

In Step With Fashion

Women in Action strives to provide an in-depth analysis of a broad range of women's issues. In our 18 years of publication, the topics we have tackled were mostly 'key issues' in the women's movement: women's health, sexuality, women and environment, fundamentalism and communalism, women and media, women and communication, and many more.

Why fashion? Why digress now, when we have established ourselves as a space for feminist debates and analyses? Well, it is precisely for the same reason—to provide a space for debates and for shaping of analyses on all issues that impact on women, including those that are not considered key issues.

Fashion—the norms on what is deemed appropriate in terms of appearances and behaviour at a particular period of time—is probably one of the most visible indicator of gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and general social position. Through the ages, fashion has reinforced symbolic boundaries set by such determinants of a person's identity. And it continues to do so today.

Fashion can define the limits of what women can do and what they can be: think corsets in the Victorian era or stiletto shoes in the modern age. On the other hand, fashion can also be manipulated to construct and deconstruct different meanings, including the definition and assertion of self-identity.

Through the 1970s and early 1980s, discussions and critiques on high fashion and haute couture focused on how it has been shaping women's images and the understanding of their own bodies. This issue revisits this discourse, as our contributors present different analyses on a wide range of topics relating to fashion.

Luz Martinez, a self-confessed regular make-up user, discusses make-up trends and how these are shaped. Roselle Pineda writes about the many ways women can subvert the concept and the business of fashion using her experiences as examples. Ava Vivian Gonzales discourses on the intersection of clothing, colonisation, and Christianity.

More than just a trend or a norm, fashion is also an attitude, a lifestyle, and a political perspective. Jing Gaddi, who goes by the interesting pen name Rotten Jello, elucidates these views by interrogating the evolution of punk from a fashion statement to an attitude and lifestyle. A related article by Lora Bex Lempert and Synov Skorge provide another dimension to fashion by sharing their experiences in using the ubiquitous t-shirt as a campaign tool on violence against women.

Another interesting discovery that we have for this issue is the new literature around gender, fashion, and body politics. While we are not surprised that these materials are authored by researchers based in the North, we believe this is a good start in theorising and developing our own analysis of how fashion impacts on women. Some of these exciting literatures are in the Resources section.

Fashion will keep marching forward, sweeping us into new body images and identities. With this issue, we are hoping to keep in step, marching forward to a better understanding of the many ways by which women's body images are constructed.

