

“Mom, why do you think that women over certain generations have a particular look to their faces? What’s with these styles that they wore? Why did they change?” This was one of the first times I had ever seen my mother without an answer to any question. Instead, her face offered a puzzled look and she responded with, “Um, I’m not so sure I could tell you...”

Why do women and clothing have different appearances throughout the decades? Why are there specific eras that display differences and what are the influences of change? Questions like those helped to inspire the aforementioned discussion between my mother and myself. Since I can remember I have always been intrigued as to why facial and body features appear to represent specific time periods. Another question that was pressed into my mind was why some ages also have a style that mimics or is perhaps a representation of the social, political or economical influence. When I was younger I would see photographs of my beautiful grandmother, and the older, classic movies that portrayed a specific “era” or “type” of woman. For example, the elegant, classy housewife, or independent woman, whose styles I would always admire. This project and the research that followed was primarily about the upper middle class Caucasian women of the time, has followed has allowed my eyes to open and receive the answers to my previous questions. Cameron Russell spoke in a TED talk about her career as a model, and the way the media uses models and how “beauty” is “created” for the appearance to put on a magazine or tabloid cover. Her words helped me to think about beauty of various decades and how the praised appearances are inspired. What has influenced the appearance of so many women throughout the years? Why does style change?

Most women throughout past decades wore what was appropriated to the time, although there were always brave souls who would turn away from previous traditions, and create a style filled with their own self-expression. The 20s specifically created an era, rich and full of “...tremendous social change, which was reflected in fashion...”(1920s Women’s Fashion). Despite the previous decades of more conservative attire, the new money of the 20s generation “now felt liberated and desired to create their own culture which embraced their values.”(1920s Women’s Fashion). Prohibition, the 19th Amendment and even the Harlem Renaissance are words of the Jazz age that are reflected in the way women of the time dressed. Flappers were possibly the most influential to this generation, as they became a symbol for women everywhere. (Nissan, Slavina, “The Influence of 1920s fashion”). They were free, sexually liberated women doing almost anything they pleased, and trying to create a different identity for themselves than what was previously given to them by men. “The image of the flapper was something of a direct result of the popular disgust among Americans at the Prohibition laws.” (Flappers and the Roaring 20s). Women were gaining new freedoms and taking advantage of them. One of the freedoms was through fashion. Rather than following the previous Victorian fashions and etiquettes, women took to dressing as younger, similar to an adolescent teen by wearing loose, straight dresses, and makeup attempting to make their faces seem younger, rather than the traditional styles of their female elders (“1920s Women’s Fashion) made easier by the economic boom after the war.

The end of the war brought not only triumph, but also anger and rebellion from American people as the younger generation believed the older folks had sent young men to their deaths in the war. After World War I, another result of the war was an increase of wealth, particularly throughout the upper middle class women. With more money flow in the market, due to the new wealth, women were now able to afford more elaborate clothing. Additionally, the booming of the stock market, allowed for better, more expensive fabrics to be used, and for more eccentric styles to become the new social norm. The changing fashion of the time followed the changing

roles of women as they began to earn more freedom and rights. As women began to fall away from the traditional roles of the “housewife,” and became integrated into more male-dominant jobs, they began dressing in more manly clothes such as pant suits (“Fashion in the 1920s”). Through this new style, women attempted to earn a place of their own in the culture of the time (“1920s Women’s Fashion”).

Besides the masculine look, other, more risqué styles were produced and further influenced by the outreach of the media. Magazines, movies, films and the celebrities of the decade, similar to any time period, were influential in the fashion world. Young teens and women would aspire to reach the social status and receive the admiration of others. Designers such as CoCo Chanel, Madeleine Vionnet, and Ella Schiaparelli helped to shape the fashion of the time. “It was a turning point in women's fashion, which broke with the past and set the groundwork for modern fashions of today. Some of the styles and fads of the 1920s still live on, built upon, and emulated today. The ideal body of the modern supermodel is itself modeled on the driving ideal of women's 1920s fashion...” (1920s Women’s Fashion).

In many ways opposite of the 20s, of the 1930s was the era of the Great Depression which impacted not only the social and political, but the economic aspect of families and women in the U.S. The Depression changed fashion, and in a way reversed the direction the 20s explored upon. With the decline of the economy, women were not able to be as lavish, and dress themselves as expensively as they had in the Jazz age. Continuing to dress nicely for cheaper was now the goal for women. The 20s were more risqué and experimentally wild, the ‘30s fashion “corrected” the style and trends. There was still an accentuation of a woman’s figure “as a feminine thing of beauty” (Nash), as well as smaller, although slightly higher waistlines with an “attractive elegance” towards the open-back evening gowns (“1920s Fashion Was a Time of Great Social Change”). Factories created better mass producing techniques by using less expensive materials meaning “...a wider range of women now had access to well-made and well-cut clothes,” in order to accommodate for the fact that people were now unable to afford the expensive clothing (Nolan, Williams). Sewing was a dying pastime for the 30s ladies although many women would continue to save as much money as possible by reusing clothes, and creating new articles of clothing from the items already in possession. A single daily outfit became more common during this time as well. Rather than changing clothes to match the activity, less outfit changes became more common, and the clothes being worn were altered as a multipurpose outfit (“1920s Women’s Fashion”).

As celebrities increased in culture significance, the fashions they wore became more influential, even more so than in the 20s, and once again women wore “well tailored suits” in order to show their seriousness for their jobs (“1920s Women’s Fashion). Why is it that women feel the need to dress or look like the movie stars? Perhaps it is because what it romanticized on the screen is what other women and men call ideal or beautiful, therefore creating a standard for women. Or perhaps it was because “movies were one of the few escapes from the harsh reality of the Depression,” (Nolan, Williams) which hindered family survival economically. It is important for some women to do whatever is in their power to reach those standards in order to feel important or accepted by society. Physical appearance and dressing a certain way is one way to boost personal moral or social status. The events of the Depression led to a lack of posh fashion for women, but forced them to utilize what was already in their possession rather than to mindlessly spend money on new clothes.

World War II began in 1939, and when US entered the war in 1945, women’s fashion changed since the main focus was to create goods that were beneficial to the war effort. The 40s

generation was “still experiencing the poor social and economic conditions tied to the 1930s,” (1940’s Fashion), and with less men in the societal atmosphere, it was now up to women to step out of the home and into the workforce (1940’s Fashion). Rosie the Riveter was the “star of a government campaign aimed at recruiting female workers for the munitions industry,” (1940s women’s fashion). Rosie became a symbol of power, pride and strength for women everywhere as she was portrayed with her hair up, a red scarf headband, and wearing overalls while flexing her arm in front of her face with the slogan “WE CAN DO IT!” in a word bubble above/behind her head. She was patriotic and a large working importance throughout the American community. Clothes mimicked more of a utility style as women began going to work. It was also encouraged that women “use less, buy less,” since “anything extravagant was viewed as unpatriotic,” (1940’s Fashion). Interchangeable outfits and pieces of clothing became more popular during this time, giving the illusion that a person had more clothing than was true. This was especially useful during the brief regulation that was put on fashion (1940’s Fashion). Nylon stockings were no longer available, leading women to use other methods for the appearance of nice legs, such as makeup until the war ended and stockings and other materials were available once again.

1945 brought the end of the war, a renewed sense of American pride, and thanks to designer Christian Dior, who had been unknown in France, only to become a success in the United States, “The New Look” for women was introduced everywhere (1940s women’s fashion). The design with its usage of fabric as a “...more feminine style with long flowing skirts and a nipped waist,” (1940s Fashion), helped to further the removal of the previous fashion restraints during the war. Since there was a restriction on material of the time, some women were appalled by the “New Look” and the amount of fabrics used, whereas others, particularly in later years, accepted the style for themselves. Despite opposing opinions among women about the “New Look” and although it was “a contrast to the conservative fashion of the war years, it would help set the beginning of the fashion trends of the following decade,” (1940s womens fashion) especially among the upcoming increase of humans.

The previous economic bust would eventually lead up to the 50s economic and baby boom, as the 1950s would become an era of excess which would follow throughout the following years with the setting of a particular fashion image. It was a time “to express conformity *and* individual identity,” (The End of Rationing and the Beginning of Excess). The end of the war meant that the returning vets and increase of men were to proceed with their previous employment options, sending most women out of the workforce and back to spending time in the house. “This meant that two of the primary driving forces behind the consumerism of the 1950s were housewives and the baby boom,” (Women's Role: Fashion, Body Image and Consumerism) meaning that women were to spend more of their money in order to provide and buy clothes for their children, along with clothes for themselves. The media and fashion industry noticed this and directed their products and advertisements towards the women, featuring more female models, and more clothing options for ladies. Dior was still a big influence of fashion at the time, although other designers such as CoCo Chanel would come around to put their influence on styles as well. Despite different designers, there was still a sense of conformity in fashion during the 1950s. This particular decade began the association of particular styles or attire with different social statuses. For example there were outfits pertaining to “housework or lounging around the home, going out to run errands or conduct business, maternity wear, party-appropriate clothing for social gatherings, or, for women of a lower socioeconomic station than the emerging middle class, work uniforms.” (Women's Role: Fashion, Body Image and Consumerism). Once again the

image of an ideal body image circulated through society, and supported by movies, magazines, models. The particular build that was of praise was having a “thin waist with defined hips and a larger but very defined and shapely bust.” (Women's Role: Fashion, Body Image and Consumerism). Towards the end of the 1950s, the style once again begins to shift and become slightly more risqué, rebellious and more focused on the individual, which would follow into the 60s (“Fashion and history of the 1950s”).

Individualism was a large part of the 1960s. The previous baby boomers that were now young teens, “demanded” a fashion style of their own (“Fashion in the 1960s”). Post-War rationing became less important as time went on and the increasing income of many middle-class Americans led to the increasing desire for clothing without the need to make them at home (“1960's Fashions including prices”). As a result of the growing baby boomers, “designers responded with a more liberal, daring approach to fashion, boasting fabrics and bold designs,” (Fashion in the 1960s-Introduction). Women wore of some those fashions, and got rid of others in protest of the Vietnam war. The Peace Movement was against sending men to the war, and to show support they rebelled against the traditional way of living, creating a new method of living leading to the start of “Hippies,” (“The Peace Movement”).

Television had a major impact on societal fashion in the 1960s. Many American households were able to afford a TV set, and were now able to observe what styles and trends the stars of Hollywood, and the fashion world were wearing. “Television had helped to create a new fashion-consciousness that could connect viewers to the here and now.” Television allowed a daily connection with its viewers therefore having a constant visual influence. Actors and Actresses now had a much larger influence on people and the way they presented themselves. Women such as Audrey Hepburn, for example, “wore simple, flat shoes, three-quarter length pants, and plain black shift dresses. Her clothing style and her beehive hairdo, would be copied by millions of women worldwide,” (1960s Fashion icons). Another example would be First Lady, Jackie Kennedy and the Pillbox hats she wore with her suits. Despite not being an actress, her prominent role as the First lady created trends among women inspired by her style, such as pearl necklaces, big buttoned-suits as well as the Pillbox-hat (“Fashion in the 1960s”).

Music was another impactful element throughout the '60s. Different genres of music generated particular styles of fashion as will happen again in the '90s. For example, to match the Beatles and the British Invasion, The British Mod, (short for Modern), was the particular style, while Psychedelic and Folk rock influenced the Hippie, carefree, individualistic, style (“Fashion in the 1960s”). Skirts of all sizes became popular as well. Many Feminists of the time saw the mini-skirt “as a claim to the right of women to proudly display their bodies as they wished,” (Rising hemlines and the mini-skirt). When talking to my grandmother about the particular styles of this time and the influence on women, she spoke to me about how although she did not pay too much attention to fashion, everyone tended to wear what he or she pleased. It was a very diverse decade, filled with all sorts of different styles and fads that could possibly change depending on the region of where you lived although TV and movies had the most influence, or so it seemed. Only in the later 60s did the Hippie fashion truly come onto the fashion scene filled with bright colors and prints, tie-dye, psychedelic prints, and mismatched patterns, bell-bottom jeans and more.

Models became strong influencers of fashion as they portrayed new styles filled with inspiration for each individual. Jean Shrimpton and Twiggy are considered to be “supermodels” that transpired from the time. “Twiggy's thin body and short hair were perfect for designers to try new androgynous and slimmer styles of clothing” (High Fashion: Models and Designers). It

is said that a downside to thin models and their influence is that the idea of perfection and beauty can lead others to eating disorders, and body image issues, which are relevant issues today ("Fashion in the 1960s"). "In the 1970s, models weighed in eight percent less than the average American woman; they continued to decrease in size by each decade" ("1970s female body image"). One era seems to influence the next, while having certain aspects that carry through until reaching the current decade.

The fashion of the 1970s continued to follow the patterns and influences of the previous ten years, although women became even more independent, and the styles slowly evolved once again. The last Hippie movement before the Vietnam War ended was the Woodstock Festival for peace and music ("1970 to 1980"). After the Hippie movements diminished the drugs continued to dwell in society, and eventually increased as the decade progressed. The fashion of the time was a distinct reflection of the music, movies, and stars of the time, although the 70s were mostly a transitional time for Americans. It was a post-war era with a twist. The beginning years of the 70's continued with a more down to earth style, yet transitioned into more of the lively disco era that is remembered today. Pants were worn basically everyday for a 70s lady, such as jeans around the house or pants that accompanied business suits ("Fashion in the 1970s"). Denim became immensely popular as everyone, meaning persons of any age, wanted to wear it. It was also a multipurpose fabric. It could be embroidered, and dressed up as much as was desired. Denim could also be turned into other pieces of clothing, which made it extremely desirable to consumers. "Designer jeans were seen as a status symbol and the more expensive, the more desirable," (1970 to 1980). Boots were another fashion piece that became widely sought after ("Fashion in the 1970s"). Glitter makeup trends became more popular with influences from stars such as David Bowie, while the disco scene was influenced more by music, and media by actors such as John Travolta in the famous Saturday Night Fever ("1970 to 1980"). Gender rules still applied to the time, as they somewhat do today, although "... compared to previous generations, women's fashion in the 1970s was nothing short of revolutionary," by allowing more freedom of self-expression through clothing (1970s Fashion for women and girls).

Research shows a continuous pattern that recurs throughout the decades, and it just so happens that the 1980s fall into it, contributing to style's changing patterns. Big fashion change does not happen until the mid 80s and the previous style of the late 70s mostly carries through the early years of the 1980s. Following the more eccentric disco styles, women's clothing once again became more subdued as they wore shades of beige, brown, tan, and pale orange. Most wore turtlenecks; scarves and shoulder-padded articles of clothing that would happen hold their trend until the end of the 80s along with silk blouses ("Fashion in the 1980s"). Fashion brand and labels increased in popularity as a new way to show social status ("1980's Fashions Including Prices"). Yuppie Culture speaks of the "...preppies, [as] materialistic and upscale, obsessed with status, who believed the privileges they took for granted were due them thanks to an accident of birth." Larger income means more to spend which is what the "yuppies" would do, also meaning more money spent on clothing to show their social and economical status. The middle class was also rising at the time yet again. They too, had an increased amount of wealth leading to more time spent at the mall. The 1980s spurred the growth and popularity of shopping centers everywhere. They became especially popular as young teens would be employed at a store within the shopping center and receive discounted shopping in their workplace (1980's Fashions Including Prices).

Similar to previous years, the media and music were influencing, as well as possibly influenced, by the people themselves. MTV was one of the biggest influences. Artists such as

Cyndi Lauper, Annie Lennox, Boy George, Blondie and Madonna were ones who influenced the “New wave look,” that was filled with “androgynous looking hair and make-up, women in menswear, short hair or asymmetrical cuts, futuristic make-up, square lines, color-blocking and layers,” (1980’s Fashions Including Prices). Once again trends can be seen but unlike any other age, multiple styles would exist at the same time rather than a single mainstream appearance. This “self-conscious and self-indulgent” (“1980-1990”), decade inspired an exercise trend that had women dressing a certain way as they appeared to be “fit” while also looking sporty as they exercised (“1970 to 1980”).

Toward the mid to late 80s was the experimental fashion time. This meant diverse fashion with many colors, shapes, brands and styles. This 80s is the one mostly remembered today. Continuous of the earlier big hair and shoulder pads, yet with more of an electricity and spontaneity about the style. Women teased their hair, wore different colors of makeup, leg warmers, leotards, one-shouldered shirts, and more in the decade such as the “must haves” bracelets and belts. The “1980s style with its juxtaposition of trends, variety and influences created a unique legacy of fashion and anti-fashion. It is emerging as an era of sought-after vintage for its unique characteristics and lasting impact,” (Vintage Devotion).

The grunge phase of the U.S. appeared in the 1990s as if in response to the 80s prep. It was another anti conformity style, as all fashion could arguably be considered, that was influenced even more by the music draining from Seattle, Washington. These bands included Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains, Screaming Trees and many more. It was a time for minimalist clothing, body piercings and tattoos showing the more personalized and urban, organic side of the time (“1990s in Fashion”). Generation X were kids born between 1960-1980, who were also “the great unsupervised generation,” writes Bruce Tulgan. Forced to take care of themselves to some extent, due to both parents working jobs. Their independence and self-care led to much time spent “in front of the television, resulting in more exposure to world events and pop culture,” (Alter). Fashion was more of the “recycled styles from previous decades,” (“1990s in Fashion”). An example of this, according to my mother was wearing babydoll dresses with leggings and flats or chunkier shoes with chokers on their necks. The grunge that is commonly associated with the age consisted of women wearing, a pair of ripped jeans, flannels, band t-shirts, combat boot, oversized sweaters, tights, birkenstocks as well as other minimalist clothing (“1990s in Fashion”). Designers found themselves having a hard time when it seemed almost unreasonable to buy second-hand clothing just for the name on the tag, but when the younger generation of women and men found the grunge style to be fashionable or easily worn, older women, generally past the age of 30, were not particularly attracted to the attire. Instead they returned to the 1970’s allure, “wearing high heels and dresses made of satin, metallic or other high shine fabrics. Feathers and fringe, beads and sequins adorned clothes that hugged the body,” (“Fashion in 1994”) allowing designers to return to make higher priced clothing with better fabric (“Fashion in 1994”).

Fashion tends to repeat itself throughout different decades and time periods depending on the influences of the time.

The 2000s were a time of constantly changing styles, as they continue to be today. The Grand Marnier explains that the beginning of the 2000s fashion of being influenced by technology. “Particular pieces of Y2K clothing included mesh tops, box-pleated skirts, handkerchief tops, satin skirts, leather skirts...” and other, studded and somewhat metallic clothing. The clothing somewhat followed from the late 90s style, while expanding upon other trends from earlier eras, as fashion usually does. Fashion faced dire changes after the Twin

Towers in New York were hit and fell in 2001. As a result of the tragic 9/11 terrorist attacks, denim fashion once again took its position in the heights of fashion. Perhaps since focus was more on the damage and lives lost, fashion became less of an importance, and with the mind preoccupied style became more of basic clothing such as patriotic denim. Similarly to the 1970s denim trend, the 2000 era influenced patriotism, as well as the more basic hippie-grunge casual looks. Labels began to take over the fashion industry of the 2000s when women began buying brands such as, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Kate Spade, and Christian Dior. Around 2003 was the 60s revival and later, the military influence (Wikipedia). Boho chic of the time consisted of clothing of the “1960s style pea coats, tunics worn with wide or thin belts, and "vintage clothing" including hippie and Boho inspired dresses with paisley patterns,” (Wikipedia).

Body image was and continues to be a large influence on the nation. During the mid through late 2000s self-tanner, made popular by stars such as Christina Aguilera, and Jennifer Lopez also became more influential and apparent in societies appearance. It was the “Mash-up” era as there were many different styles portrayed reflecting fashion anywhere from the 1930s-1990s. The mid to later 2000s brought back the 80s flair with brighter colors, and makeup and money was not of main concern in relation to style. The 2000 time period did not have any major style or trends that define the era but rather it was closer to a time of “recycled fashion” with more leniencies towards individuals choosing their own image, which is more similar to today.

There is no *single, specific* current fashion today for the overall majority of white upper middle-class women, as the style that they wear, and have worn, in over the past decade is for the most part, whatever they desire. Culture has changed drastically since the 20s. Women have more rights, and are able to do almost anything they please. It seems to me that the style and trends depend on the type of person, the region of living, as well as their influences since birth. Different regions influence certain styles or trends depending on the subculture of the people living in the area. Along with the region of birth, affluence plays a large role. If a person is born into a wealthier family, there is automatic access to a higher quality of life, and the clothing that comes along with it. As a young lady coming from the Eastern Shore to the West coast, I have noticed many differences but coming to an art school has shown me individual styles of the people around me even more so than what I was previously used to when I was home. People express themselves in different ways. My personal style is quite diverse, and I think my wardrobe consists of a style from almost any decade beginning with the 1920s. Today’s fashion although diverse contains specific trends that tend to change or shift with the political, economical or social events such as the Internet culture, military tactics, and riots and protesting about race. At the moment, bohemian, hippie, festival styles while including a more chic factor seem to be the prime styles, very similar to the late 60s, early 70s style. As previously mentioned, styles tend to be repeated and this is very evident today as a result of the growing expressive culture.

Different styles appear in different regions. For example, there seems to be more of a chic, modern fashion in most of New York, while, California contains a more beachy, surfer, diverse style, specifically L.A., or more of a country style in the south, with music to match. The continuous search for individuality and expression is a strong influence on the way people portrays themselves. Self-expression allows a person to choose an appearance that is hopefully true to their identity, or how they wish to be viewed by others. The media also continues to be an enormous influence, especially since “unplugging” is much more difficult when technology is everywhere. Women are told and shown how to look and appear in order to be more desirable, causing females of young to more mature ages to alter their appearance in the way they

physically look and dress despite having the freedom to dress and appear as they please. The pressure from the media to present yourself in a particular fashion that is attractive to others can sometimes force an individual to break under the pressure and conform to society. How much does the media affect you or your family?

Fashion has evolved over centuries and has become more diverse than ever in the current years. It is re-used and re-made over each passing year to match the social demand or style. Women have more freedom in the way they dress although their physical appearance is under more criticism since the 2000s. "With the rise of mass media throughout the 20th century, the popular image of women in America has undergone a substantial change. From Marilyn Monroe to Kate Moss, the body shapes of the most admired models have remained consistently slimmer than that of the average American woman, representing a nearly impossible ideal," (Women's body image and BMI). But perhaps with the constant evolution of fashion, one day the evolution of body image will follow, and there will be less ideals.

It seems to me that fashion from the 1920s-today has evolved and changed by becoming more diverse and less restrictive with the time and culture. As new ideals of self-expression, liberation, equality, and more continue to evolve with society, fashion may not be able to return to the more confining apparel of the earlier years. And so I return to my original question:

Why does fashion change? It changes because we make it change. We choose what style best represents the culture or different subcultures of the time. We choose what we make popular and what is "acceptable" to wear. Sometimes events happen that are out of human control, yet we create styles in response to the event. As a society, we decide how a person should look, act, and be, yet whether a person conforms to those ideals is a personal choice.

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