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**PERFORMING GENDER: AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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PROFESSOR GINA LAMB**

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I. Introduction

My time at Scripps has been a four year journey of learning to recognize, deconstruct and unlearn the problematic teachings that were instilled in me the 18 years preceding my college acceptance. Gender was one of the many concepts that Scripps has made me realize must be viewed critically, deconstructed and analytically questioned. After taking a slew of courses that discussed gender in a variety of contexts, it became clear that my gender was a facet of myself that I had incorrectly taken as a given before properly exploring. This past summer, I began questioning whether or not my desire to explore styles that veered off from the femme style that characterized the first two decades of my life meant that there needed to be an accompanying change in my gender identity. I began this semester ready to explore the concepts of gender expression and identity and my relation to the two through a change in clothing, makeup and hair and critical discussions with two non-cisgendered friends of mine.

Because the photographer inherently has control over how the subject's image is constructed, the interviews that I conducted with Jessi and Casey were essential. They were my way of giving control to them so that they could play an instrumental role in forming the representations of their own gender expressions. This way, the collaboration was authentic and individualized. For the three of us, I decided to create a series of nine digital photographs formatted into a grid, each showcasing one look that represented a way in which the person expressed their gender. I found great inspiration in Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills*^{1,2} because of Sherman's incredible transformations.

¹ See fig. 1

² See fig. 2

I also was inspired by Tomoko Sawada's works ID400³ and *Facial Signature*⁴, both of which comment on the notion of identity and show Sawada shot from the same angle with varying hair, makeup, and edited facial features. In my photo series, I used Photoshop to alter facial features in order to make them appear more feminine or masculine depending on the aim of the particular photograph. The resulting grid of photographs served the purpose of showing both the participant and the viewers the fluidity of gender expression that three AFAB individuals of different genders can express.

I also want to specify that this project is in no way meant to be a representation of all people who identify in the ways that the people included in this project do. It is not meant to encompass or speak for any one else but rather provide an inside look and discussion on the way in which three individuals have come to have the gender expression that they do and how they believe that expression relates to their gender identity.

³ See fig. 3

⁴ See fig. 4

II. Gender

Before delving further into my project, it is important to distinguish that there is a distinct difference between *biological sex*, *gender identity* and *gender expression*. While sex is something that is biological and determined at birth (i.e. male or female), gender expression (i.e. masculine or feminine or androgynous) and identity (i.e. boy or girl or gender-queer, etc.) are decided by each individual person. If the person's sex and gender align, they are considered cis, while opposing gender and sex are considered trans.

Androgyny is a middle ground between masculine and feminine. Femininity and masculinity are deeply rooted in their ties to the biological sex that they are associated with and the strict gender roles that are prescribed to males and females. For example, according to social norms, a masculine identifying person should act in a masculine manner and behave in a dominant, competitive, and independent way⁵. All three of the individuals I photographed are considered to be AFAB or assigned female at birth. I chose to only include people in this group because I wanted to focus individuals who had started their lives as the same sex as I did and who therefore experienced many of the same societal pressures regarding femininity that I had.

That being said, because femininity and masculinity are socially constructed concepts, it is entirely possible for males and men to express their gender in a feminine manner and for females and women to express their gender in a masculine manner. It is important to note that biological sex is just as much of a social construction as gender is

⁵ Fitzpatrick, Mary Anne. "The Social Psychology of Female-male Relations: A Critical Analysis of Central Concepts." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 10.4 (1986): 510-12. Web.

because “if gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not accrue social meanings as additive properties, but rather is replaced by the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term, which absorbs and displaces ‘sex’”⁶.

Gender can be conceptualized as a spectrum rather than a binary: hyper-femininity and hyper-masculinity being on opposite ends and androgyny being in the middle with infinite options in between. It is also important to note that gender expression does not always seemingly align with gender identity. Although someone may identify as a man, their gender expression can be feminine without in any way compromising their gender identity. Although there have been movements with ending the gendering of clothing, it is undeniable that in this day and age, clothing and makeup are still highly gendered. I aimed to highlight this gendering of products with my use of makeup and clothing.

Through the use of gendered items such as makeup, clothing, and hair, individuals are able to craft their gender expressions in ways that may be contrary to the ways in which the items they use are gendered. Although someone may have a masculine gender identity, they may still have feminine or androgynous aspects to their gender expression because expression and identity are separate entities and the gendering of objects - such as makeup - is subjective and does not necessarily play any role in determining the gender identity of the person wearing with them. Judith Butler discusses gender as being

⁶ Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

performative and self constructed. She states that gender is a “stylized repetition of acts... which are internally discontinuous ... [so that] the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment” and is “real only to the extent that it is performed”⁷. I will be looking at the ways in which and the extents to which my models perform the genders they both identify as and choose to express. Butler describes how the performativity of gender is essentially an impersonation of an ideal dominant convention of gender that no one actually inhabits fully⁸.

Recently, there have been movements towards opening up the makeup market to men as well. This being in large part to the wide social acceptance of the television show *RuPaul's Drag Race* which has grown to have more than 1.5 million viewers and male beauty gurus on social media sites such as Instagram and Youtube. Covergirl Makeup Company just initiated their first “Cover boy” into their brand⁹. He is a prime example of someone with a gender identity (boy) that has a feminine gender expression. This contradicting – according to social norms – gender identity and expression was something that was present in all three of my photo series.

⁷ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

⁸ “The Body You Want: An Interview with Judith Butler.” Interview by Liz Kotz, *Artforum*. N.p., Nov. 1992. Web.

⁹ Safronova, Valeriya. "Meet Covergirl's New Coverboy." *New York Times*. N.p., 12 Oct. 2016. Web. 20 Nov. 2016.

III. Altering Appearance

The makeup and Photoshop techniques that were used highlighted certain features while minimizing others in order to increase the femininity or masculinity of the individuals' faces. The feminine features that I focused on included long eyelashes, small jaws, soft features, clear skin, curves, and large eyes. These features all added to the submissive, vulnerable look that is considered to be feminine. For the feminine personas, I enlarged the models' eyes, shaved down their jaw lines, curved any angular features they may have had and made their skin clear and smooth. For the masculine features, I highlighted stereotypically masculine features such as large chiseled jaws, large full eyebrows, and angular noses and cheekbones. I created all of these with contouring makeup and Photoshop. Casey and Jessi were present for the editing process in order to ensure that they were comfortable with all of the edits and to make sure that the resulting photograph was a product of the collaboration between them and myself.

IV. Studio Photography

When photography was invented, it was considered to be “a form of representation [that] signifies and reproduces a truth that could not and cannot be refuted” so they have “been widely used as objective evidence”¹⁰. However, with the arrival of digital photography, this “truth” is not always an accurate representation of the subject, especially with the advent of Photoshop and other digital editing software. The “widespread use of Photoshop editing in magazine photographs removes us further and further from any notions of authentic femininity to a celebration of the manufacture and artificial”¹¹. Manufactured femininity has a basis in sexualized stereotypes of women. In female portraiture, there is often a focus on breasts, thinness, and submissiveness. These pictures create their ideal femininity as “thin, free of unwanted hair, deodorized, perfumed, and clothed... They produce a picture that is far removed from the reality of everyday lives”¹². Male portraiture focuses on portraying power and dominance.

I will be shooting all of my photographs from the same angle in order to create a sense of unity throughout the series. It will also serve the purpose of making the photographs seem more natural and less altered. This will also allow for all of the subtle differences in body language, makeup, clothing, and facial expressions to be what the audience focuses on.

¹⁰ Pang, Laik Wan. "Project MUSE - Photography, Performance, and the Making of Female Images in Modern China." N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Nov. 2016.

¹¹ Evans, Mary. *The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2014. Print.

¹² Wykes, Maggie, and Barrie Gunter. *The Media and Body Image: If Looks Could Kill*. London: SAGE, 2005. Print.

V. Inspiration

I drew inspiration from Cindy Sherman's series *Untitled Film Stills*¹ in which she transformed herself into a variety of characters using makeup, costumes, wigs and props. This series discusses gender and female stereotypes that negatively impact women. In *Untitled Film Stills #21* (1978) Sherman "reveals gender as an unstable and constructed position, which suggests that ... women adopt several roles and identities depending on their circumstances"¹³. Her work encourages the viewer to engage in self-reflection and realize the various identities that they have constructed and that have been constructed for them. I hope that my work serves a similar purpose of inspiring introspection and reflection on identity expression.

I also drew inspiration from Tomoko Sawada's work, especially her series *id400* in which, similarly to Sherman, she transformed herself into 100 different individuals using makeup, costumes and wigs. This project engages with the topics of identity, individualism and ideas of the self and although she uses costumes and stages all of her photographs, she evokes "the essence of 'real' people within a controlled environment"¹⁴. This ability to create a sense of authenticity in a studio setting is something that I attempted to achieve with my work. Her photographs "act as an exploration of social badges, the malleability of the self and our position and role in contemporary society"¹⁴. I aimed to produce work that functions as a representation and critique of the ways in which society has molded the gender expressions of some of the individuals that live in it.

¹³ Douma, Michael, curator. *Color Vision & Art*. 2006. WebExhibits. Institute for Dynamic Educational Advancement, Washington, DC. Oct. 2016.

¹⁴ Shibuya-ku. "Untitled from the Series Facial Signature SET 86 by Tomoko Sawada." *Artnet*. N.p., 01 Jan. 1970. Web.

V. Three Looks into Gender Expression

Casey uses he/him pronouns and identifies as a trans-man. Before he began his transition, when he was still presenting feminine, he was pressured at work to wear makeup and clothing that was highly feminine which led exacerbated the gender dysphoria he experienced during that time. He recounted how putting on makeup once negatively affected him:

“ putting on makeup to exaggerate how feminine my face looked, which is what makeup was created for – you make you eyelashes look longer because they’re feminine, you make your lips look redder because that’s feminine – felt gross. Most of my dysphoria came from the disconnect between who I am and how other people perceive me as feminine.”

He began exploring the ways in which he could use makeup to contour his face to appear more masculine and found that he could do so by highlighting his cheekbones and jaw line which turned his soft feminine features into angular masculine ones. Now that he has been taking Testosterone for the past 9 months, he is at the stage in his transition that he considers himself to be “passing.” Now, when he uses makeup, it is for the purposes of costume play or dressing up as various characters. In some of his portraits, he wears wigs that he has worn as part of various characters that he has cosplayed. Ballet is also an important part of his life and he is soon going to be switching from wearing the leotard and pink skirt pictured in his portrait to the tights and tank top that men typically wear for ballet.

There is great variety in his portraits¹⁵, which showcase both very feminine looks with heavy makeup and long hair as well as masculine looks with formal men’s wear and

¹⁵ See fig. 5

short styled hair. Aside from the cosplay that he does, his every day looks are mostly inspired by:

“the aesthetic that young boys have, so I wear a lot of overalls and stripes. When it’s colder, I’ll wear sweaters over button-downs, and in the summer I’ll wear above-the-knee shorts and t-shirts. Printed, ankle length socks are a staple and I cuff my pants so everyone can see them. That’s important.”

Now that his gender identity is more aligned with his daily gender expression, the dysphoria that he once experienced has been greatly reduced. He is now able to use makeup, wigs and costumes in positive ways that do not threaten to undermine his gender identity but rather allow him to express various levels of femininity, androgyny or masculinity depending on the character he is playing. We wanted to make sure that we included both looks that showed how he presented in his day to life as well as looks that show how he dresses when cosplaying as well. We decided that framing him from the waist up would best represent his appearance as that is the part of him that fluctuates the most throughout his various looks.

Jessi uses they/them pronouns and identifies as gender non-conforming. When conducting my interview with Jessi, I found that had come upon their current androgynous style after coming out as non-binary and undergoing a long journey of exploration into various extremes of gender expression. When asking them about how their journey led them to discover androgyny, they stated:

“I feel like it was inevitable. For a long time I had sort of a ‘genderless’ style. Just t-shirts and skinny jeans...Then I read this book about English Victorian style and I found that I wanted to dress up in the ball gowns just as much as I wanted to be an English gentleman. So I tried to be more masculine and started shopping in the boys section and that’s when things started getting better. Then I went back to a ‘genderless’ style and then for a semester I was almost hyper feminine. Then I met an androgynous person and thought ‘you know what? That’s what I want’.”

Taking this into consideration when I was working with them to decide how which clothing, makeup, and post-production edits would be best to accurately portray their gender expression. We decided on having most of the portrayals be androgynous while still having a few outfits with varying levels of femininity and masculinity to display their interests in feminine makeup styles as well as masculine clothing. Only two of the looks included a full face of makeup (i.e. foundation, contouring, eye shadow and mascara)¹⁶. The others, which were more androgynous or masculine looks all had either minimal or no makeup. While they did choose to wear button down, collared shirts in both feminine and masculine looks, the more masculine outfits were composed of clothing purchased in the men's section whereas the feminine looks included clothing items that were sold in the women's section and were tailored to accentuate curves. Their boy language remained fairly consistent throughout all of the photos. In both the androgynous and masculine photos, they occasionally chose to put their hands on their hips, therefore taking up more space and looking more assertive and masculine. In the feminine photos, they kept their arms straight at their sides. We decided to frame their photos so that they included their body from the waist up since regardless of their expression, their pants remained the same. We wanted to focus on the upper half of their body, where their fluctuation in expression was most visible.

I use she/her pronouns and identify as cis-gender. For many years, I wore makeup everyday and dressed solely in feminine clothing including: dresses, women's skinny jeans, and fitted blouses. This past semester, I began to become dissatisfied and limited

¹⁶ See fig. 6

by the feminine style my look was expressing. So I began exploring more masculine and androgynous styles of clothing, hairstyles and makeup. For my more androgynous and masculine looks, I used foundation and occasionally eyeliner but no other makeup. My feminine looks all included foundation, contouring, lipstick, eye shadow and fake lashes. The edits¹⁷ that I made to my face for the masculine looks widened and exaggerated my jaw, moved my brow down, enlarged my brows and nose. For my feminine looks, I lengthened my neck, smoothed my skin, further reinforced the contouring I did with makeup to make my cheekbones more prominent, and made my eyes and lips larger. I chose to frame my self portraits from my shoulders up because I for me, what changes most depending on my gender expression is my makeup and hair, while both Casey and Jessi said that their clothing was what changed most.

¹⁷ See fig. 7

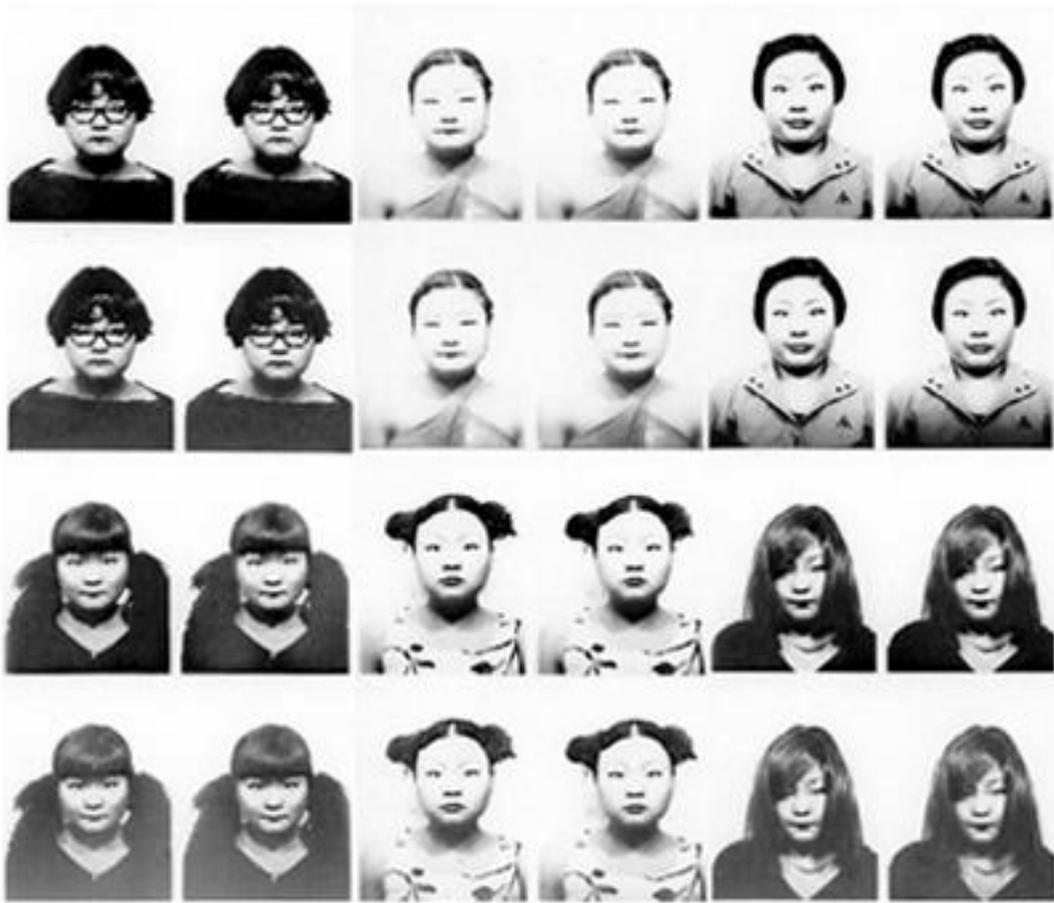
VI. Conclusion

Through this project, I aimed to discern how free individuals of various gender identities were in how they chose to perform their gender expressions. Regardless of whether or not a person identifies as a man, woman, or nonbinary individual, they are able to express femininity, masculinity and androgyny through their clothing, hair, and makeup. By showing the wide range of expressions available to three people of various gender identities, I showed that society's attempt to preach the rigidity of gender, fails in cases such as these where individuals realize the incredible fluidity that is possible.

All three people photographed as part of this project displayed gender expressions that expanded beyond the limiting definitions of femininity and masculinity to exhibit a blend of the two. While the extent to which we deviated from our assigned expression – Casey's being masculinity, Jessi's being androgyny and mine being femininity - differed, there was femininity, masculinity and androgyny expressed by all three. Through my interviews and photo shoots with the other two and the self-reflection, self-portraiture and exploration that followed, I was able to explore my gender expression and come the conclusion that although it may be evolving, that change does not demand a change in my gender identity. Although expression and identity are related, an alteration in one does not beget an alteration in the other.

Appendix

Figure 1.



Tomoko Sawada, *ID400 #1-100 (part)*, 1998-2000. Gelatin silver print. 890x1140mm.

Figure 2.



Tomoko Sawada, *Facial Signature SET #86*, 2015. Photographs, Three digital type-C prints 8.5 x 10.5in.

Figure 3.



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 4.



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #5*, 1977. Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 5.



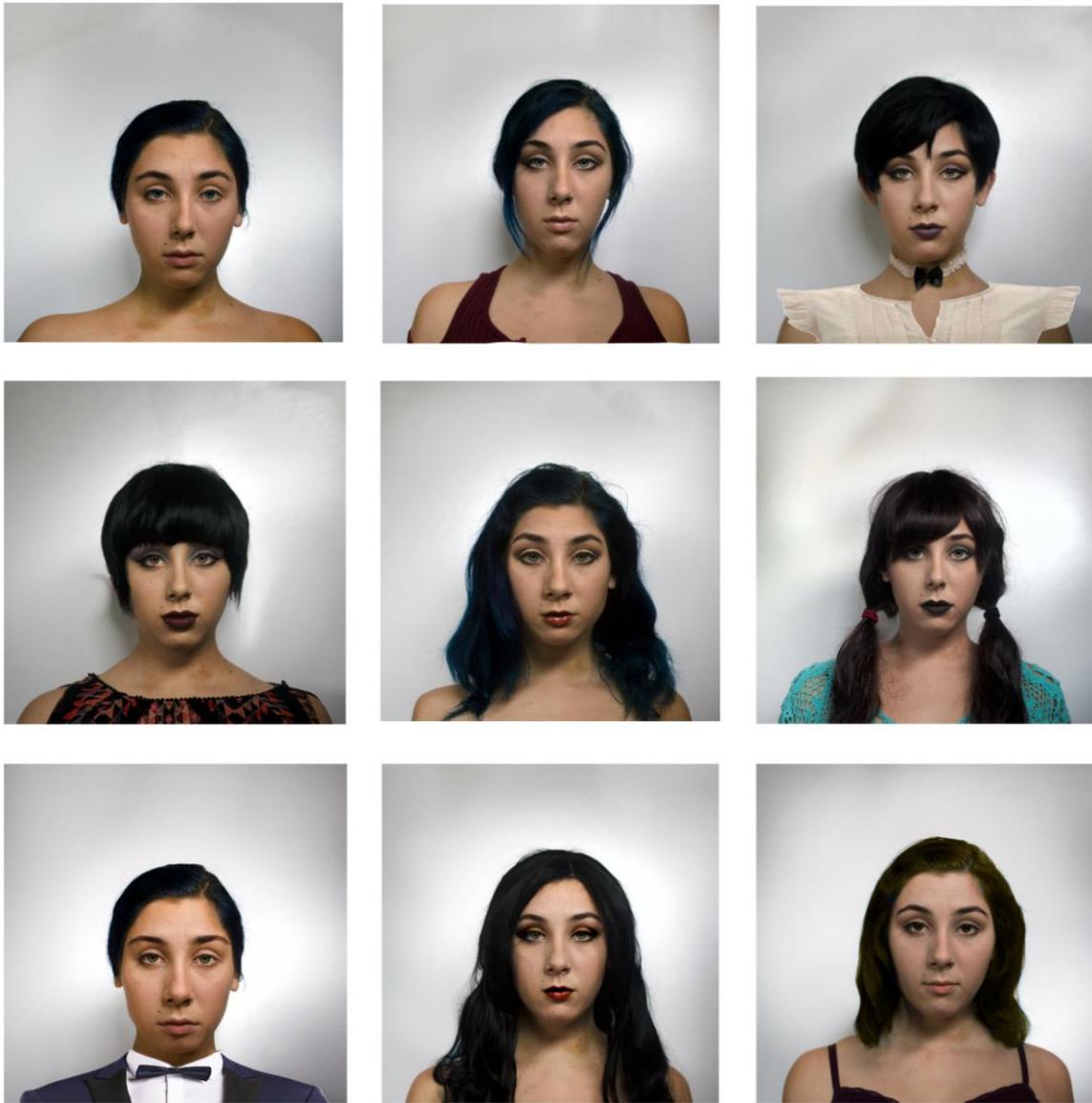
Allegra Barnes, *Casey*, 2016. Ink jet print 20 x 20in.

Figure 6.



Allegra Barnes, *Jessi*, 2016. Ink jet print 20 x 20in.

Figure 7.



Allegra Barnes, *Allegra*, 2016. Ink jet print 20 x 20in.

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