

# The Evolution of Women's Clothes: From Past to Present

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## ABSTRACT

This essay considers the role of artifacts in the historical study of dress and fashion and suggests the existence of three different approaches. The field of history of dress and costume has a long tradition going back to the nineteenth century. It adopts the methodologies of art history and considers artifacts as central to the analysis of different periods and themes. In the last few decades, the emergence of fashion studies has been interpreted as a distancing from artifacts. It is here claimed that fashion studies brought theoretical rigor and embraced a deductive methodology of analysis in which artifacts still played an important function. The final part of this essay introduces the reader to what I call the material culture of fashion, a hybrid methodology borrowed from anthropology and archaeology in which the object is centred on the study of social, cultural, and economic practices that are time specific. It shows the challenges and paybacks of such an approach.

**Keywords:** Fashion history; Material culture; Objects; History of dress; Fashion studies

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## INTRODUCTION

A glance at today's runway shows displays an overabundance of women's trends – so much so that the editor's task of pinpointing trend directions for the next season has become a complicated one. Women are more spoilt for choice in the 21st century as to what they can put on their bodies than in any period before. As designers interpret (and reinterpret) trends and garments of yore for the present, women today can be dressed to the hilt in frills and girly frippery one day, then stomp down a street in a trench coat and boots the next, before switching into a crop top and sweats with a pair of Balenciaga knife pumps for the evening. This wasn't always the case – and in many parts of the world, this is still not the norm. Since the days of ancient Rome, women's bodies have been policed within an inch of their lives and fashion became one of the primary forms of control. Shrugging on a blazer and laughing at Angelina Jolie's thigh-high split might seem like passing thoughts now, but not too long ago, both would have been punishable taboos. The right to flash a leg or to put on a suit was fought for, tooth and nail, by women who refused to be boxed in.

### Past

Policing women's bodies has been practiced at least as far back as the Roman Empire. Throughout history, different cultures have boxed in and subjugated women through unique sartorial means. While controlling women's bodies and actions was the primary purpose, each unique dress code and fashion trend pursued a slightly different end. The earliest control of women's dressing was used to signify availability. Societies used a variety of garments and accessories such as the veil to distinguish married women from unmarried ones.

### Change

Change first came in the form of the suffragettes during Edwardian England and fashion played a crucial part in breaking gender boundaries. The colours of the suffragette movement were purple, green, and white, which symbolized loyalty, hope, and purity, respectively.

Ease of movement is one of the great hallmarks of women's liberation – and Coco Chanel transformed the landscape of womenswear in the early 20th century with her signature tweed skirt-suit, which relaxed the nipped corsets of the past and adopted a more masculine silhouette that allowed its wearer greater movement.

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#### **Present**

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In one of the more entertaining and possibly meaningful acts of fashion reclamation, traditional signifiers of virginal femininity – like the puffed-sleeve dress, the midi-to-maxi

#### **Future**

We know now that the future will hold change – drastic changes. Thanks to a pandemic that has put the world on pause, when the world once again presses play, many industries will have to simultaneously press reset. As fashions once adjusted to suit wartime, our fashions today will adjust to work with this unprecedented period.

Already, designers have been putting their unique touches on face masks, adorning and decorating a piece of coverage that will become a part of our new normal in the months to come. Gloves, relegated to white-tie events and winter, will be a perennial part of women's wardrobes. In a new era where disinfectant is as precious as gold, clothes are required to be machine-washable at the highest, most sanitary setting.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **(a) Evolution of the Fashion Industry in India**

Indian fashion scenario is known for its cultural heritage, elegance, and colorfulness. It brings out the subtlety and beauty which has been sustained through innumerable decades. For not only is it comfortable, sophisticated, and aesthetically beautiful but it has also evolved. Making a sweeping surge into today's global scenario, the fashion industry in India is an amalgamation of dynamic conventions. From ethnic to western, salwar kameez to high-street fashion; the fashion industry in India has gone through a milieu of transformations. The fashion industry in India has been advantaged by thousands of years of rich tradition behind it and the knowledge as the vogue of sewn garments has existed in India ever since ancient history. The textile industry in India is among the largest segment of India's capital goods sector. As per the report published by the Indian Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), India is the second largest exporter of textiles in the world. Furthermore, favorable demographics and rising income levels are believed to be the key growth drivers of the Indian textile and apparel sector in the coming years. **(Satabdi Bhattacharjee)**

**(b)** The nineteenth century opened with a fashion landscape that was changing dramatically and rapidly from the styles of a generation earlier. The French Revolution brought fashions that had been emerging since the 1780s to the forefront. Neoclassicism now defined fashion as both men and women taking inspiration from classical antiquity. For women, the high-waisted silhouette in lightweight muslin was the dominant style, while fashionable men looked to the tailors of Britain for a new, refined look. **(Harper Franklin, 2020)**

#### **(c) Dress, body, and self: research in the social psychology of dress**

The purpose of this research was to provide a critical review of key research areas within the social psychology of dress. The review addresses published research in two broad areas: (1) dress as a stimulus and its influence on (a) attributions by others, attributions about self, and on one's behaviour, and (2) relationships between dress, the body, and the self. We identify theoretical approaches used in conducting research in these areas, provide an abbreviated background of research in these areas highlighting key findings, and identify future research directions and possibilities. The subject matter presented features developing topics within the social psychology of dress and is useful for undergraduate students who want an overview of the content area. **(Kim Johnson, Sharron J Lennon & Nancy Rudd, 2014)**

#### **(d) Women's Fashion History Through Newspapers**

Women's fashion has a long and colourful history, and, in the 20th century, newspapers captured it all! You can find full newspaper pages with photographs of the latest fashions from Paris, department store advertisements with drawings of the popular frocks of the day, and articles covering social events and what fashionable people in attendance were wearing. Here is a look at the history of fashion through newspapers, starting with the period 1900 to 1920. This is part 1 of a 3-part series that will span fashion history from 1900 to 1960. **(Heather Thomas, 2021)**

#### **(e) A sustainable style: A new fast-fashion formula**

The early 21st century has been good for the apparel industry. Thanks to falling costs, streamlined operations, and rising consumer spending, clothing production doubled from 2000 to 2014, and the number of garments purchased per capita between 2000 and 2014 increased by about 60 percent. Fast fashion has been a particularly hot segment

and a source of enviable growth for some clothing companies. By compressing production cycles and turning out up-to-the-minute designs, these businesses have enabled shoppers not only to expand their wardrobes but also to refresh them quickly. Across nearly every apparel category, consumers keep clothing items about half if they did 15 years ago. Some estimates suggest that consumers treat the lowest-priced garments as nearly disposable, discarding them after just seven or eight wears. (Nathalie Remy, Eveline Speelman, and Steven Swartz, 2016)

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- **Parisian Fashion:** - During the mid-1800s, Paris started haute couture, a new trend in fashion that elevated mere dressmaking to the luxurious status of high-quality, customized fashion. During this time, individual designers made their mark in the fashion industry with their one-of-a-kind creations that wore the designer's name on the label.
- **Changing Hemlines:** - During and after World War I, women's fashion started to evolve drastically. Dresses became more casual, and hems were raised to the knee. During the 1920s we saw fashion like the flapper dress where the waistline was dropped and there was a lot of fringe and sequins. Women's suffrage influenced fashion all around the world, as women were trying to be stronger and more independent in their choices.
- **Rebellion:** - After World War II in the 1950s, fashion took on an air of rebellion. Cloth and clothing were available again, so fashion designers and customers were breathing a sigh of relief and rediscovering personal styles. Between Dior gowns, poodle skirts, and saddle shoes, the clothing was unique. The hemlines had moved back up, and femininity was back to being popular after so many years of more serious clothing.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

#### **Indian fashionwear from 2010 – to present:**

Following the rise of internet and smartphone usage, more women are now able to stay au courant of the latest fashion trends and have become smart consumers who know what they want when it comes to fashion. Unique, chic, personal & bold are the new style statement, and Indian women confidently demonstrate these traits with what they wear. Smart pantsuits and body-con dresses have become an integral part of the corporate women's wardrobe, while designer wear and high street fashion are slowly becoming the norm.

#### **The Bollywood influence on Indian Fashion:**

The flourishing Hindi film industry in India, i.e., Bollywood has played a key role in transforming the way Indian women dress. While the 1960s brought in the era of heavy jewellery and embroidered sarees, the 1970s brought with it a sense of experimentation with bright colours, polka dot patterns, and bell bottoms.

#### **The textile, apparel, and fashion Industry in India – A brief insight**

The Indian fashion industry has grown leaps and bounds over the years owing to an increase in western influence and changing tastes & preferences of consumers. According to a report published by the Indian Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), India is the 2nd largest exporter of textiles and clothing in the world. The domestic textile & apparel industry in India is projected to be worth more than USD 141 billion by 2021 from USD 67 billion in 2014.

### **RESEARCH ANALYSIS**

This article describes aspects of women's clothes in Barcelona at a time when one of the most important sections of the textile industry was emerging haute couture. We analyse the production method and the factors that enabled creators to be recognized through labels, which provides evidence of a significant change in culture and everyday life in Barcelona. Fashion is just not an ambitious projected image of a reinterpreted good old value to fulfil some function or agenda alike but rather an evocative and refreshing concept worthy enough to be portrayed for society's appreciation that makes us even more instinctive. An individual starts seeking a solution to reduce his dissonance, or he aspires to get better. As an expression of their feelings today's youth endeavour to interpret fashion trends and adopt the clothing style that suits their value and traits. It is a trickle-across theory where the lure of aesthetic experience has given rise to everyday fashion and cognitive engagement. This is prevalent among today's youth who is in the identity creation stage of Erikson's psychosocial development to look for trendy dress choices.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

#### **(a) Food binding in the form of fashion**

In ancient China – and up into the early 20th century – foot-binding became a coveted quality in a woman after stories about an emperor falling in love with a dancer with bound feet entered the common realm. Poems were written about the delicate sway of a woman in lotus shoes for hundreds of years, even though millions of feet were disfigured and suffered an infection. In the West, corsets are among the most well-known fetishes. First becoming popular in the 16th century, it was introduced by Catherine Medici to the French court, where the corset was seen as creating an ideal woman's figure; the garment reached its peak in the Victorian era.

#### **(b) Feminism in the form of fashion**

Chiuri debuted her now famous "We Should All Be Feminists" statement on a T-shirt for her spring/summer 2017 collection. Celebrating women has become a cornerstone of Chiuri's Dior, and the season's slogan, "I Say I," was inspired by Italian critic and activist Carla Lonzi. Models walked down a catwalk with flashing neon signs that read "Consent Consent Consent" and "When women strike, the world stops," which were created in partnership with the anonymous art collective Claire Fontaine. The new decade's designs seem to signal a return to sombre fashion, favouring bourgeois sensibility and tailoring over the tracks suits that were acclaimed just a year ago, even though streetwear has had a long run.

#### **(c) Simplicity is the best form of fashion**

We already know that there will be significant changes in the future. When the globe resumes play after being placed on hold by a pandemic, several industries will need to simultaneously push reset. Our current trends will change to fit this unusual historical period, just as styles once changed to accommodate conflict. Face masks have already been embellished and decorated by designers to personalize a piece of clothing that will soon become a staple in our daily lives. Gloves, previously reserved for winter and black-tie affairs, will continue to be a staple in women's ensembles. Clothes must be machine-washable at the highest, most hygienic setting in the new world when disinfectant is as valuable as gold.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This paper reports on continuing exploratory development of a comprehensive measure of "From past till present-the evolution of women's clothes ". The research presented here is the logical extension of a ten-year tradition in fashion segmentation research and the fourth in a series of papers reporting on a major fashion research program in Canada. The " From past till present-the evolution of women's clothes " developed here is validated with an independent AIO measurement methodology and is utilized to demonstrate that the high fashion involved consumer is also the heavy clothing fashion buyer.

### **WORK DONE ANALYSIS**

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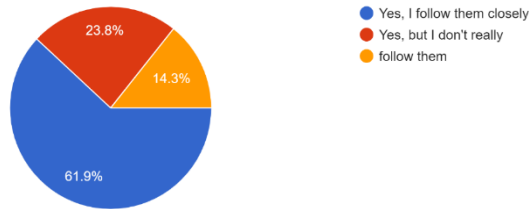
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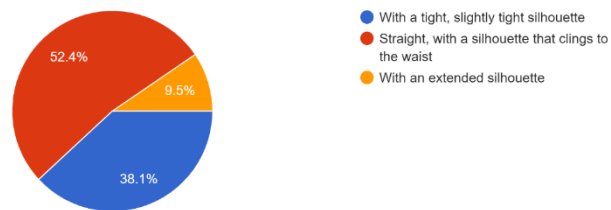
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**TABULATION AND GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION**

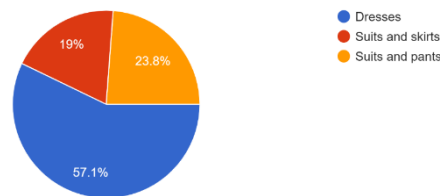
**Do you follow current fashion trends?**



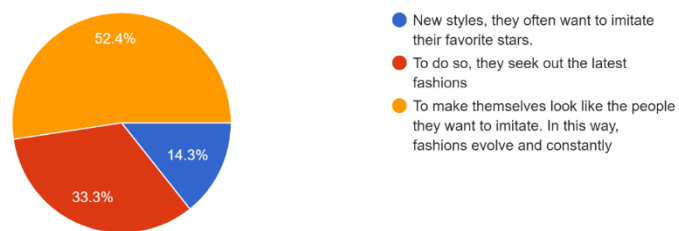
**What silhouette of clothes suits your figure?**



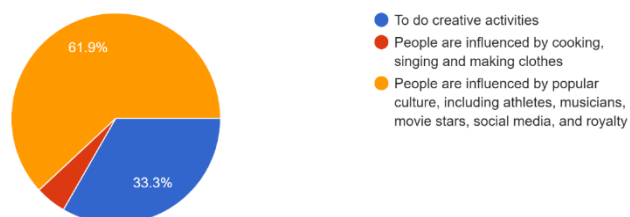
**Which clothes would you wear more?**



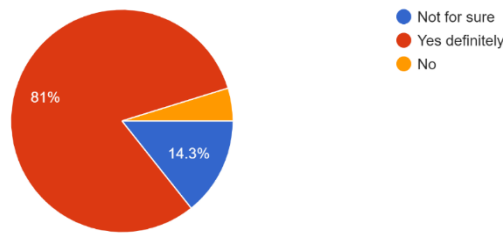
**How did the clothing evolve over so many years?**



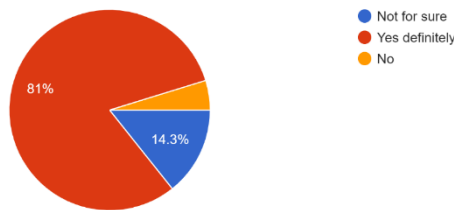
**What influenced change in clothing?**



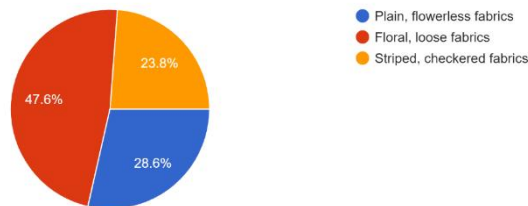
**Does clothing style reflect personality?**



### Which of the current fashion fabrics do you like?



### What clothes are suitable for non-typical figures?



## CONCLUSION

The key takeaway in studying the history of fashion has been that fashion changes periodically because of a revolt. Whenever there is a fashion going on strong there is a tendency to oppose it. A style then develops that completely changes the previous one on its head. For the corset there was a flapper, for the princess gowns there was a punk. This attitude of protest inherent in humans changed fashion trends. Today everyone wants to be unique, where once people wanted to look alike. Fashion has evolved – from being a response to cultural changes to reflecting a person's individuality. Social 'conformation' is no longer the goal of fashion.

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