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Author(s): Turunen, Arja

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“I Am A Skirt Person”

Resistance to Women’s Trouser Fashion in Oral History Narratives

By Arja Turunen

Probably the most significant change in Western women’s dress in the twentieth century was the adoption of trousers because traditionally trousers have been men’s wear and a symbol of masculinity as well. Fashion designers have designed women’s trouser suits since the beginning of the twentieth century but it was only in the 1970s that they were commonly accepted as women’s wear (see e.g. Wolter 1994:222ff). At the beginning of twenty-first century women’s trouser wearing has still sometimes been disapproved of (see Vincent 2009:132). As dress historian Susan J. Vincent (2009:131) has pointed out, “although the twentieth century brought two world wars, universal suffrage, contraception and the Equal Pay Act, it did not give women equal access to trousers”.

The history of women’s trouser wearing has therefore been seen as a story of women’s battle for the right to wear them and as a story of gender equality (Ribeiro 1986:132–145; Wolter 1994; Vincent 2009:122–132). In this article I discuss how Finnish women have experienced the arrival of trouser fashion. I focus on those women who do not like to wear them and who even criticize women’s wearing of trousers. I ask why they prefer skirts and why they are not interested in having ‘equal access’ to trousers because their stories are interesting counter-narratives to the “battle” narrative.

The history of fashion and dress has been typically represented in the academic and popular literature as a story of inevitable evolution and emulation: new fashions emerge one after another, replacing the old fashions and diffusing from the fashion centres and the fashion-conscious elites to the masses. These views have

been criticized in the new dress studies by pointing out, for example, the role of sub-cultural styles, creolization of fashion and dress, the eclectic mixing of styles and the subjective experiences of dress (see e.g. Hansen 2004). As Joanne Entwistle has pointed out, fashion does not dictate our dress: individual clothing decisions are framed both by personal preferences and by a wide range of social factors and cultural norms. Fashion is only one factor influencing dress, and not all fashions are adopted by all individuals (Entwistle 2000:49–52).

In this article I study the individual clothing decisions of those women who have not adopted trouser wearing or whose dress is influenced by it only in to a lesser extent. The article is based on the premises of the ethnological and anthropological dress studies that are interested in the individual and social meanings of dress and that analyse dress as part of the social and cultural context in a specified time and place (Eicher 2000; Turunen 2011:35–37). “Dress” refers here to the everyday dress and the act of clothing the body, and “fashion” means the abstract fashion system that produces new styles and garments as well as aesthetic ideas and discourses of dress. The relation between these two is best described as follows: fashion provides the “raw material” of daily dress and it becomes recognized only when it is accepted and worn by people (Entwistle 2000:1–4, 48).

With the methods of oral history research, the aim of the article is to give voice to those women who have rejected trouser wearing in one way or another and to investigate their perspective on the matter, as well as to interpret their views by

looking explanations for their opinions (Fingerroos & Haanpää 2012:87). I will start by discussing, how and why the fashion of women's trousers emerged in the fashion world and how and why it has been valued positively as sign of women's liberation and emancipation. After that I scrutinize the views of those women who do not share these interpretations of the meanings of women's trousers. Who are they and how do they validate their arguments?¹

Research Material and Methods

Research material for this article consists of written narratives collected in 2006 and 2007 as a part of a project that was launched to gather and study memories of women's wearing of trousers in Finland. Research material was collected by circulating a questionnaire through the Folklore Archives.² The questionnaire that was initiated by me and titled (in Finnish) "Women's Wearing of Trousers" (Naisten housujen käyttö) was aimed at women who were alive for example in the 1950s when trousers were not commonly worn by Finnish women. I was especially interested in women's own experiences and choices of dress. I wanted to study, how the trouser fashion had arrived in Finland, how the respondents themselves had made the decision to start wearing trousers and how it felt to wear them for the first time. Respondents were also asked to tell how other people reacted to their trouser wearing or the new trend in general. It was defined in the questionnaire that I was collecting memories of the wearing of (all kinds of) long pants,³ not underpants, but some respondents wanted to share their memories and stories of them as well. The

questionnaire included questions about both purchasing and wearing of trousers. I asked, for example, in which situations and for what purposes the respondents had worn trousers and how and when they acquired their first pair of trousers. In order to get a better picture of their dress style I included questions about their preferences in dress in general: for example, what are important qualities in dress when they purchase new clothing.⁴

The questionnaire attracted a total of 108 responses, ten from men and 98 from women. The oldest female respondents were born in the 1910s and the youngest one in the 1980s, but the majority of the female respondents, altogether 91 women (91% of all female respondents) were born between 1920 and 1949, which means that they were born at a time when women's trouser wearing was uncommon and disapproved of.⁵ Respondents contributing this kind of written material collected through writing competitions and questionnaires in Finland typically represent all social classes and all parts of the country (Helsti 2005:151). This was also the case with this material. Questionnaires were returned from all provinces, and from manual workers, farmers and farmers' wives, salespersons, housewives, nurses, teachers and university professors etc. The responses were mainly thematic essays that followed the order of questions. The length of the responses varied from one page to more than twenty pages.

The research material for this article consists of seventeen responses that are written by women who never wear trousers or wear them only occasionally. In this article I use the reminiscences both as source material and as the object of my re-

search (see Fingerroos & Haanpää 2012: 88–89). First of all, the reminiscences are sources to the respondents' view of the matter that I am interested in. As I analyse the respondents' views, the reminiscences are the objects of my research because I am interested in structures and devices in their narration, i.e. in how they validate their choices of dress and what kind of meanings they attach to women's trousers. In reading and analysing the reminiscence I follow Jyrki Pöysä, who has named his method of reading written reminiscence as "close reading of the text". By "close reading" he means reading the text as a coherent whole and – like a book – with a beginning, middle and end (Pöysä 2015: 9–37). In my case I am interested in the life story of the respondents, especially their personal dress history, because it forms the context for their history of trouser wearing.

Trouser Wearing as a Symbol of Gender Equality

The first initiatives for women's trouser wearing were made in the mid nineteenth century by American feminists who encouraged women to change their long dress into a more practical short dress with long pantaloons underneath. With the so-called "bloomer-dress", as the trouser suit was called, feminists also highlighted the impractical aspects of women's current fashion. The dress provoked a storm of critical and amused comments since contemporaries considered it a public attack against men and the hierarchic gender order that was seen as natural (Fischer 2001:79–94; Wolter 1994:48–82; Vincent 2009:122–125). At the end of the nineteenth century women's increased partici-

pation in sports resulted in improvements in women's sportswear which made trousers an alternative for women who liked, for example, gymnastics, riding and biking and who dared to wear them (Warner 2006; Wolter 1994:119–195; Vincent 2009:126–129). Fashion designers started to include trousers in their collections around 1908 and 1909 but they were disapproved of even in the fashion magazines (Wolter 1994:223ff). Only the First World War made trousers an appropriate work wear for women who worked in the factories and fields replacing men who were at the front (Grayzel 1999).

Women's trouser wearing made a breakthrough in the fashion world in the 1920s as part of the modern leisure wear that included beach pyjamas, shorts and other trouser suits for the modern New Woman who took care of her health by actively participating in sports and by sunbathing (Horwood 2011:79–81; Skillen 2012:165–179; Wolter 1994:237–258). This fashion arrived in Finland as well but it was adopted only by the upper-class and upper-middle-class women who engaged in sports. For the majority of Finns who lived in the countryside, the new fashion was both expensive and exotic: the ready-to-wear garments were too expensive for the rural women who, at the beginning of the 1920s, still wore mainly home-sewn clothes made of homespun fabric such as wool and linen (Lönqvist 1974:85–88; Kaukonen 1985:12–13, 266, 270). Women's trouser wearing was also strongly condemned as unnecessary and indecent fashion. One respondent wrote: "There were five daughters in my family and our mother thought that it would have been too expensive to make such unneces-

sary purchases for us all, especially as we got along quite well without them" (SKS KRA Housut 119.2006, born in 1928). The worldview of the common folk was largely shaped by religious literature and teachings, according to which women wearing trousers heralded the end of the world. Women's trousers were therefore criticized as an indecent and immoral fad (Mikkola 2009). The respondents pointed out that not all older women even wore panties in the 1930s, for the same reasons, so the idea of women wearing long pants was both exotic and terrifying.

The Second World War was an important turning point both in Finland and in the other countries that fought in the war because women were allowed and also recommended to wear trousers as work wear and even as everyday wear, not only as sportswear as was the case before the war (Turunen 2015; Turunen 2016). After the Second World War, as the hyperfeminine New Look was in fashion and the ideal woman was a housewife, Western women were again asked to restrict their trouser wearing to sports. This dress code was however soon challenged by the jeans fashion and, since the 1960s, by the hippie and other counter-culture movements' anti-fashion dress styles that criticized elitism and favoured practical aspects and social equality in dress (Wilson & Taylor 1989:155ff; Jacobson 1994:174–193; Turunen 2016). An important factor that advanced women's wearing of trousers was women's emancipation: the increased number of educated women who entered in businesses and professions started to wear them as work wear from the 1970s onwards (see e.g. Cunningham 2005: 201ff).

Quite a few of the respondents who participated the oral history project on women's trousers seemed to have answered the questionnaire because they wanted to tell how happy they were that also women can wear trousers nowadays. These women wrote how as children they had envied boys for their trousers and how happy they were when they got their first pair of trousers (see Turunen 2016). Most of the female as well as male respondents highlighted the significance of trousers by pointing that women's life was hard in the past, especially in the winter time, as they were not allowed to wear trousers:

When I started the first grade in elementary school in 1953 I wore a dress and an apron, just like all other women and girls in my village at that time. The winter cold brought nothing but pain to the womenfolk. Even though the legs of panties reached almost to the knees, a narrow area of thigh between the bottom of the legs and the top of the wool socks remained uncovered, stinging and becoming flaming red in the cold weather. [...] I can still remember how relieved I was when my mother bought red and blue fabric and took it to Hilma, who was our seamstress. She made a ski suit with trousers out of the fabric, which I liked a lot (SKS KRA Housut 157.2006, female, born in 1946).

It was mid-winter in 1957–1958, when my sister's legs froze. On her way to Helsinki, she had had to wait for the bus in a snowstorm for quite a long time. As she had a skirt and nylons, the freeze had done its job: her legs were covered with blisters. We took her to the hospital where the blisters were punctured and her legs were bandaged. When this story comes to my mind, I can only bless the civilized modern world that also lets women wear functional clothing (SKS KRA Housut 431–432.2006, female, born in 1936).

For them, the fact that women can now wear all kinds of trousers means important progress in gender equality and significant

improvement for women. They wrote, for example, as follows: "The one who invented women's trouser wearing should be awarded a medal" (SKS KRA Housut 339.2006, female, born in 1940). "Long pants have liberated us women from the slavery of skirts" (SKS KRA Housut 474.2006, female, born in 1932). In this narrative, the moment the respondent got her first trousers is described as a moment of relief and happiness. Many of the female respondents described themselves as "trouser wearers", which means that they wear trousers all the time nowadays.

"I Don't Feel at Home in Trousers"

So, who are the women who do not remember the day they got their first trousers as a special, happy day? First of all, they represent the oldest respondents of the inquiry because fifteen of the seventeen respondents who do not like to wear trousers were born 1919 to 1935; the rest were born between 1941 and 1952. Maria,⁶ the oldest of these seventeen respondents, wrote as follows:

I bought my first everyday trousers relatively late, it was probably in the 1970s. But I didn't become a trouser wearer, there they are hanging in my closet. I prefer skirts much more. On many occasions I have noticed that I'm the only one in a skirt (Maria, SKS KRA Housut 3.2006, born in 1919).

She had actually got her first trousers relatively early, in the mid 1930s, as she had gone to study at a girls' housekeeping school that was also specialized in gardening. In the gardening lessons the students wore breeches as work wear. During the Second World War, Maria had bought herself a pair of woollen skiing trousers that she had used as outdoor wear: "they were very useful during those frosty win-

ters [during the war]. I had to ski everywhere because there was no other transportation available" (SKS KRA Housut 2.2006, born in 1919). After the war she had worn sweatpants as work wear for gardening and other outdoor work. Maria nevertheless preferred skirts, as she wrote, "I didn't become a trouser wearer", which means that she wears trousers only for outdoor work.

The respondents' stories show how the adoption of a new fashion or a style is not just a matter of approving and liking the new aesthetics or the meanings attached to dress; our choices of dress are also based on our experiences of wearing the dress. The respondents who haven't adopted trousers explained it by writing that they feel at home in skirts, but not in trousers:

I bought long trousers in the mid 1970s. I noticed as I tried them on that I don't feel at home in them. I gave them to my sister. I have skiing pants in the closet, I have worn them three or four times. Then I have a reddish sports outfit that consists of a shirt and trousers. I bought it ten years ago in the sales. It happened to be the sales season. I have never worn them. But who knows if I'll need them some day. I wear trousers when I clear up in the garden and when I go picking berries in the forest but otherwise never. I just simply don't feel at home in trousers (Kaija, SKS KRA Housut 275–277.2006, born in 1941).

The respondents' stories illustrate that dress is important for our identity because it is intimately connected to our sense of self (Entwistle 2001:48); the respondents explained their dislike of trousers by writing that they are "skirt people" and not "trouser wearers". Stories also highlight how our opinions and choices of dress are based on "embodied experiences of dress" which means that dress has an important role in how we experience our body (Ent-

wistle 2001:44). Anna wrote that she doesn't wear trousers because they do not suit her body:

My trouser history is non-existent. I don't belong to the trouser people, I mean I never wear them in normal circumstances. Of course there are situations when they are useful, for example in exercising, in some trips and on travel. For these situations I have purchased trousers. [...] Why don't I wear trousers? Because trousers don't fit a body like mine. They look good on a long and slim figure, if one must wear them. I think that I look ridiculous in trousers, I've got too short legs! (Anna, SKS KRA Housut 410.2006, born in 1925).

In these stories, the reason why these women do not wear trousers is that they found them strange to wear and their experiences of wearing them were not pleasant. Therefore, they didn't become "trouser wearers". Annikki wrote that she does not like to wear trousers because she didn't like the first trousers that she had tried on. She had got the trousers from the Swedish charity right after the war: "They were too tight at the thighs and also scratchy and I felt so anguished in them that I even didn't want to show off in them. I have never been a trouser wearer, dresses have been my basic clothing till today" (Annikki, SKS KRA Housut 110.2006, born in 1928). In her study of the adoption of panties by Finnish women at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century Maija-Liisa Heikinmäki (1967) showed that some women didn't wear them because the first panties they tried on were too tight and made of coarse fabric. This was the case also with the long pants. Helena wrote that she had bought her first trousers, skiing pants, in the mid 1960s when she was almost forty years old: "They felt a bit strange and I took them off

as soon as I got home from the skiing track" (Helena, SKS KRA Housut 196.2006, born in 1928). For Annikki and Helena, the first trousers they tried on felt uncomfortable or strange to wear. Therefore, they weren't impressed by the new item of clothing and they were not interested in wearing them even later.

"There Were No Long Pants for Women in My Childhood"

As almost all the seventeen respondents were born before 1935, one explanation for their view of women's trousers is their age. They are women who were children as the trouser fashion arrived in Finland. As Eila explained, "there were no long pants for women in my childhood, therefore I cannot appreciate them" (Eila, SKS KRA Housut 383–384.2006, born in 1925). The responses indicate that "becoming a trouser wearer" means that a woman should have *learned* both to appreciate trousers and to wear them. When the seventeen respondent describe themselves as "skirt-people" or that they are not a "trouser wearer" they mean that trousers are not part of their everyday dress, let alone evening dress. Their responses indicate that their individual clothing decisions are framed by the conventions and expectations about proper dress that dominated in their childhood and youth. They learned in their childhood and youth in the 1920s and 1930s that trousers were not decent dress for women. As I have argued elsewhere (Turunen 2015), attitudes towards women's trouser wearing did not change much even during the war. Maria, for example, wrote that the fellow villagers didn't approve her trouser wearing during the war: "they gave me a

mouthful for wearing such an indecent outfit" (SKS KRA Housut 2.2006, born in 1919).

Women's wearing of sports trousers became more common only after the war, but still, at least in the remote country villages, women and girls were mocked for it. Kaija, who was born in 1941, wrote that in her youth in the 1950s girls who wore trousers were called "surrogate boys" (Kaija, SKS KRA Housut 272.2006, born in 1941), which was a way to tell the girls that it is ridiculous and inappropriate for them to wear trousers. As the older respondents were young adults or in their thirties in the 1950s, the dress code allowed women to wear trousers only as sportswear and work wear in blue-collar work, but even that was in some cases seen as too masculine behaviour for women. Liisa, who was born in 1935, wrote that "It took a long time until I accepted trousers into my dress. I've been a skirt-person. Trousers [in her childhood and youth] were worn by tomboys and by those [women] who exercised" (SKS KRA Housut 30.2006, born in 1935). Nowadays she wears trousers only as sport wear and work wear and she doesn't accept their wearing as evening wear: "My opinion and choice of an evening dress is a full dress or a skirt and a jacket, *not* trousers. [...] I'm old-fashioned. I don't dye my hair either" (SKS KRA Housut 31–32.2006, born in 1935), emphasis by Liisa. Also other women who do not like to wear trousers explained their dress style by saying that they still follow the old dress code:

I started to wear trousers "in public" only after they became in fashion. I however enjoy wearing elegant dresses and also skirts. My mother and her

family as well as my father and his sister(s)⁷ always dressed smartly, which means that they always took the time, place and occasion into consideration when they chose dress. I'm used to hearing that people comment on my dress by saying "She's always elegantly dressed with matching accessories, including the earrings" (Marjatta, SKS KRA Housut 461.2006, born in 1925).

I never saw my mother and grandmother in a trouser suit. I started to wear trousers at school at sports lessons and I only wore them for sports. In my youth I did like to wear Marimekko's⁸ colourful trousers but for all my life I have shunned trouser wearing. The reason for this is my upbringing, I think. For example, I have never worn jeans and it makes me sick to see young people's tattered jeans and jeans that are made to look like they're worn out (Anja, SKS KRA Housut 185.2006, born in 1932).

Many of the respondents have never worn jeans and they also criticized other Finnish women for wearing jeans all the time. One of the respondents had even titled her answer "Jeans people" because

Finnish women love jeans. They wear them everywhere and in all ages. [...] My daughters fell for them so much that they didn't want to wear anything else, they had them, to my horror, even at the school's Christmas party. Mother's insistence on smart dress was not paid attention to (Ritva SKS KRA, Housut 41.2006, born in 1935).

Those respondents who do like to wear trousers also wrote about how women's trouser wearing was still sometimes disapproved of in the 1960s and 1970s, but they didn't mind because they liked to wear them. For them, the dress code of the 1950s and 1960s represents an outdated and conservative dress code and they are happy that we don't have it any more, whereas those respondents who do not like to wear trousers, miss the fashion and the dress code of the 1950s and 1960s.

Resistance to Change

In the histories of fashion and dress, the 1950s are described as an era of conservative and rigorous dress code that was challenged by youth fashion, especially by the jeans that preceded the liberation fashion in the sixties. The seventies are described as "style for all" and "anti-fashion", which means a fragmenting and subdividing of fashion. Both the liberation of fashion and dress codes and the subdividing of fashion have been seen as explanations why trousers became gender-neutral wear: as the formal dress code was replaced by a dress code that emphasized casualness and practicality in dress, even in formal situations, and labelled the wearing of formal dress as a sign of negatively valued conservatism, women's wearing of trousers became acceptable and fashionable. Both men and women started to demand clothing that is more casual and practical and to wear casual clothing also in public places and on formal situations. Fashion itself was condemned as an elitist phenomenon (Wilson & Taylor 1989:155ff; Jacobson 1994:166–191). At schools, for example, pupils were allowed to wear jeans and even some teachers started to prefer the combination of jeans, t-shirt and pullover instead of formal dress. In the 1950s, this kind of dress was out of the question for both pupils and teachers (Turunen 2016; Jacobson 1994:180–190).

For the younger respondents, meaning those who were young in the 1950s and 1960s, trousers have been a part of their dress since childhood and they have also adopted the later trouser fashions easily:

I got my first pants, dungarees, at the age of four. This happened fifty years ago, but my dress hasn't changed much since then because I like casual

clothing. I wear jeans, knits, t-shirts, quilted jackets, beanies and flat-heel shoes. As evening dress I wear fancy black or linen trousers with jacket and blouse (SKA KRA Housut 191.2006, born in 1952).

Those respondents who do not like wearing trousers admit that they are old-fashioned; they haven't changed even though the world around them has:

I'm a skirt-wearer. I do wear trousers on some occasions but I don't wear them as formal wear in any case. I wear a skirt also when I ride a bike, in cold weather too, with a long coat. When I go to church and to other religious events, I always wear a skirt. I just can't go to these events in trousers even though I know that many other women do (Aino, SKS KRA Housut 53.2006, born in 1921).

Many of the seventeen respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the changes in women's dress since the 1950s and 1960s. Helena, for example, wrote:

A while ago my female relative got married in a trouser suit. I wasn't there. But her mother said that it was a practical choice because she can wear it afterwards on many occasions. I don't think that a trouser suit is a proper dress [for the bride] in a wedding – even a combination of a jacket and a skirt would have been better. And she could have had use for it as well. Oh, how beautiful we used to be in the old times as girls always had beautiful dresses at parties (Helena, SKS KRA Housut 387–388.2006, born in 1930).

Helena is not the only one who underlines her point by nostalgically reminiscing about women's fashion and dress code "in the old times". Aino pointed that in her childhood and youth it would have been a shame to wear tattered clothing. "Clothes had to be patched up nicely and the seams had to be finished with flat strings. Nowadays, it's all the same" (Aino SKS KRA Housut 53.2006, born in 1921).

As researchers of nostalgia have noted, a nostalgic picture of the past is a reconstruction for current needs (see e.g. Koskinen-Koivisto 2015). In other words, nostalgia is cultural practice through which one can evaluate today's world against the past (Koskinen-Koivisto & Marander-Eklund 2014). In the respondents' stories, nostalgia, the melancholic longing for the past, functions as a reaction to change. It is especially used to express resistance to changes (cf. Davis 1979:9-10; Cashman 2006; Koskinen-Koivisto 2015) as in Helena's story. For women like her, today's fashion and liberal dress code as well as the idea of "style for all" represents "no style at all":

Many times the legs of the pants are too long, they drag the ground, the edges of the legs are frayed and dirty, it looks so untidy. Sometimes there are even rips from dragging on the ground. Sometimes they are so tight that the bottom of the trousers is worn-out and even ripped. Even the knees can be ripped, that's the top of it all. In my youth everybody wanted to dress beautifully and smartly (Helena, SKS KRA Housut 387–388.2006, born in 1930).

In these kind of stories, the respondents associate women's trouser wearing, especially the wearing of jeans, with overall lack of manners or disrespect for them. They explain their attitudes by saying that they do not value positively the social and cultural changes in Finnish society since the 1960s and 1970s that emphasize liberalization of dress codes and diminishing of social hierarchy and gender distinction:

A few years ago I saw the vicar's wife, who is as old as me and who has always been very conservative, in trousers. And my sister had seen also the dean's wife, who is younger than me, in trousers in the centre of village. I know that they are ordinary people like us, but we [she and her sister] are

used to thinking that wearing trousers is not proper for women of their status. But nowadays people respect nothing and nobody (Aino, SKS KRA Housut 54.2006, born in 1921).

When I look at the fashion plates, you can see any sort of dresses in them. Why go to the extremes, I think women should look like women, shouldn't they, and not like men. Isn't it so that women are created as women and men as men and they should dress according to their sex and to the circumstances, women should wear trousers only at outdoor wear and as work wear and when they get the groceries and as skiing wear to go skiing in Lapland (Eila, SKS KRA Housut 383–384.2006, born in 1925).

The nostalgic longing for the past, for example for the 1950s, when men were men and women were women, usually express an anti-feminist counter-narrative to the grand narrative that praises the increased level of equality between men and women in today's Finland (see e.g. Koskinen-Koivisto & Marander-Eklund 2014). In the narratives quoted above, however, the respondents are not so much against gender equality as they are critical towards the social and cultural changes that Finnish society underwent in the 1960s and 1970s. These significant and thoroughgoing changes have been discussed a great deal in the media, in literature and in research (e.g. Karisto *et al.* 2005; Peltonen *et al.* 2003; Miettunen 2009), but it is noteworthy that these changes have been mostly discussed from the point of view of baby boomers who were young at that time and actively participated in the changes. For them the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s represent positive changes and the 1950s represent a time of conservative values and narrow-mindedness. The views of those people who do not see the changes in positive light have

only gradually been brought into the academic discussion (Purhonen *et al.* 2008).

Defending Their Own Role, Identity and Style of Dress

Many of the seventeen respondents are sorry that the meanings of dress have changed. Kyllikki, for example, pointed that even after the war women dressed beautifully, "They probably valued the fabric and clothing that was finally available as the shortage of goods ended" (Kyllikki, SKS KRA Housut 401–402.2006, born in 1930). In this narrative, the elderly respondents argue that in today's world, people do not seem to value clothing. Women's wearing of trousers as formal wear is in their opinion an example of how fashion dictates women's dress. Helena pointed that now as trousers have become the new norm for women, it is difficult to find proper underskirts anymore: "I like those beautiful silky underskirts there were in the old times. If there are underskirts [in the shops] they are made of synthetic fibres, I don't like them, they are so sweaty" (Helena, SKS KRA Housut 388.2006, born in 1930).

Anna and Helena discussed the trouser question by comparing modern women to the traditional agrarian mistress of the farm:

How would my grandma have looked like if she had had trousers as she was standing by the stove with a scarf on her head? Quoting a saying she often used, that would have made her a laughing stock of the whole village. At my childhood home women never wore trousers. [...] I wouldn't mind revisiting those times of long skirts! It was a time of femininity (Anna, SKS KRA Housut 410.2006, born in 1925).

I've seen women in trousers [cooking] by the stove, they don't look like the mistress of the

house to me. In the old times, mistresses of the house had a long dress in the kitchen and it looked good. And you could also tell who was the mistress of the house (Helena, SKS KRA Housut 383.2006, born in 1925).

The status of a woman in agrarian society and the patriarchal family was low and subordinate to men (Olsson 2011; Helsti 2000). Helena and Anna, however, saw her as a highly respectable farm mistress who would have lost her high position if she had worn trousers. They were probably also standing up for themselves since one of them had been a farm mistress herself and the other one a housewife.

As Jyrki Pöysä has noted, a reminiscence that is written as an answer to an inquiry is essentially an action that strengthens the agency of the person. The decision to write, the framing, style of writing and, in the end, the decision to send the final text to the archive are made voluntarily and subjectively (Pöysä 2015:129). This means that respondents decide, from what kind of perspective they discuss the topic and what kind of role they give to themselves. By writing a text the author always creates a discursive representation of her/himself. The "I" in the text is always situational and partial; it is never the whole truth of the writer (Pöysä 2015:133).

When the narrative identities of those respondents who are against women's wearing of trousers are analysed, they are usually positive although they might note that they are old-fashioned in their dress and in their views. By presenting their views and validating their opinions and dress style they construct a representation of themselves as women who are *not* oppressed even though they do not like to wear trousers. They construct their own

identity as active agents: for them, wearing a skirt is a conscious decision to dress differently, not a sign of incapability to follow fashion. To the contrary, they see women who do wear trousers as women who are lured by fashion and not able to think themselves. For example, the respondents noted that trousers are actually not as practical wear as they are usually seen; in many cases a skirt would be a more practical to wear than trousers:

Sometimes this women's wearing of trousers amuses me. On some occasions a skirt would be a better option. Once as the weather was really hot, I had a skirt and I even had to fan with the hem of the skirt to get some cool air. These other women were sweating with their jeans. I said to them, take off those jeans and put on a skirt, that would help, at least a bit. They kept quiet (Helena, SKS KRA Housut 388.2006, born in 1930).

Helena and Kyllikki also criticized women for imitating men:

You don't know nowadays who is a man and who is a woman because men may have earrings and women wear trousers, just like men (Helena, SKS KRA Housut 387.2006, born in 1930).

It makes me especially sad to see women wear a black trouser suit with a jacket and even with a tie. It is a direct copy of men's pinstripe. There is so much fuss about women's equality. Shouldn't women progress as women? [...] What is equality? Don't women have their special value as women and especially as mothers? I have never felt inequality in my life even though I have lived in a very male world (Kyllikki, SKS KRA Housut 401-402.2006, born in 1930).

By arguing for the wearing of skirt Kyllikki and Helena highlight what they see as problems of the women's so-called emancipation: diminished status of those women who are feminine and who are proud of it. They point that the idea of "style for all" has led to a situation in

which there is only "one style for all" – meaning only trousers, usually jeans, for women – and the original idea of liberation of style and the co-existence of multiple styles has been forgotten. In this narrative the criticism of women's emancipation is most evident; the respondents value traditional representations of femininity and masculinity. A closer reading of the narratives shows that in reality the respondents are questioning the way women's emancipation has been carried out and represented, for example in dress and appearance. As Kyllikki asks, "What is equality? Don't women have their special value as women and especially as mothers?" and "Shouldn't women progress as women?" She also commented that

I have sometimes asked young girls who have problems in approving their womanhood to dress in a skirt and a hat. They have been surprised themselves at their feelings (Kyllikki, SKS KRA Housut 402.2006, born in 1930).

For these women, the trend for women to wear trousers doesn't represent equality but deteriorating standards of dress and behaviour as well as the loss of certain aspects of bodily control among girls and women, who are not used to wearing skirts and dresses and are no longer taught to observe and control their bodily movements and gestures. Another woman who likes to wear trousers was worried about the disappearance of traditional femininity as a flip side of the increased wearing of trousers by women:

Women of my generation know how to wear a skirt: you should not stride along or stoop, because the hem of the skirt has to be straight and the zip fastener should be either on the side or in the middle (at the front or at the back). In those times

you also had to have straight stocking seams and should not show your slip. Sitting on a low-slung sofa in a narrow skirt needs special skills: the hem should cover the knees, the thighs should be together, only ankles can be crossed, you should sit bolt upright, and you should rise at an angle (SKS KRA Housut 343.2006, born in 1947).

It seems that the decision to write an answer to an inquiry about the history of women's wearing of trousers was based on their will to criticize and question both the current fashion and the general ideas of gender equality and women's emancipation: if emancipation means becoming a man and diminishing of feminine attributes, isn't gender equality understood in a totally wrong way? For these respondents, the trends in women's fashion since the 1970s have not represented progress but steps backwards. As Helena put it, "I wish this trouser boom would decline someday" (SKS KRA Housut 388.2006, born in 1930).

Women Who Do Not (Like To) Wear Trousers

The aim of this article was to study why some women never or seldom wear trousers and are even against women's trouser wearing. The starting point for the article is the general conception of the history of women's trousers as a history of women's liberation and emancipation. The analysis of the reminiscences, especially of those women who were born in the 1920s and 1930s or before, shows that they were too old when women's trouser wearing made its breakthrough in Finland after the Second World War. In their childhood and youth they had learned to think that women's trousers are indecent clothing that no respectable woman would wear.

As they were adults in the 1950s, trousers were seen as suitable mainly for young women and only as outdoor wear and workwear. In the 1970s, as trousers became women's everyday wear, it wasn't easy for them to dress according to the new dress code; they preferred the old dress code.

They do not, however, see themselves as oppressed women. Some of them admit that they are old-fashioned, but they also point out why they think that things were better in the past when women didn't generally wear trousers. They argue that wearing a skirt is a conscious decision on their part and not a sign of incapability to be an active agent. To the contrary, they see themselves as individual agents who consciously do not conform to the norm that they consider too narrow. They also question the general ideas – or what they think as general ideas – of gender equality and women's emancipation: if emancipation means becoming a man and diminishing of feminine attributes, isn't gender equality understood in a totally wrong way? With their own dress style they want to represent a different kind of positive role model for other women: a feminine woman who appreciates good manners and is proud of being a feminine woman in a skirt.

Arja Turunen

PhD, Postdoctoral Researcher in Ethnology
Department of History and Ethnology
Jyväskylä University
arja.h.turunen@jyu.fi

Notes

- 1 The article is part of the research project "Happy Days? The Everyday Life and Nostalgia of the Extended 1950s", funded by the

- Academy of Finland (project number 137923).
- 2 The questionnaire was sent to the Folklore Archives' network of respondents and information leaflets were available for Folklore Archive's visitors. The network of respondents is open to anyone, but most members have a connection to the archive and are willing and able to express their memories in writing (Helsti 2005:150; Hytönen 2013:89). I also published the questionnaire at seminars, and in public presentations and radio interviews.
 - 3 In Finnish the word *housut* is equivalent to the English words "trousers", "pants", "bottoms" and "pantaloons" i.e. *housut* means all kind of long pants that aren't underpants (*alushousut* in Finnish). *Housut* is also term for all long pants, such as jeans, leggings, sweatpants etc.
 - 4 The questionnaire is available in Finnish at <http://neba.finlit.fi/kra/keruut/naisten-housut.htm>.
 - 5 Altogether 35 respondents were born in the 1920s (36% of all female respondents) and another 35 in the 1930s (36 %). Twenty-one respondents were born in the 1940s (21%).
 - 6 All the names of the respondents are pseudonyms.
 - 7 The Finnish word *siskonsa* means both "his sister" and "his sisters".
 - 8 Marimekko is a Finnish design and fashion house that was established in 1951.
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