

Anti-fashion during the 70's essay sample

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Fashion trends are commonly categorized in decades to describe the prominent designs during that particular time period. The 30's were known as the beginning for admiration of Hollywood and the rise of glamour. (<http://www.1930s-fashions.co.uk>) The 60's fashion was directed to the youth and consisted of colorful fabrics and bold designs that eradicated the formal way of dressing. (<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/1960s-fashion.html>). The 70's were known as the period of anti-fashion. " If the hippies had one irrevocable effect on culture, including fashion, it was to destroy every rule, except the injunction to please oneself. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the 1970s have also been called " The Decade That Taste Forgot." (Fashion Theory Volume 1 Issue 3, Steele, 1997: 280). To support this statement, I believe there are two main factors that contributed to this fashion period:

- * The expansion of individual expression from the 1960's
- * The emergence of pro-choice by the consumer

This essay will consider how these factors resulted in the anti-fashion mentality.

First, I will discuss the expansion of individual expression from the 60's. Influenced by the hippie's movement, society began to voice their opinion and gave this power of voice to youth. They began to put importance on being an individual and thinking for oneself. There was one prominent person in the fashion industry that represented the 1960's, and helped to put the spotlight on youth. Lesley Hornby mostly known as " Twiggy" became the idol for millions of teenage girls of the sixties revolution and by the age of

17, Twiggy was one of the most famous faces on the planet. (<http://www.twiggylawson.co.uk/fashion.html>) Her androgynous, lean look marked a radical departure from the full figured women who dominated fashion in the 1950s. (<http://www.wisegeek.com/who-is-twiggy.htm>) “ With the emergence of the youth as market share with the largest disposable income, there was a democratization of fashion as the institutions of fashion themselves adapted to a younger market.” (<http://aonygoesparis.blogspot.com/>) This notably changed definition of beauty and focus on youth paved a path for them to experiment with their personal and individual style. Eventually the 1970's would be known to challenge just how far they could go with this newfound individuality and freedom of choice. (http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vivw/hd_vivw.htm)

The individual expression of the 1970's began to expand from the love and peace mentality of the 60's. It uncovered opportunities for everyone that wanted to show their individuality, anger and different sexual preferences. With these beliefs, multiple anti-fashion movements such as punk, unisex (androgyny) and fetishism began to emerge. (<http://thefashionindex.net/archive/70s/inspiration/>) Extremes in fashion originally adopted by youth to express their rebellion against the older generation were adopted and worn by the middle aged. This expansion of individual expression was recognized by the fashion industry. There is various theories used within the industry that classify how these trends are inspired: trickle-down, trickle-across, and trickle-up. The ‘trickle down’ theory is the most common practice. It is the theory that trends start at the top or upper class of the “social ladder” and moves down to fashion followers. The ‘trickle across’

theory is where fashion moves horizontally through similar social levels and the “trickle up” theory is where fashion trends start with the young or lower income groups and influence the fashion leaders. (The World Of Fashion Merchandising, Wolfe, 1998: 35-36)

Because of the various youth subcultures growing in the 1970's, designers recognized these movements and lead the trickle-up theory to have its greatest impact although Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel previously introduced it in the 1920's. (<http://angelasancartier.net/theories-of-fashion>) There was an influence of street fashion with designers however only a selection of designers were about to explode the youth revolution and enter what was to be labeled as the anti-fashion era. To prove the exploitation of the youth revolution, the perfect example was designer Vivienne Westwood who used what was happening in street fashion and gave it her own twist. She became a phenomenon for this because people recognized what she was doing; she was speaking their language.

Her designs incorporated what was happening on the street: the move from love and peace to anger and aggression. “Westwood and Malcolm McLaren can be justified in claiming that they invented “punk fashions,” and, despite her rebellious nature, the fashion establishment recognized her work as important. Decadent, depraved, and demented are all words that describe the fashions of Vivienne Westwood. She once said of her designs, “My aim is to make the poor look rich and the rich look poor.” (<http://www.researchover.com/biographies/Vivienne-Westwood-34474.html>)

Westwood and McLaren's ambition to bring the dark world of sexual adventure and fetish to the streets of London was made explicit when they re-branded the shop SEX in 1975. SEX (later named Seditionaries') became synonymous with the most culturally significant street style of the second half of the 20th century, Punk. (<http://designmuseum.org/design/vivienne-westwood>.) Among other designs SEX carried Westwood and McLaren's personal collections, which consisted of clear plastic-pocketed jeans, zippered tops and the Anarchy Shirt; which was bleached and dyed shirts with silk Karl Marx patches and anarchist slogans. SEX also showcased Vivienne Westwood's most provocative fashions including bondage, leather and rubber fetish gear. (http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vivw/hd_vivw.htm)

Supporting the 1970's street fashion influence on fashion leaders, Jean Paul Gaultier was another designer that stood out during this time. In the 70's few people understood his vision or even showed up for his first show. In 1976 he launched his own woman's collection. He soon became known for iconoclastic designs such as the male skirt, recreating underwear as outerwear, and tattoo-printed body stockings. His clothes transcended gender and fashion's traditional boundaries. (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/jean-paul-gaultier-i-like-to-show-that-there-is-no-frontier-between-good-taste-and-bad-taste-424573.html>) Lastly, around 1977, Zandra Rhodes the British dress designer took elements of the punk style and used it in her collections making refined and more elegant versions in bright colors, which were more acceptable to the rich and famous. She used gold safety pins and gold chains to connect and decorate uneven hems

and slashed holes. The carefully placed holes were edged with gold thread and the hems adorned with exquisite embroidery. (http://fashion-era.com/punks_fashion_history1.htm)

Fashion critics analyzed what happened during the 1970's. Technically street fashion greatly influenced the 70's designs enough for critics to need to understand it and consider the trickle-up theory concept. This large influence in design meant that in some cases the fashion industry in the 70's had promoted the anti-fashion movement. "Trousers were deliberately torn to reveal laddered tights and dirty legs. They were worn with heavy Doc Martens footwear, a utilitarian, practical traffic meter maid type of footwear in that era, not seen on many young women until then. Safety pins and chains held bits of fabric together. Neck chains were made from padlocks and chain and even razor blades were used as pendants. The latter emerged as a mainstream fashion status symbols a few years later when worked in gold." (http://fashion-era.com/punks_fashion_history1.htm) As I have proved with the information above, designers such as Vivienne Westwood and Jean Paul Gaultier promoted the ugly and the cheap.

After thoroughly discussing the expansion of the expression from the 60's into the 70's I will discuss my second point of pro-choice. Not only was the youth revolting but the general consumer was as well. The seventies decade raved pro-choice; the voice of the consumer on what direction they wanted in fashion. There are many examples of this such as the start of the jean industry becoming more than work wear, woman's trousers as more than

informal wear and the midi skirt fiasco where the consumer revolted against the dropping of the skirt hemline from the ever popular mini.

In the late 70's, jeans moved from work wear to becoming one of the most desirable articles of clothing for all sexes and across all subcultures. This phenomenon is a great example of the trickle-across theory. Just like Vivienne Westwood adopted the punk movement, top designer Calvin Klein who is credited as revolutionizing jeans wear adopted the jean movement. “During the 1970s, Calvin Klein is said to have instigated a revolution when he launched his jeans range – the original designer jeans. This new range was advertised as wholesome, sexy and practical, using the model Brooke Shields.” (<http://www.thebiographychannel.co.uk/biographies/calvin-klein.html>) People young and old were free to choose whatever they wanted to wear and were overwhelmingly choosing jeans. The introduction of the “ designer jean” moved jeans from street style to the newest fashion trend. (Fashion Theory Volume 1 Issue 3, Steele, 1997: 285.)

Going into the early 1970's, Parisian fashion designers began to introduce a new look. Humored as though skirts at that point couldn't get any shorter, the only option for the next trend was for the skirts to become longer, which was characterized as the “ Midi.” (Fashion Theory Volume 1 Issue 3, Steele, 1997: 281) This caused American's to defy European fashion influences. With the ongoing move to freedom of choice, the American public and fashion industry continually snubbed the move to mid-calf hemlines. “ It took another year or two before most women began to wear longer skirts. This delay has led many observers to conclude that the midi was a “ flop,”

because women no longer “ obeyed fashion’s dictates.” (Fashion Theory Volume 1 Issue 3, Steele, 1997: 283) Not only did they voice their disapproval, historians considered this as a flop because consumers didn’t buy into it. (

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1978&dat=19701013&id=9HUiAAAAIBAJ&sjid=QqwFAAAAIBAJ&pg=1066,4593437>) “ More importantly, the hemline controversy showed that the fashion mood was anti-fashion and pro-choice.” (Fashion Theory Volume 1 Issue 3, Steele, 1997: 283)

After the hemline controversy and the movement of the women’s liberation, women were expanding into male dominated professions. Considered the look of traditional masculine power, women adopted the trouser as more than their casual attire. “ The 1970s marked the first time in history that trousers were really accepted as female apparel, not only for informal occasions, but on the street and in the office—a development that really does seem to have reflected women’s social and economic liberation.” (Fashion Theory Volume 1 Issue 3, Steele, 1997: 284). For centuries society’s disapproval prevented most women from wearing pants, but through the years, as the expression and role of a woman changed it lead to trousers being more acceptable for lounge wear and in other physical activities such as sports like horseback riding. A reference to prove the development of women’s liberation at this time was the emergence of Yves Henri Donat Mathieu-Saint-Laurent in the late 60’s and into the 1970’s. Otherwise known as simply Yves Saint-Laurent, he became an icon of glamourizing items for

women taken from the male wardrobe such as the blazer, the pantsuit and the leather jacket. (<http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/136/1/le-smoking>)

In conclusion to support the statement of the promotion of anti-fashion in the 1970's I have referenced two main factors to support my arguments: The expansion of individual expression from the 60's and the emergence of pro-choice by the consumer. The introduction of this consumer freedom to choose took away some of the control from the fashion industry which took awhile for them to regain. Much of the 'ordinary' fashions were styles being pushed by the public in their vision of where they wanted fashion to go. The 70's were a decade where the public really began to voice their preferences in fashion. A decade that seen much change across all spectrums from the subculture scenes of punk, youth and the continuation of the hippie era to the consumer pushback of designer direction to the skirt and the acceptance of the casual look with jeans and women's trousers. This resulted in a period where the consumer tried to dominate the fashion industry direction with their social changes and constant promotion of pro choice thus producing in the 70's some of the most ugly, cheap and ordinary fashion styles. "Let us grant to the seventies its claim to anti-fashion, for the freedom to wear what you want, where and when you want, is finally here." (The Fashion Business: Theory, Practice, Image, White, 2000: 13)