

Do you remember when Harry Styles wore a dress on the cover of Vogue magazine? Why was there so much controversy over a man in a dress? Harry is a well known celebrity who lots of people question because of his feminine manner and unaddressed sexuality. When Vogue published Harry on the cover of their magazine, he was the first solo male in American Vogue to be on the cover, and he wore a dress. This caused upheaval for some people just simply based on the fact that he was a man wearing a dress. This is due to the gender norms of the collective consciousness of what society believes people should wear. Harry Styles wearing a dress caused controversy because the collective consciousness of society as a whole refuses to accept that a person can choose what they want to wear, regardless if it is made for a man or woman.

What is the collective consciousness and how does it form? The collective consciousness is the fundamental shared beliefs of a society or group of people. The collective consciousness forms over time based on how a whole society views different things, such as what is considered right or wrong. Relating to gender norms of clothing, society collectively has certain shared beliefs of what men and women should wear, and what is not accepted. When someone goes against this norm, it causes controversy because people are not used to experiencing this, and believe somehow it is fundamentally wrong.

Over many years, gender norms have been building up. It has only been recently that people have begun to start going against the norm. The reason that society follows these norms is that it has been ingrained into our heads since we were kids. Growing up reading many children's fairy tales, the girl is typically a beautiful princess in a dress,

and the man is a handsome prince in a suit. We are used to seeing people dress in a feminine way, or a masculine way, and that is how we are taught to identify them as man or woman. When walking into a department store, you see the clothes organized and labeled into mens or womens clothing in completely different sections or areas of the store. Most of the clothes are cut a certain way, for example, womens clothes are cut a certain way so that most men would not even fit into those clothes. We are taught that the stereotypical man wears pants and shirts, or a suit, and that the stereotypical woman wears dresses, skirts, heels or “girly” clothes. So, these ideas are built into our brains from a very young age. This is how the collective consciousness of our society regarding the way people of a certain gender should or should not dress formed over time.

Before the 1900’s, society’s gender norms were even more strict than they are now. Men wore pants, women wore dresses, and that was it, no debate. Women started to go against the grain, and decided they did not always want to wear a dress. So, they started wearing pants. This caused many people, men and women, to become enraged at the change. They thought this was ridiculous, and haneus. The women that were beginning to wear pants realized there shouldn’t be anything wrong with it, and did not always want to be confined to a dress, because frankly, it was not always practical. They wanted to have the freedom to dress how they wanted, and did not think they should be treated any differently based on what they were wearing. Now, looking back, that seems quite ridiculous, given that women now wear pants all the time. Women wear jeans, shorts, and trousers, and nobody thinks anything badly of it. This goes to show how gender norms do change, it just takes time. At first, when someone dresses

outside the “normal”, people don’t like it and it causes outrage, but over time, as people begin to follow in that lead, the collective consciousness changes, and it becomes the “new normal”.

A man wearing a dress is not something you see very often, but does that mean it is wrong? Who or what “rule” says that it is wrong? There isn’t one. So, why was Harry Styles, a globally famous musician, wearing a dress, on the cover of Vogue Magazine such a huge controversy that made national news? Since this was not what people were used to seeing from Harry, or any male celebrity, or even Vogue, people were very upset. This topic was trending all over social media, as well as the news. But my question is why. Why is it such a crime for a male to wear a dress? It isn’t hurting anyone and it isn’t offensive. It is more than acceptable for a woman, but not a man. This is because the collective consciousness does not accept this. Even in 2020, this was still not widely accepted. Conservative commentator Candace Owens was extremely upset by this, pouring gasoline on the fire with her comments on Twitter. Owens is notorious for starting controversy by spreading the conservative narrative and anti-feminist remarks. She made comments on why she believed this was unacceptable and said that we must “bring back manly men.” But the fundamental question regarding her remarks is how does what a man wears make him any less manly? What says that a man even has to be “manly”? What even defines “manly”? These are all questions to think about when analyzing gender norms. Who you are as a person should not be defined on what you wear or how you act. Just because you are a certain gender does not define what you can or cannot do, and this is something that clearly has not been established as the current collective consciousness.

Perhaps Harry did this to start the conversation, and to be a catalyst for erasing gender norms. In an interview with Vogue, Harry said, "I think if you get something that you feel amazing in, it's like a superhero outfit. Clothes are there to have fun with and experiment with and play with, what's really exciting is that all of these lines are just kind of crumbling away." This goes to show that people are starting to change these norms. As more and more people follow in Harry Styles' footsteps, eventually the collective consciousness will change and there will be no more controversy. The Candace Owens controversy inspired many men, including, but not limited to fans of Styles, to begin to wear dresses to work, school, and out in public to protest these norms. This is the start of a change. Clothes should be a way to express yourself, not your gender. More and more people are starting to realize this, but there are still plenty who don't, and refuse to accept this. This is why the collective consciousness takes a while to shift. The people who refuse to accept this societal change in belief will probably not be able to change their ways of thinking until they see a vast majority of other men doing this, and it becomes normalized.

Another thing to think about is what it will take for men wearing feminine clothing to become normalized. Since Harry was already seen as feminine before the dress incident, the dress just added on to that viewpoint. People also labeled him as more feminine than they already thought just for wearing a dress. The people who follow in his footsteps are hated on and viewed as feminine, or even weaker, simply for acting as Harry does. So, what would happen if men that were already viewed as very "manly" started to wear feminine clothing, such as a dress? Would people have the same reaction if an NFL football team all wore dresses instead of suits? Or maybe famous

strong actors such as Dwayne Johnson? Or what about lawyers? Would it be more accepted or more protested? That is something we do not yet have the answer to, but will see with time.

Therefore, in time, if the collective consciousness shifted, there would be no gender norms. Everyone would be equal. People would be free to just be people, and the way they dress or act would not have to define them as a man or woman. The shift in the collective consciousness would mean there would be no more controversy on what someone is wearing and if it is the “right” gender for that article of clothing. Clothing would just be seen as clothing, and whoever is wearing it would not bother anyone. This is how it should be. If people continue to hold their old, stereotypical views over others, there will never be a change. There is no reason that Harry Styles wearing a dress should upset so many people, and that also does not make him any less of a man. Being “manly” or even “womanly” should not be based on a piece of fabric. A piece of clothing should not determine your gender, just as much as a gender should not have to determine what you do. There must be a change in what we see as we grow up, what we read, what we see in department stores, what we see on TV, etc, for gender norms to be erased. A change like this is not easy, because you cannot just change people’s mindsets. A change like this takes lots of time. Society must begin to accept others for who they are, not by what they look like or what they do in order for there to be any change in this world.