

Scientific  
Journal of  
**Applied  
Social and  
Clinical  
Science**

## **MEN'S SKIRT: A HISTORICAL TOUR**

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**Abstract:** The male gender is gradually freeing itself from male stereotypes that limited its consumer desires and behavior. The new man is vain and enjoys a certain freedom to wear and wear what he considers best, including garments that in another era would have been inconceivable, such as the skirt. Faced with an imminent approach by the male public to the adoption of the skirt as clothing, we seek, through a historical tour, to provide the reader with a panoramic view of the garment, its history and its uses. The present article is based on a bibliographical research and seeks, in an expository argumentative way, to present the trajectory of the male skirt through different cultural systems, with the intention of reflecting the garment as a process of cultural construction in a continuous process of modification.

**Keywords:** Male skirt. History of the skirt. Fashion and culture.

Since the emergence of society, the male figure has always had a central role. Today, this social organization is no longer what we find when we analyze civilization as a whole. The woman, previously seen as a secondary player, began to seek her way in the social environment and this consequently affected the routine, behavior and physical appearance of men. Feminism gave men this complex task of disembarking from the armor of traditional masculinity, in which men are male, powerful and providers. He doesn't cry, he's not afraid and he doesn't take shit home. That is, it only exists in the world of ideas and appearances.

The male gender is in constant transformation, for Gomes (2006) the model of masculinity for the new man is based on his ability and possibility to demonstrate his feelings, to be able to love and express his emotions publicly without embarrassment. This social and behavioral change in recent decades has also empowered him to assume

his vanity and recognize that taking care of his personal appearance does not interfere with his sexuality. A new man has emerged, with less prejudice to take care of his physical appearance who little by little frees himself from male stereotypes that limited his desires and consumer behavior. A new generation of male consumers looking for a different option in the fashion market.

The new man is vain and enjoys a certain freedom to wear and wear what he considers best, including garments that in another era would have been inconceivable, for example: the skirt.

The men's skirt has gained a lot of visibility in recent years. The press, fashion journalism, fashion blogs and influencers have been responsible for positioning the men's skirt in a place without historical precedent. Nowadays, it is more and more common to find people wearing the piece.

But how did the skirt gain ground in the male universe? How did one of the most enduring elements of human clothing transform and reinvent itself in such a considerable way?

The present article is based on a bibliographical research and seeks, in an argumentative expository way, to present the trajectory of the male skirt through different cultural systems. Through a historical tour, we seek to provide a panoramic view of the garment and its uses.

Accompanying the evolution of clothing over the centuries and realizing how men's clothing, at times exaggerated at times discreet, has been walking and changing along with society and its time, provides us with tools to understand clothing as a process of cultural construction in a continuous process of modification.

## **THE ORIGINS: A GENRELESS PLAY**

The skirt is a garment for the lower part of

the body, it is used fastened at the waist, it is one of the oldest garments of humanity, it has a conical or tubular appearance, it is used by different cultures and societies, according to the AURÉLIO dictionary it can have length variable. When we look for examples of phrases and uses of the word skirt in the same dictionary, we come across the following:

“A naked woman would be less dangerous than a skilfully displayed skirt, which covers everything and at the same time leaves everything in sight.”

“The collection defends an elegance with a sexy touch: the models “forget” some pieces, like the blouse or the skirt to show off a bodice, a bra, a garter belt or sophisticated pantyhose”.

In these examples, our attention is drawn to the immediate identification of the term with the female gender, but if we analyze the clothing’s historical archives, we can observe that this skirt-woman association did not always exist.

Lipovetsky (2009) explains that before the emergence of fashion as a system, clothing did not delimit territory according to sex, It was in the West and from the end of the Middle Ages onwards when clothing began to draw marked differences between male and female attire.

Prior to this, within ancient civilizations, both men and women used a kind of kilt to cover the body. Torralba (2015) explains that the Sumerians had two basic pieces of clothing, the first was a calf-length skirt called kaunake formed by multiple lines of a material made with wool, the second was a rectangle of fabric with which they wrapped the body leaving the right arm free. These pieces were worn by men, women and children and contained only minor external variations in terms of ornamentation.

Another example of the democratic use of the skirt in antiquity happened in Egyptian society, linen was the main raw material used

in clothing and the most popular piece was a white skirt that changed in length and trim depending on the social position of the user, the name hers was shenti. Gonzalez (1996) describes it as a simple garment made with a long, thin strip of fabric, wrapped several times around the hip and secured by a belt.

Likewise, the Minoan and Greek civilizations wore the same open system (skirt) for both men and women. Torralba (2015) mentions that it is possible to follow ancient clothing through found objects and sculptures of the time (figure 1), some pieces such as the Venus of Lespugne and many other Greek statues, allowing art historians to trace the journey of the skirt and from clothing in general to the present day. In ancient Greece, the Peplo remained intact for over a thousand years, the same author describes this piece as a rectangle of seamless fabric in the form of a draped tunic that was used by men, women and children. This same tunic was inherited by the Roman civilization that preserved the use of the peplo in their societies.



Figure 1 – Skirt in ancient civilizations

Source: prepared by the author - internet images

Going to the Asian continent, it is also observed that the clothing did not change according to gender. In Japanese society, the kosode, now called kimono, was worn by men and women and differentiated only by the external stamping. In Chinese culture, the tunic made of silk and used by both sexes

remained unchanged for centuries. In India, a rectangle made of cotton and without seams that wraps around the body is part of the local dress until today, it is called dhoti for men and sari for women. Torralba (2015) points out that also in Southeast Asia, in countries such as Burma, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, the skirt has been used since prehistoric times, which is called longyi, the length for women goes up to the ankle and for men reaches mid-leg.

In the geographical region of Oceania, there were skirts made of formally twisted vegetable fibers that are still used by men and women today and are known as piu piu. Besides, on the American continent there were the taparrabos, a kind of skirt made with cotton fabrics used by the original peoples.

The history of humanity shows that the clothing of the first civilizations was based on tunics and skirts for both sexes. It was only from the Middle Ages onwards when a marked difference between men's and women's clothing was established.

## **WOMEN'S SKIRT: A WESTERN OFFERING**

Throughout history, clothing has undergone several changes in terms of sex. Over the centuries, society has increased different signs of distinction until reaching what is now considered men's and women's clothing. Reflecting on the process is essential to understand the "rules" of current clothing and the skirt-woman association as a cultural construction characteristic of the West.

According to Lipovetsky (2009) only in the Middle Ages was it possible to recognize fashion as a system, with its metamorphoses, its sudden movements and its extravagances. It is from here that clothing has endeavored to exhibit some significant differences between men and women. In the 15th century, the man's tunic became shorter and tighter. The

number of men wearing a kind of pantyhose has increased considerably (figure 2). According to Boucher (2009), the long and baggy suit, previously used by both sexes, was replaced by an anthropomorphic garment, adjusted and buttoned for men.

From that moment on, clothing heralded a new era, fashion in the West was clearly differentiated according to the sexes. This clothing revolution laid the foundations for contemporary clothing.



Figure 2- 16th century men's clothing

Source: <https://www.hisour.com/pt/mens-fashion-in-western-europe-in-1550-1600-32404/>

The transformation of clothing at the end of the Middle Ages, which established a very marked difference between male and female costumes, standardized silhouettes according to gender and forged an idea that was spread throughout Western Europe and later throughout the world. This pattern has been perpetuated from generation to generation. The man lost the freedom to wear skirts and dresses and started to wear only pants.

The social expansion of fashion according to Lipovetsky (2009) was not immediate. Fashionable clothing was for a long time a luxurious and prestigious consumption confined to the noble classes. From the 13th and 14th centuries, great bourgeois fortunes emerged with commerce, and the nouveau riche appeared, who dressed like the nobles and rivaled in elegance the nobility of blood.

But the popularization of costumes only progressed in the passage from the 16th to the 17th century, when the imitation of noble clothing reached new social strata, lawyers and small traders also adopted the fabrics, headcloths, lace and embroidery used by the nobility.

Thus, over the centuries, fashion expanded, reaching more and more new layers of society, the West witnessed its democratization resting on a sharp opposition of the sexes.

As time went by, the division of opinion between classes became increasingly blurred, on the other hand, the division of clothing by sex remained intact for centuries.

It was not until the 1960s that some significant changes in secular dress appeared. A process of reducing the difference between the sexes in dressing appeared. On the one hand, men's clothing has integrated fantasy, bright, cheerful colors, comfortable and sports clothes have become part of men's wardrobe; on the other hand, women increasingly adopted masculine-style clothing (trousers, jacket, suit, tie, blazer).

According to Lipovetsky (2009) the equalization process of the 1960s did not get very far, it does not continue until the annulment of all difference. Fashion's homogenization of the sexes only understood a superficial look. A process of differentiation with exclusively female signs was perpetuated. Skirts and dresses continue to be worn only by women.

For the 1970s, the appearance of the sexes got a little closer, men already enjoyed a certain freedom to leave their hair long, use colors that were previously prohibited and even wear earrings in their ears, however, according to Lipovetsky (2009), this movement did not in any way shake the fundamental prohibition that weighs on men's fashion. In 1985, famous fashion designer J.P. Gaultier presented some men's skirts in his collection, but according to

the same author, the stylist intended to impact and provoke the market through a publicity stunt rather than changing the centuries-old forms of men's clothing. The stylist was followed by some recognized designers such as Kenzo, Giorgio Armani, John Galiano, among others. The operation had no repercussions on royal clothing.

In the 1980s, the new fashion system, now more open and flexible, continued to maintain the previous order. Even though it was a decade recognized for being an irreverent and revolutionary stage, the effect of a man wearing a skirt continued to be a burlesque and parodic act. Games of charm and extreme metamorphoses continued to be a female thing.

It was from the 90's that the presentation of men's skirts in the main fashion shows in the world, such as Milan and New York, began to be a constant. In the United States, Marc Jacobs became the main defender of the skirt for men. In the world of music, the male skirt became popular and it became common to find many rock, pop and hip-hop singers wearing the controversial piece, among the most famous are Mick Jagger, Jonathan Davis, Robbie Williams and Kanye West.

In 2008, an association was created in France to fight for the right of men to wear a skirt. According to the BBC news portal (2008) The idea of the group Hommes en Jupe ("Men in Skirts", in the literal translation) was to rescue a tradition that still existed in several places in the world, but was lost in western countries.

In 2013, a group of train drivers in Sweden won the right to wear skirts to work. Social pressure was high and the railway company changed labor standards to allow train drivers to wear skirts in the summer, according to the BBC news portal (2013). according to them, they are much more comfortable than pants.

Today, associating the skirt as an exclusively



feminine piece is a thing of the past (figure 3). The main national and international brands, fashion journalism, celebrities, fashion editorials and social networks. All show the skirt as a garment used by both sexes, although it is not a constant in the streets, the male skirt is increasingly seen in Western cultures and societies.



Figure 3: Sao Paulo Fashion Week parade

Source: <https://www.saopaulopretaporter.com/noticias/ler/homens-querem-usar-saias-sim>

## CONSIDERATIONS

Through the history of the skirt, we can observe that a man and a woman dress differently not because of nature, but as a result of a differentiated education, the product of a cultural heritage forged over centuries.

History shows us that as human beings, we have the ability to question our own habits and customs and also change them. According to Laraia (1986) the moral and value assessments that we have about the world, social behaviors and our personal characteristics, including the act of dressing, are the product of a cultural heritage, that is, the result of the operation of a certain culture. Knowing this is crucial to understanding men's clothing as we know it today.

The recent adoption of the skirt by a fraction of the male population in Western societies did not happen overnight. The process has been long and complicated and even today we can say that men who dare to wear the garment have to face a whole model

that was historically constructed as severely sexist.

In modern western society, we recognize men and women of equal essence, we increasingly claim the same rights and even so we have difficulty in overcoming the taboos that regulate our aesthetics. According to Queiroz (2009), our concepts about clothing and appearance are rarely questioned. We know that skirts and dresses are feminine garments and we understand this logic to be true without questioning the reasons.

Knowing the biography of the skirt is important to understand the historical context that traced such a striking difference in the clothing of the sexes. Understanding the skirt as a piece of neutral origin can contribute to opening our minds to new possibilities and increasingly freeing us from the old mechanism of Western fashion.

Understanding this dynamic is important to mitigate the clash between generations, between divergent thoughts and to avoid prejudiced behavior. Our cultural heritage has always made us react disparagingly towards those who behave outside the standard accepted by the majority of the community, but, just as it is important for societies, understanding the differences between people from different cultures is necessary. also know how to understand the differences that occur within the same cultural system. This procedure prepares us to receive changes and accept new capacities, who knows, who knows one day we can see in the streets of the West men completely free of judgment wearing skirts and dresses.

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