Chapter 5
Gender in Attire

*Know, first, who you are; and then adorn yourself accordingly.* -Epictetus, Discourses 3.1

Overview

Clothing and its decorative version, ‘finery’, signified social standing, occupation and gender in the nineteenth century. This chapter examines gender as reflected in attire in the British and Western Australian social and cultural contexts. Gender is a grammatical classification corresponding to the two sexes and sexlessness. However, as Ann Oakley claims that, the term *gender* is more than an identification with a biological sex, it is a cultural concept which refers to the social classifications of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. The biological explanation of gender only enhances our understanding of the sexes; it scarcely explains the relationship between the sexes in everyday life.

In examining the research question, “Does colonial clothing negotiate the gender boundaries in the nineteenth century?”, this chapter includes discussion of gender in the British and colonial societal and cultural contexts in order to understand the expression of gender in colonial clothing.

Understanding clothing through gender is important because the nineteenth-century clothing behaviours were primarily governed by gender. The biological, economical and cultural discussion of gender help to explain the extent of gender hegemony in Western Australian colonial society. Analysing clothing in the context of gender also helps to explain some of the governing factors of colonial society, ie, religion, class and gender segregation in colonial society. It also shows how social conventions of the time prescribed appearance for the two sexes.

The chapter is divided into sections, ie, Culture, clothing and gender and Gender in attire in the colony of Western Australia.

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818 Oxford English Dictionary
According to Hutt, psychological and behavioural differences between sexes are based on biological dissimilarities, but contrary to the above argument, Maccoby and Jackline claim that the sexes are psychologically much alike in many ways. The greater majority of men and women are very similar in terms of their intelligence, spatial and verbal aptitude and aggression. The sexes are very similar in relation to their innate characteristics, yet men and women are subject to different kinds of social expectations.

Some socio-biologists assume a biological and genetical base in male authoritativeness. For example, according to Wilson, the male command is an outcome of genetically programmed and evolved male societal behaviour which is primarily derived from our hunting heritage, ie, in hunter-gatherer societies, the sexual division of labour can be highly functional. As in most primitive and modern industrial societies male survival mechanisms develop into male autocratic behaviour. Anthropologists, Parker and Parker, claim that primitive men acquired their power and dominance as a reward for their high risk activities such as hunting and warfare which has been reinforced throughout civilisation. However, Coontz and Henderson maintain that ‘male dominance and female dependence are part of our genetic primate heritage’ and that male domineering behaviour is not determined by genes but by culture.

The dominant ideological beliefs, ie, of the male public sphere and the female domestic sphere, the masculine intellect and feminine emotion, the male activism and female passivism, and the masculine physical and mental strength and feminine physical and mental weaknesses have prompted gender differentiation. As Perkins claims, any breach of the ‘great law of subordination’, especially between husband and wife, was regarded as petty treason in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The notion of male dominance and female dependence as caused by their respective biological roles or sexual differences has become manifest in the social inequalities of gender. Therefore, the male dominance and female dependence can be analysed in biological, psychological, economical and societal contexts.

Male dominance and the subsequent uneven distribution of social power between men and women is one of the primary reasons for the positioning of gender in social hierarchies. The contrastive power relations of husband/wife, master/pupil, doctor/patient, as well as the comparable power relations, nationalities, occupational associates etc., fundamentally shape the way in which society exists.\textsuperscript{826} The nineteenth-century British society was founded on such power relations expressed in terms of gender, class and occupation, ie, the power of men over women, of an employer over his employees, of a king over his subjects. Social power is identified with prestige, glamour, force, authority, prominence, supremacy and repute and is aided by the possession of wealth.

The effect of Victorian social structure on women was different than for men. Women had restricted political and legal rights which subordinated their status and standing in society.\textsuperscript{827} Women were also restricted in social and economic arenas as Davidoff and Hall\textsuperscript{828} state, all social institutions were gendered, from domiciliary to religious and trading establishments.

The questions such as why men and women dress distinctively, why women’s clothing conceals their bodies and why women’s clothing is more decorative are directly associated with the social and cultural differentiation of gender and the resultant roles and behaviours expected from each gender. Scholars such as, Dentith, Barnes, Eicher and Davies have proposed that gender in clothing is a cultural phenomenon, because clothing is a matter of custom and a form of communication.\textsuperscript{829}

Some scholars argue that women’s subordination and male domination was economically established. Labour was the source of all wealth in the nineteenth century and property was the sign of success. As an obedient wife, a woman had to display her family’s social position by being fashionable and the state of female conspicuousness determined the male status and standing. As Veblen explains, in a society where value was measured in terms of property, commodities and production, the domestic role of women was considered as valueless non-waged labour and not regarded as part of the economy. Therefore, women were subjected to submission to men, who were the primary contributors to the accumulation of wealth. Thus, capitalism to be perceived as the basis of women’s oppression and social gender differentiation with the emergence of social class and the introduction of commodity production, women’s low productivity in the economic sense was the primary rationale for their inferiority in the social sphere. Having no production, they became ‘privately owned property.’

In the nineteenth century, as a symbol of their economic standing, women wore decorative and expensive dresses designed to restrict movement which made them incapable of working. As Veblen explains, “The role of the lady of the house is to exhibit her master’s wealth, his pecuniary strength to remove her from the workforce and to justify his status and wealth” and according to Perrot, ‘The unchanged splendour of women’s toilettes and the opulence of their flesh signified the social status and monetary power of their fathers, husbands or lovers.’ Therefore, women’s fashionable finery in the nineteenth century was also an indication of their social subordination. Adorned in fashion they were observed as family show-pieces, symbolic of their role as a ‘man’s chattel’.

Throughout the centuries, gender inequality has also been passed from one generation to another with the assistance of religion. Religion particularly accepted and implemented social and sexual subordination of women. As Tseelon explains, “Christianity countered its fears about woman by attempting to control her sexuality and appearance”; moreover “Every Victorian wife, had a duty to dress for her husband as well as for her God,” suggesting that a woman’s style was a familial responsibility.

Male dominance is reflected in almost every religion. In Christianity for instance, God is a male figure and almost every religion has a male leader, ie, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed etc. Although female characters were presented in biblical narratives, they were relatively minor as servants, helpers (Mary Magdalene and Ruth), evil or mindless (Lot’s wife, Jezebel, Eve). Religions have segregated functions for each gender. For example, in the Catholic church, ceremonial divinely duties are celebrated by priests, whilst women as nuns function in secondary roles. In Judaism, only men can be rabbis. In synagogues, there is segregated seating for men and women. Women are not allowed to take part in the official prayers and ceremonies, while in Islam, women are prohibited from official prayers in the mosques.

A woman’s position in the family and society has been extensively defined in almost every religious scripture. The public arena has been viewed as a place for men and the idea of the patriarchal model has been considered most suitable for creating and building a public order by most religions, especially in Judeo-Christian doctrine. Also, in Islamic faith, the Koran proclaims that “Men are superior to women on account of the qualities in which God has given them pre-eminence and also because they furnish dowry for women; women never had neither real power nor mystic prestige.” Moreover, in most societies, especially Western Christian societies, women’s pre-marital chastity and post-marital faithfulness and dedication has been a social requirement. In contrast to men, women’s morality was socially measured by the extent of her commitment to the family.

Gender-differentiated attire was clearly specified in most theological scriptures. For example, religious institutions demanded modest clothing and head-covering for female church-goers. In Christianity, doctrine demarcated gender-distinguished attire: “A woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment.”\textsuperscript{843} In Islamic tradition, Muslim women conceal their body contours and hair with fabric in austere colours as a ‘religious obligation’, ie, according to al-Nur: “Women do not display their beauty.”\textsuperscript{844}

Language as a communication system also embodies gender inequality. For example, as Stockard and Johnson explain, some languages such as Japanese are used differently by male and female speakers. In English, females have often been described in terms of males, eg, actor - actress, doctor - lady doctor, lawyer - woman lawyer etc. In addressing a female, the terms Mrs. or Miss indicate a woman’s marital status, which has been an automatic sign of her personal identity. Historically, women are educated linguistically to fulfil the role of the mother, passing on language to the child and to act as companion to the male in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{845}

Especially in the nineteenth century, the vocabulary of clothing also reflected gender. For example, a ‘blouse’ was worn by a woman and a ‘shirt’ by a man, although they are virtually the same garment. ‘The suit’, ‘knickerbockers’ and ‘trouser’ alluded to men, while the words, ie, ‘corset’, ‘petticoat’, ‘dress’ and ‘skirt’ were firmly associated with female clothing. Also, there are gender specific clothing in the past, eg, slacks for women and trousers for men, knickerbockers for men and bloomers for women and hats for men and bonnets for women. Only in the twentieth century these terms have merged across the genders, eg, suits and slacks worn by both men and women.

In the nineteenth century, fabrics were also associated with the different genders. Silks, satins and laces were primarily regarded as feminine and wool was regarded as masculine, while fabrics such as linen and cotton had a neutral image.\textsuperscript{846} This difference also link back to gender roles and finery, as men ‘worked’ so needed sturdy, hardwearing fabrics, while women didn’t so wore decorative fabrics.

\textsuperscript{843}\textit{Deuteronomy 22:5, The Holy Bible}
\textsuperscript{844}\textit{al-Nur 24:30,31: Holy Quran}
Culture, Clothing and Gender

Historically, the cultural patterns connected with etiquette and morality are associated with attire. As these cultural patterns are distinctive from society to society, each society classifies its own clothing behaviour in accordance with its moral and ethical standards. Clothing, as part of culture, is important in expressing masculinity and femininity. As Kidwell and Steel explain, “An article of clothing has no inherent meaning. Trousers do not have the idea of masculinity built into them, nor does a skirt automatically signify that the wearer is either female or feminine. The meaning of clothing is culturally defined.”

In Egyptian and Roman civilisations as well as in Northern and Central European civilisations from fifth to twelfth-centuries, both men and women dressed in similarly styled costumes. The idea that attire denoted gender originated during the thirteenth century. Prior to that period, clothing indicated social status rather than gender differences. For example, in Roman society, the longer robe signified the higher societal status, while the shorter robe was worn by inferiors. Although in early days, the Roman women dressed in the same manner as the men, as civilisation progressed most male and female apparel differed in construction, colour and fabric, ie, wool, cotton and silk, was not confined to a particular gender. However, the pivotal development in the gender-designated attire in the Western world occurred in the late thirteenth century with the arrival in Western Europe of trousers.

Fashionable dressing in the nineteenth century was more gender-differentiated than in previous centuries. The significant difference between eighteenth and nineteenth-century attire was, the noticeable austerity of nineteenth-century male dress and the extravagance of female dress. The colourfully ornated and embellished male attire evolved into a sombre clothing. The mutation of male attire in Britain occurred gradually as swords were transformed into walking-sticks, the tax on flour for hair powder during the war accelerated the decline of powdered

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848 Boucher, F. 1966, A History of Costume in the West, Thames and Hudson, London. pp. 91-172
hair and wigs and a new tendency for cleanliness made ruffles and laces impractical and expensive to maintain.\textsuperscript{852}

This distinct divergence in relation to clothing in the nineteenth century has been examined by many scholars\textsuperscript{853} and several reasons have been suggested such as the disintegration of European feudal aristocracy, the ascendancy of a mercantilism and bourgeoisie-class, and the transformation of social structure primarily because of the Industrial Revolution. Flugel claims that masculine austerity reflected a shift in class relations and as a result male attire across the classes became more uniform, homogenous and integrated than in the previous hierarchical era which he calls 'The Great Masculine Renunciation' due to the seventeenth and eighteenth-century gaudy finery of men.\textsuperscript{854}

The more simple attire of the nineteenth century portrayed a new identity for masculinity which was characterised by activity and strength. Unlike previous societies in which leisured men wore ruffs, wigs, jewellery and furs\textsuperscript{855}, in the new industrial society masculinity was identified by an industriousness which required less complicated attire. According to Perrot, the focus of elegance on only female attire provided a novel way to display affluence. The absence of sumptuousness in male attire also signified a new social responsibility. "In fact, upper-class men displayed their glory or power in an oblique way, not through what they were, but through what they owned."\textsuperscript{856} This is confirmed by Laver who describes Victorian man as a "dowdy bird, displaying wealth and status vicariously through the exotic plumage of his women, children and servants."\textsuperscript{857} According to Flugel, (as the nineteenth century progressed) men's "most important activities were passed (sic), not in the drawing room but in the commercial and industrial places", which had been associated with a relatively simple clothing. The austere working environment influenced the uniformity and lack of decoration in their clothes.\textsuperscript{858} Nonetheless, according to Veblen, women's elegant and elaborate dressing in the nineteenth century was demanded by men as a sign of vicarious consumption. For example, "At the stage of economic development at which the women were still in the full


\textsuperscript{855}Boucher, F. 1966, \textit{A History of Costume in the West}, Thames and Hudson, London.


\textsuperscript{858}Flugel, J. C. 1930, \textit{The Psychology of Clothes}, Hogarth Press, London. pp. 112 & 113

278
sense the property of the men, the performance of conspicuous leisure and consumption came to be part of the services required by them.”

From an economic perspective, the triumph of capitalism, with trade and industry controlled by private owners was an underlying factor in mutating the masculine ideal. The men who produced labour and capital in the rapidly transformed industrial society required clothing more sombre suitable for their public and functional obligations. Chenoune however, takes a different view claiming that the “masculine image of reserve and austerity stemmed from the ethical Puritan conceptions, which distanced from the ethic of the Catholic aristocracy.”

In English cities during the mid-nineteenth century, dark colours especially black became the standard. Dark colours began appearing during the third quarter of the eighteenth century and were gradually accepted and adopted. Men in every social stratum during the nineteenth century, regardless of their societal standing and class, ie, the aristocracy, the gentry, the bourgeoisie and working-classes, wore black on Sundays. By the early twentieth century, men’s suits had settled into a convention of black, dark grey or dark blue for formal day wear and patterned clothes or tweeds of brown or greenish tones for informal or country clothes.

The history of the trouser shows evidence of the cultural mutation of a basic style. The modern version of the man’s suit, consisting of a coat, waistcoat and breeches or trousers is considered to have evolved by the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Although it has been reformed over the centuries, the fundamental form remains the same. Trousers were apparently worn in Persia in the late pre-historic period and later adapted by northern Europeans and central Asians. In Medieval Europe, male aristocracy experienced a series of trouser variations. During the fifteenth century, elaborate and very short robes were worn over tight stockings or hose. During the sixteenth century, these were converted into a doublet and puffy bloomers which were remodelled into knee-breeches in the seventeenth century. During the early nineteenth century, knee-breeches were replaced by trousers, because knee-breeches were impractical for overseeing industry, travel in trains etc. The disappearance of knee-breeches and the emergence of trousers can therefore be attributed to changes in men’s social roles and identity.

Trousers, in Western cultures, especially in the nineteenth century were associated with masculinity and considered 'improper' for women to wear until the twentieth century, although historically a *Turkish trouser* was a female accessory. In Imperial China, trousers were deemed to be inferior clothing and were restricted to working-classes while the upper-classes wore long tunics/gowns. Historically, a skirt is customary of Western femininity. In contrast, a kilt, a Scotsman's skirt and the tartan it was made of were among the most powerful symbols of Scotland. Wearing a kilt was seen to confer extra stature on its wearer. “A man in a kilt is a man and a half;” for this reason the wearing of kilt and/or tartan was banned in Scotland by the English under the Dress Act in 1747 and was repealed in 1783. This fashion was revived during the Victorian era. Thus gender in clothing can be characterised differently across cultures.

The Western hat also provides evidence of the cultural expression of gender. Formal head-wear in the pre-nineteenth century, especially hats, expressed social hierarchy as well as gender hegemony. As McDowell explains, hats proclaimed a man’s status, attitude and beliefs and a woman’s class, breeding and even matrimonial state. The wearing of hats in church was controlled by gender superiority. On entering a church, men removed their hats, whilst women’s heads remained covered, ie, according to *Corinthians*: “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head [who is Christ]. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head [who is her husband] ...” By contrast, a soldier retains his head-dress even in a Christian church. As Flugel explains, similar to woman’s dress and her head-wear, a military uniform is a whole and the removal of any part of it gives the wearer an immodest appearance.
The colour of clothing also marked differences in social position and gender. For example, Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* explains, the distinctive colours worn by different classes in medieval England, i.e., “knights wore embroidered garments, yeomen in green, merchants in motley and doctors in purple and light blue.” By the twentieth-century, colours were firmly associated with the specific gender, i.e., pink for girls, and blue for boys whereas prior to World War II, there were no distinctions in dressing young children according to their gender. For example, children under five years of age wore similar clothing, i.e., short frocks with low necklines and short sleeves. Sometimes the pleating of skirts distinguished gender. Adults and children dressed alike. Children wore miniature replicas of their elders' fashions. It was not until the mid-eighteenth century that there were specific styles for children. Pink for men nowadays remains improper and unsuitable, but in the eighteenth century pink suits were highly acceptable for gentlemen's attire. As Chenoune explains, Frenchmen in the eighteenth century wore all colours such as pink, plum, white, cream, blue, yellow, puce and sea green which nowadays are unquestionably associated with femininity. By contrast, nineteenth-century European male wore austere colours such as black, white and grey to provide an image of dignity, control and morality. The idea of morality and control also affected women's clothing in this era, e.g., orange was prohibited for the unmarried, two bright colours in one dress was considered 'vulgar' and yellow was generally regarded as unladylike. (Note also that yellow was the colour of most correctional attire.) As the above suggests, gender differentiation through colour was practised diversely in different cultures and epochs.

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878 Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1974, Vol. 5, pp. 1029
881 See Chapter 3
As the above illustration suggests, throughout the centuries, including the nineteenth century, regardless of their age (children or adults), men and women dressed differently. According to costume historian James Laver, clothing was designed to display the physical and biological inequalities of men and women. For

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example, “Women’s clothes are governed and denoted by the eroticism or seduction, by contrast men’s clothes are directed by the hierarchical principle of class or status.” In the context of Victorian dress, gender differentiation has been described as: “men were serious (they wore dark clothes and little ornamentation), women were frivolous (they wore light pastel colours, ribbons, lace and bows); men were active (their clothing allowed them movement), women were inactive (their clothes inhibited movement); men were strong (their clothes emphasised their broad chest and shoulders), women were delicate (their clothing accentuated tiny waists, sloped shoulders and a softly rounded silhouette); men were aggressive (their clothing had sharp definitive lines and a clearly defined silhouette), women were submissive (their silhouette was indefinite, their clothing constricting).” As these descriptions suggest, biological gender distinctiveness was strongly interpreted in attire.

Gender in Attire in the Colony of Western Australia

In colonial Western Australia, gender differentiation through attire was evident from the time of initial settlement and quickly confirmed male dominance, power and social position and female subordination in the colony. This was in spite of the fact that women did far more physical work than they had done in England. Therefore, clothing was often the principle visual indicator of this social asymmetry. Colonial Western Australian clothing therefore reflected social gender inequality in the same way as it did in England. For example, as in many cultures, colonial Western Australian men wore less clothing than women to enable mobility for occupation and activity. In Western Australia, this would have also been influenced by climate. Colonial women however, were still expected to wear more clothing and embellishments to retain their status, decency and femininity, as The Inquirer reported: “The long flowing drapery, which in all civilised countries is generally considered an essential part of women’s dress ...”. Therefore, women continued to wear multiple petticoats, concealed/boned/corsetted bodices, trained skirts and long sleeves while men’s outfits consisted of trousers, jackets and shirts.
Religion, especially Christianity, influenced Western Australian society from the initial settlement. As Stannage wrote, "Swan River in the 1830s was as conservative in religion as it was Tory in politics, and Perth in 1918 was still a profoundly religious society." Prominent colonial religious figures, such as Rev. Wollaston, constantly acknowledged the practice of Christian rituals and traditions. Therefore, the patriarchal theological attitudes which segregated gender were maintained in colonial Western Australia. In a God-fearing Western Australian society, women were expected to cover their bodies and men to dress conservatively, especially in the Christian church and in public places.

As discussed in Chapter 3, sports clothing in the colony also reflects gender hierarchy. There were scarcely any distinctions between women’s ordinary clothing and sporting clothing in the pre-1900 era. Women who participated in sports were mostly from the privileged-classes, but wore exact versions of their everyday clothing with less decoration and embellishment. For example, a photograph taken in the late nineteenth century depicts women in ankle-length skirts, long-sleeved, embellished blouses and decorated hats, skiing in the New South Wales snowfields, rowing and horse-riding. In colonial Western Australia, women were photographed in sporting arenas and in women’s sporting teams dressed in formal hats, less-decorative ankle-length skirts and tight fitting bodices, sometimes with crinolines or bustles, stockings and gloves. (Figure 42 and 43) Cricket became a favourite sport for men in Australia during the 1870s and women’s interest in cricket began during the latter part of the nineteenth century. As with other sports, women cricketers wore long skirts, long-sleeved blouses and hats. Significantly, this conservatism in cricket survived until 2002, with Western Australian women cricketers wearing divided skirts being prohibited from wearing trousers like their male counterparts, unless recommended for medical reasons.

886 Stannage, C. T. 1979, The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia’s Capital City, Perth City Council, Perth. pp. 34 & 308
889 Battye Library Photograph Collection, No. 1063P, 29714P, 29668P
Figure 42:

**Tennis on the Perth Esplanade c1890**

Women tennis players dressed in hats, long-sleeve bodices and ankle-length skirts


Figure 43:

**Women Croquet Players in Busselton c1890**

Dressed in decorated formal hats, fitted blouses, long-sleeve bodices and long skirts.

Source: 25864P, Battye Library Photograph Collection
In the nineteenth century, women were expected to wear their regular clothes—long-sleeved blouses, ankle-lengthed skirts, corsets, hats and gloves on the beach. Public swimming and bathing for women in the colonial era was deemed immoral. For example, the Glenelg City Council of South Australia in the 1850s, implemented sea bathing regulations which separated men’s and women’s beaches one thousand feet apart with different bathing times. At Brighton Beach in Victoria, a white flag signified the women’s bathing area and a red flag signified the men’s bathing area. Likewise in relation to colonial Western Australia, public swimming for women was restricted and mixed bathing was prohibited, and at Bathers’ Bay in Fremantle men’s and women’s bathing areas were carefully demarcated, while in Geraldton, as Mrs. Norris wrote: “There was no need to mark ladies and gents. Gents were not allowed in while any age female was in. The women and children had 2 hours in the morning and 4 to 6 pm. A big land bell was rung to call them out.” Knickerbocker bathing suits were worn during the 1880s and in Geraldton, “Women wore nightgowns or underclothes as bathing suits, but then bathing suits consisted of 3 pieces, long trousers with frills at the ankles, a top piece with long sleeves and a separate skirt, all trimmed with white or red rickrack braid or tape. The men and boys wore sixpenny trunks in white cotton with stripes running across them.”

In accordance with British and European convention, Western Australian male colonists wore austere colours. For example, “One dress suit of black cloth,” was requested by colonist George Fletcher Moore in May 1833, and “Black clothing was the uniform of respectability and social status.” In examining approximately five hundred surviving photographs, male colonists wore dark-coloured sartorial styles comparable with European designs. Resembling European fashion, Western Australian formal male attire consisted of a waistcoat, trousers and jacket throughout the nineteenth century. A great number of

896 Mrs. Norris, Memories of Geraldton 1890-1900, Typescript (PR 657), Battye Library, Perth.
897 Field, M. The History of the Swimming Facilities (Baths and Pools) of Western Australia, Typescript HS/PR/1453, Battye Library, Perth. pp. 10
898 Mrs. Norris, Memories of Geraldton 1890-1900, Typescript (PR 657), Battye Library, Perth.
nineteenth-century Western Australian waistcoats have survived. Generally the waistcoat was made with sombre simplicity, but a few were especially made for weddings and embroidered.

**Figure 44** shows men’s black suit worn in the Kalgoorlie/Boulder goldfields c1900 and consisting a waistcoat, tailcoat and trousers.

*Royal Western Australian Historical Society Collection*
Source: Royal Western Australian Historical Society
Drawn by author Damayanthie Eluwawalage
Although male clothing designs conformed in simplicity, a variety of styles and fashions did flourish. In particular, variations in men's coats, jackets and neck-wear increased. Men's coats for instance varied in length, lapel size and function, ie, tail coats, frock coats and morning coats. In fact, different coats and jackets for leisure and formal wear suggests a lack of uniformity and an attention to fashion. But as Veblen's leisure theory maintains, these masculine fineries were reserved for the upper-classes indicating their status and social position: "Elegant dress serves its purpose of elegance not only in that it is expensive, but also because it is the insignia of leisure. It not only shows that the wearer is able to consume a relatively large value, but it argues at the same time that he consumes without producing."  

Numerous supplies of coats, jackets and neck-wear were imported into Western Australia. As existing newspapers indicate, approximately fourteen styles of coats (eg. dress, frock, shooting, fur, waterproof), seven types of jackets (eg, monkey, pea, polka, pilot, fur) and neck-wear (eg, neck ties and cravats) were imported throughout the nineteenth century. (See Appendix 1) Surviving photographs provide evidence of various male coat, jacket and neck-wear styles suggesting that the colonial male population dressed stylishly or perhaps, as Veblen maintains, conspicuously, designating their social class and status (Figure 45).  

Figure 45:
Different Style Coats, Jackets and Neckwear Worn in Colonial Western Australia

A.

B.

C.
The lack of uniformity and colour in men’s wear is also visible in portraits from the 1840s. Official group portraits throughout the century show less-regularity in male clothing. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the uniform dress code seems to have largely disappeared or was perhaps disregarded as the male colonists attired in suits with different colours and colour combinations, different style neck-wear and suiting styles. In Britain in early 1800, dark jackets and light trousers were well-received until the emergence of the matching jacket/trouser style in late 1850. This was scarcely evident in colonial Western Australian photographs. Therefore, although colonial men dressed stylishly, they appeared different from each other, suggesting Western Australian practice primarily determined by availability and economics which contrasted with the existing European convention. The photographs below reveal less uniformity in colonial men’s clothing as they wore different style jackets and neckwear.
Figure 46:

A. Government Printer Staff c1880
Source: Battye Library Photograph Collection (25340P)

B. Office Staff c1886
Source: Battye Library Photograph Collection (3215P)
From about mid 1890, there seems to be a clear relaxation in rules for men’s clothing, eg, first, with rolled-up shirt sleeves and from 1900, fewer neckties and increased informality. This is evidenced mainly in the Goldfields (Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie) but is also evident in photographs taken in Perth in the same period. On the other hand, women’s clothing, although more durable, tended to maintain current styles and fashion. See example below:

**Figure 47:**
Informal men’s clothing c1890
A. Public Works Department camp, Kalgoorlie c1890

B. Miners' camp, Coolgardie c1895-96

Source:
A. Battye Library Photograph Collection, 20163P
B. Battye Library Photograph Collection, 4715P
C. Tiger's Well camp, Subiaco c1893

D. Money Street, Perth c 1894

Source:
C. Battye Library Photograph Collection, 67474P
D. Battye Library Photograph Collection, 28381P
The emergence of the features of Western Australian men’s attire was a subtle transition and occurred in spite of an overall conformity to British style. Colonial tailors for instance, fulfilled a vital role in maintaining a male appearance consistent with British and European practice. According to the colonial newspapers, in April 1841, F. Waldeck, Tailor and Draper in Perth advertised the availability of a variety of fabrics and buttons for tailoring which he had imported. From 1850 onwards, there were numerous tailors’ advertisements indicating their willingness and ability to create the equivalent of European fashion. For example,

New Tailoring Establishment
A.R. Kennedy
N.B. every garment warranted to fit in the latest Paris and English styles.

As various advertisements indicated, some tailors used imported ready-made fashion as samples, for example,

Stanley and Marriott
Tailors and Habit Makers, Murray Street, Perth
From Minister & Son, Tailors and Habit Makers to Her Majesty, Regent Street, London.
Latest London and Paris fashion kept for inspection.

As the workmanship was far below average initially, it was only towards the end of the century that male clothing in Western Australia improved in tailoring and finishing. This might be attributed to better access to developments in technology, eg, sewing machines, pattern making etc which enabled better cutting, constructing and tailoring; the increase in fashion establishments; and the greater accessibility of fashion instructions such as publications like The Tailor and Cutter.
In colonial Western Australia and concurring with the British practice, head-wear, especially hats, were worn from the time of the initial settlement. In the pioneering era, hats were greatly sought after, because of the climate, for example, George Fletcher Moore wrote in August 1831: “We are in great want of light black beaver hats, which every one who can get them wears; but we can procure no male headpieces here, except some villainous-looking silk ones of an old fashioned shape”. Also, as some photographs reveal, Aborigines and working people wore hats in work and private/formal environments. Noticeably, scarcely any individuals in photographic portraits wore their hats. However, some appeared holding their hats or their hats were exhibited nearby, for example,

Figure 48:

A. 842P
B. 28261P
C. 67856P
D. 26385P
E. 26826P
F. 26349P

Source: Battye Library Photograph Collection

Moore, G. F. 1884, *Diary of Ten Years: Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia*, M Walbrook, London. pp. 59
As explained previously, hats in Europe and Britain were primarily worn to maintain social status. Therefore, specific types of hats became associated with particular social classes. The top hat appeared in Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century and was worn by upper and middle-classes. As the style filtered through the class system by mid-nineteenth century top hats were worn by all classes. The bowler hat, created in England in 1850 as an occupational hat for gamekeepers and hunters, was adapted by the upper-classes for sport. Eventually the bowler became an icon of the bourgeoisie, while the straw boater hat was worn widely by working-class men during the nineteenth century, however, this style also became popular with all social classes during the late nineteenth century.904

Along with the British custom, Western Australians also wore top hats, bowler hats and straw boaters. According to Western Australian newspapers, hat importation began as early as 1833. However, less uniformity in hats was evident in Western Australia in the late-nineteenth century. For example, at the opening ceremony of the Perth General Post Office in 1890 (See Figure 49), a range of hats were worn, ie, top, bowler, straw boaters and caps.905

Figure 49:

General Post Office Opening Ceremony c1890

Source: Battye Library Photograph Collection (24564P)

905 Photo No. 24564P, Battye Library, Perth.
Photographs of official functions, staff portraits, informal gatherings, picnics and social events however demonstrate the less conformity in head-wear in colonial Western Australia, suggesting, that the role of the hat as an indicator of social level was less effective or even ignored in the colonial Western Australia, or that choice of style was governed by availability and/or local millinery skills.
Figure 50:
Examples of conformity in Head-wear in Colonial Western Australia

A. 5101P  B. 24544P
Source: Battye Library Photograph Collection
The image of the Victorian woman portrays her social, sexual and economical subordination. The notion of the Shifting Erogenous Zone that women’s fashionable dress arouses the other sex by exposing and concealing various parts of her body, which also explains the role of clothing to heighten sexual allure, can be viewed as another facet of male dominance. For example, as Kunzel explains, decolletaged female dresses were permitted in the courts and among ruling aristocratic circles as a sexual display, for the attention and satisfaction of men. According to Laver, the primary force behind changes in women’s fashions was their desire to attract males. Tiny waists and the revealed cleavage caused by corsets and by extension the corset itself has been interpreted as an instrument of physical oppression and sexual commodification, and can also be interpreted as the result of the male fascination for the woman’s body.

As the illustration below, Figure entitled *The Silhouettes of Western Australian Women* suggests, throughout the nineteenth-century women wore ankle-length dresses (often with trains) with fully covering bodices. Styles and construction were identical to the current British and European modes.

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Figure 51: The Silhouette of a Western Australian Woman 1829-1900
(The General Outline of a Woman in Costume)

1820-1830
1830-1840
1840-1850
1850-1860
1860-1870
1870-1880
1880-1890
1890-1900
1900-1914

Drawn by author Damayanthie Eliwawalage
Examination of approximately two hundred articles of nineteenth-century surviving costumes and approximately five hundred surviving photographs in nineteenth-century pictorial fashion publications and British costume collections revealed that, although most colonial costumes were similarly styled, cut and constructed, they appeared less decorative than British costumes. For example, in 1869, colonist Isabella Ferguson instructed her dressmaker to "put less trimming" on her dress,914 and colonist Georgiana Molloy wrote in 1830 of her less decorative and simplistic way of dressing: "My gowns, are all very plain without anything but hems and tucks and my bonnet's are cottage shape with ribbons,"915 providing evidence of differences between the British and Western Australian ways of dressing.

It is likely that the less elaborate Western Australian female attire was a result of the colonial town infrastructure (e.g., the state of road, pavements etc), the climate and social conditions (e.g., more involvement in work by pioneer women). In Britain, especially in the nineteenth-century, many social activities were a podium for the fashionable leisure-classes. Urban and public spaces were significant as the street was an important element of social life in Britain and the social elite promenaded frequently on popular streets and in parks to display themselves, as well as to facilitate social relationships.916 The scarcity of such activities or venues in colonial Western Australia may also be a reason for the less extravagant female attire.

In keeping with British tradition, colonial Western Australian women wore hats, bonnets or caps, throughout the nineteenth century. Newspapers advertised imported hats, bonnets and caps from the early 1830s, and there was numerous colonial personal correspondence regarding women's head-wear. For example, colonist Thomas Brown wrote in November 1851: "I have seen the cap which Mrs. Cowan got made and think you will like it. Price 3/6."917  

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In surviving colonial photographs, almost every woman wore head covering out of doors. For example,

**Figure 52:**

A.  

B.  

A. 5459P  
B. 26333P  

Battye Collection
However, almost every younger female studio photograph was without head-dress. For example,

**Figure 53:**

A. 21423P   B. 29044P  
A. 21423P   B. 29044P  
C. 26473P   D. 26462P  
C. 26473P   D. 26462P  
Source: Battye Library Photograph Collection
After the 1880s, the use of head-wear declined and during the 1890s, only wedding parties, party-goers, picnickers and church-goers wore hats and bonnets. For example,

Figure 54:
Unlike in Britain, colonial Western Australian women’s head-wear seems not to have been an indicator of class or matrimonial state. Obviously colonial women required hats and bonnets for protection against the sun but the wearing of hats, bonnets etc was not mandatory, eg, affluent colonist Isabella Ferguson wrote in February 1869: “Can you make me a bonnet (don’t buy one) or I can do without a head-dress.”

The correlation between decorative clothing, power and dominance is also exhibited in Western Australian male clothing. The costumes of the European monarchs and military uniforms for instance displayed sovereignty and power, as Flugel observes: “Even the most gay feminine attire scarcely equals the gorgeousness of certain military uniforms.” Throughout the centuries, European kings, queens and monarchical members wore extravagantly embellished costumes and jewellery rarely available to other classes of society. In colonial Western Australia, military officials wore colourful regimentals similar to British officers. For example, the first Governor of Western Australia, Captain James Stirling wore a bright red and gold embroidered official naval uniform. These along with magistrates, judges and clergy were males and they wore distinctive clothing of authority. As the century progressed, according to surviving photographs, this pattern continued with colourful and distinctive costumes worn by higher governmental officials.

In nineteenth-century Britain, clothing maintained the status between the upper and working-classes as servants’ uniforms were a notable indication of social differentiation and hierarchy between the classes. The uniformity of servants was established by the upper-classes as a class-demarcation which reflected their power and authority over the lower-classes. When comparing these social circumstances with colonial Western Australia, however, there is scarcely any evidence of liveried servants apart from those of the Governor’s residence. Female servants generally wore aprons in a contrasting colour with the dress and head-wear while male servants wore trousers, shirts, waistcoats and jackets and had no distinctive badges.

Personal appearance is a form of communication, and establishes identity by indicating to others gender, age and occupation etc. According to Goffman, “personal identity and appearance is an assumption that the individual can be

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Portrait of Sir James Stirling 1833, Photo No. 52467P, Battye Library, Perth.

differentiated from others. "922 As Skevington explains, members of low-status groups [in this instance women] may seek to change their position to attain distinctiveness whereas members of high status groups will act to maintain superiority. However, sometimes, rather than compare themselves with superior groups, low-status groups may seek comparison with equivalent or more subordinate groups in order to enhance their own social identity.923

As Australian costume writers such as Fletcher,924 Flower925 and Scandrett926 claim, colonial (Eastern) Australian men's clothing became more uniform with less indication of class or status especially after the mid-nineteenth century, whilst women's dress indicated the constant expression of social status and standing. This influence may have occurred earlier in the Western Australian colony. The Western Australian colony was established approximately forty years after the initial Eastern settlement. Therefore, by the 1860s, the Eastern colonies were approximately a century old. According to Kroeber's notion of fashion/style mutation, the eastern settlements had almost completed the process of transforming structural features of dress, while Western Australia was only beginning.927 There were also major differences in the social structure of the colonies. Western Australia was initially established as a crown colony while most Eastern colonies were penal colonies and therefore accommodated a wider range of social classes with different behavioural patterns.

Therefore, theoretically, the comparison of attire between the Eastern and Western colonies at any given epoch is impractical. Nevertheless, the quantity and quality of importations, personal correspondence, surviving photographs/costumes and newspaper advertisements suggests that colonial Western Australian men and women dressed somewhat differently for at least the first fifty years of the settlement.

924Fletcher, M. 1984, Costume in Australia, Oxford University Press, Melbourne. pp. 64, 93
Sumptuary laws were implemented in colonial Australia in 1864 in the colony of New South Wales. The extraordinary ‘Act for the Reform and Regulation of Female Apparel’ restricted women’s appearance and also controlled their conspicuous expenditure.

Figure 55:
The First page of the Act.
Clauses and Regulations, ie:

1) Repeal of potential rights and powers held by females.

2) No grating, gridiron, skeleton or ladder underskirt of compressible umbrellic or other construction to be used. Penalties to be enforced.
   No female shall wear above articles, which shall be in diameter more than two yards, whether the same be made or fashioned out of street, whalebone, cane, cord, wicker-work, cat-gut, India-rubber, wood or any other material, by means of any other persons in the streets, parks, bridges, churches, theatres, doorways, public vehicles, steam vessels, here-to-fore incommoded by reason of the collisions and causalities caused thereby. Under a penalty of twenty shillings for each offence, such sum to be earned by the offender, either at plain needle work, or shirt making, at the usual slop charges at the direction of Magistrate.

3) Barrel or tub pattern petticoats forbidden.
   It shall not be lawful for any female above the age of forty to wear, underskirt or petticoat, the pattern of red and black striped, tub or barrel pattern nor chess or draught board pattern, which likely to cause the fright of horse, ox or ass or shall be calculated to cause the unnecessary barking of puppies.

4) In cases of married women, husband’s approval certificate must be obtained before purchasing fabric and clothing. Husband may buy without certificate. Unmarried female under thirty years of age must obtain a certificate of approval from the parents or a parent.

5) Any female who may have in her possession of any ropes, ladders, skeletons, gratings, wicker-work, or other machinery, may deposit them at Police Stations or Workhouses for the poor.

6) Boots
   It shall not be lawful for any female under sixteen or over forty to wear any boots with military or high-heels, which shall exceed in height three inches, nor any boots made of buffalo or cow-hide; nor any boots with brass, or German silver eyelet holes, nor any boots with leather laces, or black boots with pink, red, blue or green binding, shall draw the attention of the passengers either to the large sized or expressively elegantly shaped foot of the wearer, under a penalty of ten shillings, the same to be earned at the wash-tub in a laundry, at the usual rate of payment; which fine may be remitted by the nearest Police Magistrate.

7) Bonnets
   Any female, whether married or single, above the age of ten years, shall not be worn any bonnet which shall be more than ten inches off the forehead, or the curtain of which shall sit or rest on the back of the neck, or shall be
fastened on by steel springs or other wise, so as to sit entirely behind the ears, shall incur the same penalty, ten shillings.\textsuperscript{928}

This Act was significantly distinctive to the twelfth to eighteenth-centuries European sumptuary laws.
As there was scarcely any evidence to clarify that Australian males attired extravagantly.
Perhaps, the conspicuous fashionability associated power and social dominance, was irrelevant and inapplicable to the colonial Australian social arena. Therefore, high fashion was viewed as an unrequired conspicuous waste (as in Veblen’s theory\textsuperscript{929}).
The Act reflects the Australian woman’s secondary position in the male-dominant society. Noticeably, the colonial societal circumstances were more extreme than in nineteenth-century Britain as the Act also includes the perception of fashionability. The implementation of such laws were non existent in the colony of Western Australia. The differences between the status of the colony and its inhabitants of the eastern and western colonies, as well as the gulf between administrative procedures, were the possible rationales.

In addressing the research question, whether colonial clothing negotiated gender boundaries in the nineteenth century, this chapter defined/analysed the differences in male and female clothing (in general and in colonial context), and examined changes in clothing developed in response to the requirement to distinguish the various strata of colonial society.

\textsuperscript{928} An Act for the Reform and Regulation of Female Apparel, 1864. pp.1-3
Summary Analysis

Colonial Western Australian society has been established along gender lines in all facets as gender consciousness was evident from the pioneering era. For example, the religion and language patterns of Western Australia reflected a male-dominated culture. The religious way of living and dressing and stereotyped conversing patterns suggest gender segregation. Clothing is one of the noticeable hallmarks of social status and gender. The God-fearing Western Australian society clearly demanded the gender differentiated and culturally acceptable clothing, as colonists’, especially colonial women’s, attire accorded with theological guidelines. These religious customs determined colonial clothing behaviour.

Dress in the nineteenth century demarcated gender. Historically, gender did not mediate through vestmentary codes but gender-segregated attire was visible from the nineteenth-century. Noticeably, in the nineteenth century, female attire became extremely elaborate, while male dress developed uniformity and sobriety. The symbolism of clothing served gender segregation, reinforcing the asymmetry of gender roles. In relation to colonial male attire, trousers were worn by colonial males and were reserved as a symbol of male authority and identity, suggesting male domination and power in the colony. This suggests, patriarchy-associated societal behaviour and gender-demarcated clothing in the colonial society. Distinctive dress codes between colonial men and women, and women’s concealing and decorative dresses verified the ways in which fashion expressed gender. It is also connected with the different forms of respect which social convention prescribes for two sexes. The meaning of the hatted-head varied in relation to the wearer’s gender. The women’s hat indicated her fashionability whilst man’s hat indicated class and status in the nineteenth century.

Fashion in nineteenth-century Western Australia expressed male hegemonic values. The feminisation of fashion and the idea of vicarious displays were processes which declared the power of men. In the nineteenth century, fashion, in terms of an interest in dress and its changing styles, became a predominantly female concern. Therefore, the fashionable finery and related surviving evidence are primarily confined to colonial women. Fewer evidential sources of colonial men’s attire also reflects the consistency of men’s attire, suggesting their public status and power in society. The distinct attire of primarily male colonial governors, judges, clergy and officials portrayed conformity of public power. As the masculine ideal became supreme, their attire was expressed in conservative styles of clothing in discreet and sombre colours. At the other end of the spectrum, the extensively documented woman’s dress with wide-ranging varieties demonstrated the women’s dependence and their role as a decorative accessory displaying the collective wealth of the
family. These varied clothing patterns are indicators of how colonial society and different stations within society were actually operated.

Male authority was considered a form of social control mechanism in the economic and spiritual context. In nineteenth-century Western society, women had restricted rights and liberties, legally, politically and socially, as they were subordinated to men's dominance and power. As explained in Chapter 4, in colonial Western Australia, although many women were occupied as clothing workers, the economic importance of these women was disregarded in colonial Western Australian society, because of the institutional and attitudinal barriers against women engaging in pronounced male domains, ie, commerce and finance. For example, throughout the nineteenth century, Western Australian women were almost totally excluded from business and commercial activities, as their services were restricted to domestication, ie, in relation to the proprietorship of colonial stores for instance, approximately ninety-nine per-cent were owned by males. In relation to colonial women's clothing, supplying and manufacturing of women's clothing was rarely controlled by females, as the authorities who empowered women's clothing, ie, local traders, importers and newspaper owners, were predominantly males. This male governance over women's clothing suggests women's submission in colonial society, where women were identified on their personal appearance rather than their individual and intellectual accomplishments. In that context, women's fashionable clothing can be perceived as a social control, ie, social control which maintained women's dependence and subservience and which elevated the status of men. Clothes, therefore, performed the dual function of designating social position and gender, and fashionable clothes operated as a mechanism of social control, directing social distinctions. Western Australian upper-class women experienced class-related privileges, whilst at the same time they must have experienced submission because of their gender. Western Australian lower-class women experienced double subjugation, because of their lower social status and gender.

Colonial women's fashion encountered many variations. Skirts expanded and reduced, waistlines rose and fell, and sleeves enlarged and compressed. Nevertheless, despite the technical advances, ie, the sewing machine, development in clothing production, material, paper patterns and pattern cutting, certain fashion features remained constant and unchanged. Skirts, for instance, never rose above the ankle and sleeves of day-time dresses were long at all times. The materials of surviving costumes, such as fine cottons, elegant prints, delicate silks, coarse velvets and heavy woollens, provides testimony to the fabrics used in the colony. The resemblance between the cut and construction of colonial garments and dressmaking and cutting instructions contained in the many magazines/books, also demonstrates colonial fashion consciousness.
In the colony of Western Australia, conspicuous consumption appears more
evident in female dress than in male dress because of social role to display wealth
and class. Males in developing on styles either through availability, climate,
hardship or environment show less evidence of the trickle-down of styles from
Britain. Women, in order to display their husbands/family wealth and social level,
show much stronger evidence of utilising British styles.