary feat. This is accomplished through rhetorical choices made by the video’s producers to contrast the interviewee’s message that disability is not inspiring by telling the story in an inspiring way. This opposition overshadows the message of the disabled individual, thus furthering the societal norm of thinking of disabilities as anything but normal.
To begin, the CBS news story highlights Dani as extraordinary through the development of different segments that together logically tell Dani’s story in a setup that portrays her as an inspiration. The video begins with news anchor, Jane Pauley, introducing the story, followed by Lee Cowen introducing Dani and her family. The first segment displays images of a “normal” functioning family: a husband and wife reading and playing with their children. The narrator explains that Dani and her husband Rudy are raising twin girls, Lavinia and Georgiana. However, the next segment of the video shows what makes this family so interesting: Dani’s disability. The narrator explains that Dani is a quadriplegic. This is paired with images of Dani in her wheelchair, still taking care of her children, but with the help of her husband, Rudy. Following this, CBS includes background information about Dani’s injury and the hardships she faced immediately following it. The news story displays past images of Dani before, during, and after her accident, as well as interview segments. This is paired with Cowan’s description of her accident and disability that ensued. The remainder of the video includes where Dani is now with her personal, work, and family life. The CBS narrator updates the audience on Dani’s life by sharing how she manages to take care of her family and herself, as well as work a full-time job with a disability. The choice to organize the video in this specific way is an example of logos, a rhetorical strategy that appeals to the audience’s sense of logic and reasoning. This is achieved by logically transitioning between ideas, as each section focuses on a different aspect to portray the life of a normal family, the difficulties of disability, and the success of overcoming them. Overall, these sections work together to set up the video’s storyline to highlight how Dani surpassed challenges and thus, is inspiring for doing so much with her life while living with a disability.

The first section of the CBS news story functions as an introduction to the Izzie family and what the video is about. Although the audience becomes aware that the video is about a person with a disability, the first minute of the CBS story gives no indication of who is disabled or what their disability is. The very first line the audience hears is that “to have a child, it’s one of life’s biggest decisions, made immeasurably more difficult if a parent is disabled” (Cowan, 00:0:00-00:00:09). From the start of the video, CBS uses logos to set up the idea that while motherhood itself is challenging, this, paired with disability, is a new level of immense difficulty. Jane Pauley’s introductory comment introduces disability as a negative thing and establishes the idea that disability makes everyday tasks that are normal to society much harder than they are for
the able-bodied. The statement lets the audience know that the video includes a disabled individual but does not yet reveal who this is. Following this statement, CBS includes images and an interview with Dani, a mother of twins. These two aspects introduce the audience to what seems like a “normal” family: a mother, a father, and their two young daughters. This normalcy is reinforced by images of Dani and her husband, Rudy, reading and playing with their children, Lavinia and Georgiana. Furthermore, the CBS producers include the following interview statement from Dani: “I’ve had periods over the past two and a half years where I’ve been very tired, just like any other new mom, you know” (Cowan, 00:00:40-00:00:47). The inclusion of this statement further demonstrates the normal family dynamics of the Izzie household. Throughout the clips shown of the parents, the camera angle always shows Dani and Rudy at the same level (Figure 1). This establishes the parents as equals and leaves the audience wondering how disability comes into play in this CBS news story. Overall, highlighting Dani and Rudy as a “normal” family helps the audience to connect to the story and set up the later logic that disability contrasts the idea of “normal.”

Figure 1

Although the first section portrays an “average” family, the next minute of the video announces how disability plays a role in the Izzie family in that it alters the way Dani must adjust to care for her children. The switch from displaying normalcy to contrasting this with disability suggests the idea that disability is anything but normal. CBS utilizes a downward camera angle and appeals to logic and emotions to portray this message. To begin, the narrator explains that “alongside their parenting challenges, are their personal challenges. Dani’s especially” (Cowan, 00:00:54-00:01:01). This comment explains that Dani is the one who is disabled, which we are shown through the video clips of her in her wheelchair and being helped by Rudy. The word “especially” establishes Dani as the outlier of the family because she is the only one who is disabled. Furthering this logic, the video claims, “But thankfully, her paralysis isn’t complete” (Cowan, 00:01:07-00:01:10). This quote serves as both an appeal to emotions and logic.
Specifically, the word “thankfully” suggests that having full paralysis would be the worst thing that could happen to a person. Additionally, the word “thankfully” in this quote has a very positive connotation and appeals to emotion based on the logic it establishes. Because it sets up the logic that full paralysis is the worst possible outcome, this word evokes some emotions of hope or positivity, making it seem like Dani’s life is still worth living because she maintains some bodily movement. In addition to the use of rhetorical appeals, the video utilizes camera angles to further develop the idea that disability is not normal. This is done by capturing footage with a downward angle (Figure 2). The video clips change from being shot at eye level to looking down on Dani. This downward camera angle implies that disability makes a person weaker and inferior to able-bodied individuals, which supports the message in this section that disability is abnormal and negative.

Additionally, the middle of the video serves to give the audience background information on Dani’s disability. It does so through dark images of Dani after her accident that left her disabled. These images are an example of pathos, an appeal to emotions, that demonstrate the dark, difficult time Dani went through when her life drastically changed. After explaining that Dani became disabled when “she slipped on a bathroom floor and snapped her neck, paralyzing almost everything from her chest down,” the video displays images of Dani in the hospital immediately following the accident (Figures 3-4). These images are all very hazy, with dark color hues, contributing to a more serious, somber mood shift. These shadowy visuals function as emotional appeals, evoking sympathy by displaying Dani in such a vulnerable state. The images make the audience think about what a hard and awful time Dani went through, thus appealing to the audience’s emotions. While these images portray the overall background story of Dani’s accident, they also serve a deeper meaning. They work to support the overall message of overcoming obstacles. They serve as evidence of Dani at her lowest point in life, creating the base that her life turns up from here. The images contribute to the video’s inspirational message.
by showing the darkness Dani will later emerge from as she chooses to continue with her life and overcome adversity. Overall, this section of the video provides information about Dani’s disability and sets up for the future sections of the video that play off of this to demonstrate hope and inspiration.

Even though the previous section of the CBS news story portrayed Dani’s disability as negative, the next three minutes of the video reflect a happier time in Dani’s life by demonstrating her journey to finding a partner, marrying, and starting a family. This is portrayed through appeals to pathos and a change in the color value of images. Lee Cowan begins this section of the video by stating, “that tenacity in part is perhaps what led her to putting herself out there on dating apps. That’s where she met Rudy in 2016” (Cowan, 00:03:32-00:03:37). Through the use of the word “tenacity,” the narrator makes the claim that Dani is a warrior for finding the strength to pursue the dreams she always had: to have a family. This idea of strength evokes emotions of hope and optimism because Dani was able to overcome her obstacles and come out the other end successfully pursuing her goals. While the narrator discusses Dani’s tenacity, the video displays images that, compared to those from the previous section, are clearly much brighter (Figure 5). These brighter images further support the message that Dani is strong; thus, the audience feels pride and hope because the video clips have also shifted from dark to light. This shift demonstrates Dani’s strength to overcome the darkest parts of her life.

In contrast, after the birth of Dani’s twins is shown, Cowan states that Dani’s experience raising her kids was “pretty humbling” (Cowan, 00:06:36). This specific word choice delivers a more negative connotation, implying that Dani is less of a mother because of the challenges she faces raising children as a disabled person. Specifically, the use of the word “humbling” indicates a sense of inferiority and suggests that her status as a mother is lower than that of able-bodied mothers. This draws on the audience’s emotions of pity, making viewers feel sorry for Dani
because of the challenges she faces. Additionally, the images during this comment display differences in color value when they show Dani taking care of the children with Rudy versus taking care of them alone. One example of this can be seen in Figures 6 and 7, which are shown directly after one another. In addition to the specific word choice used in this segment of the video, the value of the images also supports the audience’s pride in Dani for accomplishing her goals, but also sympathy for the challenges she faces. This first image (Figure 6) is of Dani and Rudy sitting together, changing one of the twins’ diapers. The image has a lot of white and brighter shades of color. However, the following image is of Dani alone with both children (Figure 7). In this image, the colors are much more muted, and the room is much darker, with the only light coming from behind the closed drapes. This shift in color and light assumes that parenting is harder for Dani than for Rudy because she is disabled. Overall, this segment of the video suggests that although she was able to persevere, she still struggles more than others because she is disabled; thus, it is impossible to have a “normal” family if you are disabled.

![Figure 5](image1.png)  ![Figure 6](image2.png)  ![Figure 7](image3.png)

The final section of the CBS news story serves to establish the takeaway message that disability is inspiring, even though Dani urges people to use any word but inspiring to describe disabled people. This logic is set up by contrasting the way Dani wishes to be described with how the narrator describes her, as well as through the use of pathos. To begin this final section, Lee Cowan states, “And she does all of this while working a full-time job” (Cowan, 00:06:51-00:06:54). This vague statement evokes feelings of motivation and inspiration by emphasizing Dani’s achievements. This is particularly inspiring to the audience because Dani is not only taking care of twins but is doing so with a disability. While the statement does not necessarily point to both of these things, it can be inferred based on the topic of the video. Furthermore, Cowan further develops the message of inspiration by stating that, “Lavinia and Georgiana, now three, have unwittingly proven Dani’s critics all wrong. She’s thriving, and so
are they” (Cowan, 00:07:27-00:07:36). Once again, Cowan’s statement evokes feelings of inspiration by highlighting Dani’s perseverance in the face of criticism. While the video describes Dani as an inspiration, it is later noted that she wishes to be described as anything but that. The video includes the quote from Dani: “I wanna be seen as normal. I wanna be seen on the same level as everybody else. I don't need to be inspiring” (Cowan, 00:08:04-00:08:10). Dani’s personal comment starkly contrasts the ideas set forth by the video’s producers. While the video portrays Dani as an inspiration, she explains that she wishes not to be seen this way. This elicits the idea that although disabled people wish to be seen on the same level as everyone else, our perception of them as a society continues to do the opposite.

Even up to the end of the video, Dani reiterates that she wants to be seen as “normal,” however, the video repeatedly contrasts this by displaying Dani’s life with a disability as a remarkable feat and accomplishment. The CBS News producers succeed in doing this by logically setting up the video to support their purpose of the video as well as utilizing additional rhetorical strategies such as pathos, logos, color value, and camera angles within each section. The problem with the video’s message is that it perpetuates the idea that disability is not normal. This creates an issue in the sense that it reinforces the continuity of viewing disabled people in a way that separates them from the rest of society. Overall, because the video’s message rebukes Dani’s personal message, the video suggests that society will continue to ignore the pleas of the disabled to be seen and treated on the same level as everyone else. The video instead implies that the voices of the disabled are not enough to break the cycle of society always thinking of disability as a negative thing and that those who are successful despite their disability are an inspiration.

**Works Cited**


Consultation Reflections

**Writer**

Tahlia Little

My paper, titled “‘Disability Porn’: A CBS Sunday Morning News Special,” was written for Dr. Green’s first-year writing workshop “That’s Not Normal!: (dis)Ability, Equity, Access, and Advocacy” during the fall 2023 semester. The assignment was to find a multimodal artifact that exhibited disability to analyze how the text constructs the idea of disability through rhetorical appeals. As always with writing, I found the initial search for what to use to write about challenging. The initial part of writing is often the part that causes the most stress for me as a writer. I want to find just the right topic that will yield me ideas. Since being at Denison and conducting extensive writing, I have found that my confidence as a writer has grown with each assignment. Working with the writing center on this finished work was rewarding. The challenge was finding ways to tweak a transition or add a description to help explain what I was writing about. The consultation with the Writing Center allowed me to step back and be the reader of my paper rather than the author. I was able to see more clearly what I needed to adjust in my writing to strengthen and fine-tune my work.

**Writing Center Consultant**

Henry Shaw

When reviewing the Prologue submissions, the essay “‘Disability Porn’ A CBS Sunday Morning Special” stuck out to me as a fascinating review that touched on the realities of disability representation in the media. Tahlia’s writing is engaging as it includes detailed analysis of lighting and tone. During my read-through of her essay, I didn’t feel huge changes were necessary, as it already stood as a strong piece of writing. Our consultation was very productive, as the bulk of it was a blow-by-blow review of each section. We focused on crafting the essay to appeal more to an uninformed audience through better explaining the key terminology. We discussed paragraph length and structure, as well as quotation format. A key part of our consultation was working on the conclusion. We worked specifically on transitioning and how to best restate the argument and summarize her thoughts on the Special. This was a smooth consultation, as both Tahlia and I got our points across and had a good dialogue. This consultation, where the writer was given strong complementary feedback, is exemplary of the Writing Center’s desire to celebrate student writing hand in hand with helping to improve it.
Meet the Writers

Charvi Bernwal is an Economics and Data Analytics double major. Charvi finds joy in research papers that are open-ended as they afford him the freedom to explore his interests to the fullest.

Writing Advice: Writer's block is normal and happens to everyone!

Corvus Endo is an English Major and Ancient Greek and Roman Studies Minor on the Pre-Law Track. He enjoys writing heavy courses and his favorite part of the writing process is researching and putting ideas together.

Writing Advice: When stuck with writer's block, talk out the confusion with a friend or someone who will listen. They may give you an idea or you may figure it out yourself.

Taylor Hardin is a Religion and Black Studies double major. Taylor is a passionate writer and enjoys writing on topics that align with her interests in areas of social justice, human rights, and equality.

Writing Advice: When you can, bring your own options and writerly voice into your work. This will allow you to not just write a good paper, but to write a good paper which aligns with your personal values and beliefs.

Ava King is a Theatre and Women's and Gender Studies double major. For Ava, there is almost nothing more satisfying than crafting a well-made sentence for an academic paper. As a writer, she enjoys analyzing contradictions and paradoxes.

Writing Advice: Remember that your reader doesn't know the thoughts inside your head, you have to clarify what you mean so they don't make assumptions.

Tahlia Little is a Health, Exercise, and Sport Studies (HESS) major. Tahlia describes herself as a reluctant writer, and focuses most of her energy during the writing process towards pre-drafting and planning.

Writing Advice: Write until you get there and worry about fixing it later.
Meet the Consultants

Lauren Ehlers ’24 is an English Creative Writing major. Lauren has worked as a consultant for two years (four semesters), during which her favorite part has been engaging in discussions with new people about a practice she really loves.

Tenzin Kunga ’25 is a Psychology and English Literature double major, Journalism minor. She is finishing her first year as a consultant this semester. During her time at the WC, Tenzin has enjoyed meeting students from diverse backgrounds as each consultation has taught her something new.

Henry Shaw ’26 is an International Studies major and an Economics minor. Spring 2024 is Henry’s first semester at the WC, and the highlight of his time so far has been working alongside the supportive staff who encourage his own growth as a writer.

Juliana Zeller ’24 is an English Literature and Environmental Studies double major. Juliana has worked with the Writing Center for 3 years (5 semesters). Her favorite part about being a consultant is having conversations with students about different topics she wouldn't normally be introduced to in her own classes.

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All of our first-year writers for their courage in submitting their writing and openness to the collaborative revision process. Prologue is honored to showcase the outstanding quality of your work. We hope to see you at the WC again soon!

Rebecca Hurtado ’26
Prologue Editor-in-Chief