

# Fashion flow theories: misconceptions

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Written Exam Fashion Flow Theories The Instrument of Meaning Exemplified as an instrument of meaning, the fashion system is a menagerie that takes meaning on an arduous cycle. One that sheds light on how its products are idealized, produced, adopted, and then finally discarded after serving its utilitarian or ideological purpose. Masscommunication and other conduits of information dissemination play a role in channeling meaning from its origins to the consumer (McCracken 1986). The fashion system flows from one end to the other.

At its starting, is the creation or invention of meaning, undertaken by influential individuals or groups that capitalize on their stature or celebrity status. Their influence help reshape ideologies of cultural categories and principles. Fueled by imitative appropriation by those of lower standing, this innovation of meaning is prompted and stimulated (Simmer 1904).

American-born singer Lady Gaga is one good example. By using fashion as an outlet of self-expression, her avian-garden style of dressing caught attention and liking.

Taking full advantage of her celebrity stature, she has brought about societal form in her support for the LEGIT community. Her constant feature and highlight of gays in her music videos and advocacy of marriage equality have inevitably given society new meaning. Her influence has trickled across to other influential individuals who then pass it on further, resulting in what we see today as homosexual taboos being slowly abolished (with countries lawfully engaging in marriage equality, etc. ). Meaning in this sense, has changed from vociferous aesthetics to a political statement.

Aside from the designers of the goods itself, meaning transfer is accomplished by another group of people - the fashion Journalists. They act as conduits of meaning transfer through their work with print or firm media. They act as social observers of social development and reform, reviewing, inquiring and questioning it. They have to possess a clairvoyant quality as to pick out specific fashions they approve of then disseminating their choices onto their assigned publications. This in turn also affects the designers having their influence felt even before the early adopters of society or opinion leaders.

Suez Menses is a British fashion Journalist currently serving as the dead fashion reporter and editor for the International Herald Tribune. Her work there involves reviewing fashion runways and giving her opinions on it, all of which is widely read by the public. Early February this year, Menses published an article for the New York Times titled " The Circus of Fashion". In that article she gave her views on the changing dynamics of the biannual fashion shows; how the focus seems to be changing towards the people who " peacock" outside them (Menses 2013).

This shift in paradigm stimulated others to rethink, with others giving their own views e. G. Garage Magazine (Take My Picture, 2013). It is such reviews that contribute to the shaping and reshaping of publics ideals of fashion. In the case study of the " preppie look" we see how the fashion system comes into play in this transfer of meaning. Originating from high society, people of upper- upper and upper-lower classes, the preppie look was a signifier of that particular social stratum.

The term preppy derives from the expensive pre-college preparatory or prep schools that upper-middle-class White Anglo-Saxon Protestant children on the United States' East Coast (Fashion Encyclopedia 2013). Introduced in the sass, the preppy look has continually gone in and out of style. During the sass soap operas like *Dynasty* and *Dallas* brought about this social acceptance for the style. The North Americans who frequently watched these evening soaps generally began to accept and adopt the style of the preppy look due to its association with the show and its characters.

This radical change of meaning transcends from what originally was being associated with upper-middle class stringent pre-college prep-school dress code, to the incorporation of lifestyle habits by lower standing individuals of North American society. This also clearly models the downward flow theory of adoption of fashion; a style first adopted by people at the top of the social pyramid then gradually winning acceptance at progressively lower social levels (Stone 2008). An innovation of fashion similar to that of "The Preppy Look" is Christian Dior's 1947 "New Look".

The Haute Couture house introduced it right after the World War II. Contrast to the conservative wartime dressing, this profligate use of materials was well accepted amongst the social elite. Only a tiny minority of women was in a session to purchase the New Look. Because of its singularity and the fact that no other alternatives were available, the years following 1947 saw the trickling down of the it to department stores and then to patterns that could be easily used at home. The fashion system is an instrument of meaning.

Consisting of a vast array of methodically linked elements that take the meaning of something from one end to another, changing and reinterpreting it to suit society. With examples of the preppie look and Door's New Look, the diffusion from high society to mass-market clearly shows the way by which meaning quickly changes and adapts around cultural principles and its repercussion reformation. 3 Misconceptions About Fashion Fashion has grown and transcended from bare necessity to a form of non-verbal communication, almost like an extension of the body.

With it, there are common misconceptions that are still vastly kept. One of them is that fashion designers and retailers govern what fashion is or will be, forcefully imposing it onto helpless consumers. Although, to a certain extent, designers and retailers play a vital role in the fashion system as gatherers of meaning and injecting them into consumer goods (McCracken 1986).

However, in actual fact, consumers are the ones who decide the contents of fashion, what it will be. By their acceptance or rejection of an offered aesthetic, the design direction is then focused onto accommodating the consumer.

In the example of the upward flow theory of adoption, fashion styles can be seen coming from mass-market, low standing society. With the evolution of fashion dissemination throughout the decades, the way fashion moves has progressively opposed what it used to be 50 years ago. Beginning in low-income social groups, fashion trends from there move upward into the higher-income groups (Elaine Stone 2008). An example covered by Elaine Stone's article is the T-shirt. Generally associated with blue-collared workers

and commonplace sportswear, it took a turn during the sass, igniting a brand new fashion cottage industry.

The Channel No. 5 T-shirt was the epitome of what was in-vogue then. As a result, retailers and producers look towards this new direction of fashion flow, radically revising their methods of fashion forecasting. Today, more effort is focused on pr©t-α-porter runways, aiming at the youths. Fashion is not governed by anyone nor is it a helpless process of induction to its consumers. The consumer plays a vital role in influencing and being influence by designers and retailers alike. The second misconception about fashion is that it acts as an influence solely on women.

Men and children are as equally responsive and influenced as women towards fashion. A demand for styles and specific products in menswear and childlessness be it in suits, hairstyles or shoes, Justifies the fact that there is an end hat reciprocates and influences. In the case study of " The Perfecto Jacket", we see again the upward flow theory of adoption, in light of menswear. The " Perfecto" motorcycle Jacket, by Shoot Brothers Company of New York, became a social signifier of rebellious youthculture.

This was because of Maroon Brandon, when he wore one in the widely popular movie The Wild One in 1953. The sinister black sheen and knife-slash like zips personified an attitude of rebellion. It was an indicator of the way street style progressively became accepted as part of social culture (Polishes 1994). This clearly illustrated the fact that men from different social stratum had an influence and were influenced by fashion. There was a

process of idealization and adoption, much like how women respond to fashion.

The last misconception is that fashion an enigmatic and unpredictable force. Contrary to that belief, design direction and the way it changes can be quite accurately predicted by people known as fashion forecasters. These people study the basis of the fashion system to understand it and to utilize this knowledge into the business aspects of fashion. One major trend forecasting website is WOWS. Their method of research goes as follows - input, analysis and output. They offer a smörgåsbord of analytical perspectives, from in-depth material predictions to aesthetic forecasts.

In the article, Elaine Stone mentions that every action has a repercussion effect and questions its link towards fashion. With the Pearl Harbor bombings by the Japanese in 1941 and the terrorist attacks of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, it is evident how events that spark social change have an effect on fashion (Stone 2008). Those attacks inevitably led to a sense of nationalism and patriotism amongst the American people - aptly resulting in a trend for clothing and accessories of the colors white, blue and red.

Fashion is not a complex force that requires an extreme level of clairvoyance, but is in fact a logical process that can be anticipated by ways of analysis of past, present and future. With its quick evolution and reinvention, fashion is a complex system that ideas seem to have been wrongly interpreted or conveyed. Some of which involve the misunderstanding of consumer roles to the fact that fashion is too

complicated to anticipate. However fashion does in fact engage in a healthy designer/retailer-to- nonuser relationship and through immense study of it, can be accurately predicted.

Fashion has grown to be something more tangible and cognitively assimilative. Fast Fashion Consumerism is something we witness on a daily basis. We are incessantly bombarded with imagery that encourages the extensive purchase of products. It is everywhere. In this media saturated world, there is no escape. Fashion in this sense, is exploited. People of the fashion world have become so hungry (Polishes 1994). The fashion cycle gives us a clear idea of how this vicious recess works - ideas are generalized, produced, adopted then dropped (McCracken 1986).

This all happens at an alarming rate that coincides with the biannual fashion calendar. In a year, there are two conspicuous seasonal showcases - Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter; each happening almost a full season ahead of the actual (for business practicalities). In between that we have Haute Couture, Menswear, Cruise and Resort collection showcases (Mode & Paris 2013). That totals about 8 shows in a year for the average homogeneous fashion house, a frenetic pace of activity. With its products there, the question then begets - What is the driving force of the fashion system?

The consumers. Fashion acts as a social determinant. People are greatly concerned about the way they look, it affects the way one is perceived and how one feels about oneself (Gains 1999). The desire to imitate celebrities and the influential people of society is a factor that is continually growing on consumers of all ages and the buying power throughout Europe (Simmer



1904 & Reenact 2005). The followers of fashion are the bulk of what the fashion industry is, owes it to its lowers (Stone 2008).

Fashion ideas are deemed fashionable when a sufficient amount of people accepts it, and these ideas later go out of style when people no longer associate with them (Gains 1999). Conversely, fashion acts as an outlet of self-expression, a promotion of individualism. Present-day youths tend to combine various styles to in turn create a look of their own. Noticing this, designers of clairvoyant nature have capitalized on it, encouraging this mixing-and-matching approach of fashion. Aside from the patronage of fashion, technology plays a huge part in the stimulation of fashion.

The media acts as a convoy to the fashion system, disseminating information; being responsible for the image saturation in society. The fashion press stimulates and coaxes in consumers, famously inducing tastiness like "Shop till you drop" that psyched the American public into mass consumption (Gains 1999). In the example of fashion House Louis Button, their advertisements can be seen plastered on billboards and across the facades of their duplex stores. Their image distribution has also reached platforms like social media whereby they give the consumer a more p-to-date, interactive experience to the brand.

It is this way that Louis Button garners patriotism and markets itself and it is this advocacy of consumerism by meaner of media that helps transfer meaning of products towards the consumer. Technological advancements and changing business dynamics are also factors that act as catalysts towards fast fashion. In delineative case study of China and Italy by Simons

Serge Reenact, a shift of dominance in production in the amalgamated silk industry of both countries could be observed with the improvement of technology.

The efficiency of production and new distribution channels that inversely reflect societal reforms have inevitably contributed to the pace at which fast fashion has increased further (Reenact 2005). The fashion world is one that comprises of its innovators, hungry-for-more consumers and the people who exploit it. Fashion can be said as a salient notion of planned obsolescence (Gains 1999). Fashion is presented ahead of its intended period of usage, adopted and deemed fashionable, then obsolete when the same people quit it. It is a cycle that repeats itself on a seasonal basis, with its people almost nonchalantly and blindly embracing it.