

The summer before my freshman year of high school, I was preparing to begin a new chapter of my life, and I wanted a revamped wardrobe to reflect that. One of the new items was a pair of shorts with a 6-inch inseam, meaning they were shorter than my typical 8-inch shorts. I remember almost not buying them, putting them back because I was worried the other students would think I was gay. I talked myself out of the thought, but to my dismay, the first time I wore them to school I had a friend comment on them. He jokingly asked if I “had worn my sister’s shorts by accident”. While the remark didn’t offend me, it definitely stuck with me, and I refused to wear the shorts again for three whole years. I’ve never told anyone this story, but looking back on it, I understand why I cared so much about my friend’s comment: because I wasn’t matching the gender expectations, I was embarrassed that other people would think less of me.

Flash forward a few years and 6-inch inseam shorts are trendy. Most of the girls I know think guys look better in them than in the longer shorts of the past. Now, the length of men’s shorts is something that has changed with every generation, so this isn’t very surprising to me; but other trends becoming popular are. The rapper Kid Cudi wore a dress on Saturday Night Live, the comedian Pete Davidson always has painted nails, and Johnny Depp has been wearing eyeliner for years. Men are becoming less afraid to “get in touch” with their feminine side. With the transgender community becoming more prominent than ever in our society, it could be speculated that these aren’t just trends, but totally new norms that are here to stay. As the gender norms of the past fade with

said that the concept of ‘doing gender’ is on its way out.

‘Doing gender’ is a concept coined by West and Zimmerman that means participating in actions and beliefs that lay claim to a sex category. To do gender is a performance, to appear to those around you as the gender that you identify as. Children learn to do gender as soon as they figure out what it is. The authors discuss the story of a little boy holding a necklace. When asked, he says he doesn’t want to put the necklace on, because it’s for girls. Even after being told that kings wear necklaces, his mind is not changed. The little boy has it established in his head that all jewelry is for girls and that boys are not allowed to wear it.

Children today don’t all think like this though. As society has come to understand that gender is different from biological sex, some parents are giving children the freedom to differentiate from the old standards. Speaking from experience, my 5-year-old nephew has told me he likes to have his nails painted. When West and Zimmerman wrote *Doing Gender* in 1987, they said that sex categorization was mandatory for children. I would argue that things have changed since then, and as time passes and the world becomes accepting of new ideas, it will change even more.

One of the core tenets of the article revolves around the body and how important its use as an “ever-available resource for doing gender” is. This is especially important in transgenders, as they naturally feel trapped inside of a body they do not identify with. Even though they don’t identify with the body, the rest of society will still judge them as such. The authors use a male-to-female transexual, named Agnes, as an example of this. She was constantly misidentified everywhere she went, primarily due to her body,

people were able to look past that and slowly society began to accept her identity. This goes to show that gender, despite often being decided by a person's biological sex, is found in a person's actions and behaviors, not their body.

If we understand this to be true, then as gender equality becomes more balanced, the entire concept of 'doing gender' will slowly fade away. Wives now find themselves in the role of breadwinner more frequently, and the number of households with stay-at-home dads increases every year. This isn't because women are becoming more masculine or vice versa, but because gender equality is completely normal for modern families. If gender is determined more by one's actions than it is by one's outward appearance, it should seem that gender roles aren't just changing, but disappearing entirely. Other examples include women abandoning the traditional gender roles of being mothers and homemakers in pursuit of high education and professional achievement. In 2016 the United States almost saw its first female president with Hillary Clinton. Having arguably the most powerful person in the world be a woman would be one of the most important disregarding of traditional gender roles seen to date.

A female president is going to happen sooner or later. It seems like a fact that everyone accepts, even though we have yet to see it happen. This is because the days of "acting like your gender" are over. No more will those not doing gender as expected be called to account for their characters or motives. No more will there be a negative stigma attached to such actions. Just 7 years ago, the Supreme Court declared gay marriage to be legal in all 50 states. Six years after that, an executive order was passed allowing transgendered people to serve in the military. As the collective consciousness

come, more of the same can be expected.

In the conclusion of their paper, West and Zimmerman determine that ‘doing gender’ is simply unavoidable. They say this because, during any face-to-face confrontation, the way a person looks and the way they behave is under the scrutiny of others in order to always identify them with a certain gender. I agree to the extent that the concepts of male and female will always exist, but I disagree with them on one thing: that the social order is merely an accommodation of the natural order. Every year it seems, as a society, that we disobey the gender norms of yesteryear. In the past, it was true that the natural order determined the social order, but as we become more advanced as a civilization the social order has become much less dictated by sex or gender in a trend that I predict will only continue exponentially.

To summarize, I believe that ‘doing gender’ is a concept that has always been very prevalent in society, but in modern times we are seeing a shift of values away from it. Men no longer aspire to be the manliest, because what it means to “act your gender” as a man has become a blurred and confusing concept. While a person’s sex category is certainly an important influence on their gender and how they are perceived, it has been shown that gender is contained in the mind and not the physical body. All of this put together provides me with the evidence I need to state that ‘doing gender’ will one day become a thing of the past.

West, Candace, and Don H Zimmerman. *GENDER & SOCIETY*, vol. 1, no. 2, June 1987, pp. 125–151.