

# Changes in women's fashion and gender perceptions essay

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First impressions may be powerful.

Clothes may speak volumes about class, culture, and gender. High heels can play with one's height. Clothes can make one look presentable or otherwise. Accessories can add to a strong fashion statement. However, fashion is superficial at face value, because beneath the outer trappings, man and woman are certainly of equal footing.

The Evolution of Women's Fashion Over the years, it has been evident that changes in women's fashion have been influenced by history, geographic location, as well as design (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998; Thomas, 2008). In addition, the societal status of a woman has something to do with her preferences in clothing, influenced by what society's verdict and expectations are of her (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). The roles women play in society have an influence on clothing styles that are in vogue at a particular period. Hence, such influence was very much evident in the varying lengths of hemlines, layers of fabric of their dress, the kinds of shoes they slipped on, and what was deemed to be fashionable at that particular period in history (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998; Thomas, 2008).

The Conservative Taste Fit for a Lady In the early years of the 1900's, the legs and feet of a woman were always covered (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). Her legs and feet were only seen whenever she sat. As a result, stockings as well as other kinds of footwear did not receive as much attention and in were as a matter of fact intended to draw as little attention as it can generate.

At this particular period in the history of fashion, bows, darker tones of color, and small buckles were in vogue. Pointed toes shoe designs and moderately high heels were trendy. Following the Civil War, designs of women's skirts became narrow, and it then resembled a cone instead of a bell (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). In addition, clothing was designed to be heavily starched, and it was also at that time when shirtwaists patterned after men's shirts came in fashion (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998). Rising Hemlines Came in Vogue During the 1920's, revealing a woman's legs was no longer believed to be indecent, and this was reaffirmed by fashion then (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998). Hemlines rose revealing more skin, and women grew more attracted to footwear and stockings in skin tone.

Silk stockings that usually match evening wear were high-priced. The trend then was patterned and ribbed designs in diamond cut (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). What was dubbed as flapper fashion started in the 1920's, and highlighted soft, delicate materials, handkerchief hemlines, as well as girdles (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998). All about Style and Glamour It was during the 1930's when a more ladylike look was once again the fad (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). Designs then leaned to a more feminine taste, characterized by crisp and clean cut lines that defined day time charm (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). Glamour was added to adapt the trend to night time fashion (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Thomas, 2008). Shoes

became more stylish and open toed sandals emerged (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Thomas, 2008).

Undersized suits and jackets were also in fashion then and the now timeless little black dress made its initial appearance (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998; Thomas, 2008). Nylon was launched as a fabric, and in effect, stockings may already be available at a much cheaper price than silk (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). In the latter part of the year 1930's, the self-made fashion leader of the moment, Gabrielle Coco Chanel, became the first designer ever to adapt custom-made men's suits when she was seen wearing breeched trousers paired with a tweed shooting jacket (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). This was considered a revolution in women's fashion as it was able to bridge the gap between gender stereotypes that had been looming fashion for long. Trouser suits were modified to go well with the woman's contour and were seen to generate a sexual indistinctness, enhancing womanliness with the adaptation of men's clothing in women's fashion. Fashion during the Second World War During the 1940's, the Second World War influenced women's fashion in the negative as leather came in limited supply, and certain fabrics were hard to obtain (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). Wooden soled footwear with wedge was common, and several clothing pieces were rationed.

Clogs, mending wools, lace ribbons, and suspenders were among the rationed clothing pieces at that time (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). For purposes of variety, women started painting their footwear with

bright hues or adorning the sides of the soles with shells or other ornaments (Breward, 2003). Sophistication and Style During the 1950's, glamour was in vogue once more. Full skirts that come with petticoats, elaborate suits, and plunge line empire dresses were all the rage (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). Stiletto heels as well as Italian shoes were the best in sophistication and elegance. Seamless stockings and beehive hairstyles were also trendy ((Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). Liberalism as a Fashion Statement During the 1960's, fashion echoed the liberal outlook of the period.

Skirts were way above the knee, and the miniskirt was all of a sudden in vogue (Thomas, 2008). Stockings grew out of fashion and pantyhose began to emerge (Thomas, 2008). Short dresses and miniskirts were usually matched with flat boots as footwear. Other styles that came in vogue at that time were psychedelic prints, “ everything denim” sported as everyday wear rather than merely for laid-back or leisure time, and the launch of the pillbox hat (Thomas, 2008). Once more, footwear appeared to have thicker low heels with rounded or squared toes (Thomas, 2008). Footwear with huge buckles was also in vogue. Heels matched such footwear in either gold or silver. When High Fashion Came in Low Designers remained in business in the 1970's.

However, business was not as thriving as it used to be. This is largely due to the at-home fashions that stole the attention past the consumerism that directed the designer's profitable empires (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). The designers of this decade introduced the anti-mini skirt

that came to be known as the midi. The midi extended below the knee up to the middle of the ankle (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Steele, 1998).

This unattractive design and several other designs of this decade led to an anti-fashion rebellion known as the Rags (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). Rags are characterized by inexpensive blue jeans and tattered shirts (Breward, 2003). Resulting from these rag designs were personally altered clothes which espoused the anti-consumerist hippie philosophy, causing couture and high fashion to become less and less attractive to the average shopper. Dress to Impress In the 1980's, the fashion industry started to produce clothing to surprise its predecessors. The concept of dress to impress turned out to be a catchphrase of the popular culture (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). Businesswomen desired to be clad daringly, so designers as well as couturiers employed striking and bold hues, accompanied with sharp lines that contributed to a more impressive overall look (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Steele, 1998).

The designers made these trends with a display of shoulder pads, clean cut lines, as well as pleated ankle length skirts (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Steele, 1998). Society was utterly in opposition to the concept of the skirt and clothes like the midi, pointing out that the designer was the sole influence in its creation. The designers greatly influenced fashion during the 1980s too. Couture and High Fashion Reborn In the 1990's, couture returned with a bang.

It started to actually thrive once more simply because patrons of high fashion craved for the creations of such celebrated designers (Steele, 1998). At the beginning of the 20th century, a woman's figure was constrained by Victorian fashion and strained into a shapely silhouette (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Steele, 1998). Women put on the corset believing that it would tug them in and thrust them out in just the right places so that they may be able to comply with the standards of fashion during that particular period.

Women's fashion was expected to transform significantly through the years brought about by the varying roles that the female of the species played in society (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). Fashion of the twenty - first century The 21st century created a trend in high fashion which is the teenager (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). Although the upper class teenagers were at times clad in couture, they were never seen in such force in the past.

These teenagers and young adults sported sophistication that very well characterizes the creations of famous designers as Dior and Chanel (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Steele, 1998). Fashion and Society At the span of such turbulent history of the past century, civilization has witnessed the transformations of both society and fashion. All of these transformations, social as well as fashion, coincide with one and the other.

In the modern society, it is absolutely unobjectionable for women to be dressed in their personal preferences. Today, they are given a much more

laid-back and assorted fashion alternatives. The most outstanding source of such remarkable changes in fashion is obviously the perception of a woman's societal position. A full turn from what was once deemed to be a world dominated by men to a sexual revolution and the recognition of a woman's birthright to equal opportunity has consequently caused a significant impact on the trends and styles of clothing that the woman of today can wear.

Fashion is the way one presents himself or herself to the rest of the crowd. So long as fashion remains in existence, the clothes one wears literally says a lot about his or her personality.

It is a non-verbal means of global communication through which one may be able to articulate his or her own individuality, social class, and opinions. To select clothes is to define and express oneself. In each and every civilization societies, clothing forms a part and parcel of culture (Davis, 1992).

Clothing has transformed throughout the years. Moreover, for the most part, it has witnessed its creative leaps in the previous century (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998). What transported fashion from where it was in the past to where it is now is highly unanswerable.

Whether social changes shaped such fashion revolutions, or that prime movers of fashion altered the way society viewed fashion, cannot be determined for certain (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). To be able to arrive at an educated guess with regards to this topic, one must have a better understanding of the history of fashion. From there,



one should take a glimpse at the social episodes that took place as well as the changes that happened and relate them to all fashion developments or draw backs. Couture has not always been around. Before, dresses were sewn by dressmakers who could not exercise their creativity (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003). Couture in the past was boring. It was shaped complying with the standards dictated by society.

Consequently, women were not allowed to show off as much skin as they want. In point of fact, there had been trends, but high fashion was yet to be put into practice (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998). However, the moment a former fabric store clerk that goes by the name of C.

F. Worth launched his fashion house in Paris, civilization came recognize the new idea of high fashion (Steele, 1998). Worth's concept of a fashion house became a pattern for those who came after him. He was the first contemporary couturier for the reason that he created things that suit his taste with a touch of artistry (Steele, 1998). Members of the royal family as well as prominent personalities sported his creations. Since then, fashion designers and couturiers were not anymore associated by humble dressmakers; rather, they were then perceived to be members of high society generating international recognition. At the height of women's rights movements and when women began to take part in the work force, they had a lesser need for the occasional dress (Davis, 1992). This permitted the fashion industry of much more freedom in the way they design women's fashion.

It was at that time when female couturiers were seen more frequently. These women, during their careers, created clothes that really offered women freedom, both physical as well as mental. It was also at this time when, despite the fact that they were unstable, the industry was still able to create fashion of artistic substance and attractiveness, although it was somewhat more conservative. Contemporary culture as well as designer fashion grew to be a constantly changing world of length variations, hues, lines, and materials. Each particular movement goes in and out of culture and the fashion industry. Movements have led to rising hemlines that paved the way to war and depression which transformed clothes into uniforms. The war brought with it a New Look accompanied by a fabric wasting dropping hemline (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998). Refinement and exquisiteness followed and then the Youthquake stirred both the fashion industry as society in general (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992; Steele, 1998).

This enthusiasm for young fashions caused dislike for consumerism which led to home-made or altered clothing. And then it was the love of the name which brought high fashion back in circulation. The Ever Changing Trends and the Woman that emerged from it Culture has steered fashion over the years, or to the very least, it is what it seems. Certainly, both society as well as the designers themselves constantly brought innovative ideas into the industry. However, these two mutually dependent worlds are providing from the needs of one and the other in the main. There can be made no distinction as to which world influenced which. Both are continually

modifying one and the other, although at some occasions one by chance occurs at the absence of the other.

Nonetheless, they are practically at all times changing each other in much the same way. In the past, women turned their tresses practically into an ornament by wearing wigs or twisting their tresses to resemble huge monuments (Benstock & Ferriss, 1994; Breward, 2003; Davis, 1992). Perhaps, this trend started with Marie Antoinette (Davis, 1992). Certainly bearing such a weight over their heads could have impacted their frail necks. Nevertheless, women then chose vanity over health. The history of fashion must be a lesson for women to never again allow anyone to dictate the kind of clothes, shoes, or accessories they should wear.

Regardless of social class, race, religion, or even physical appearance, no one has the right to tell her that she is not worthy to exist for not complying with the standards culture has set for her. Fortunately, women are gearing right on track. They can already wear a piece of clothing to their taste without hesitation or fear of nonconformity. While women today express themselves through their fashion statements, the message that their true worth lies beneath the outer trappings reverberates much louder at their every stride.