

Fashion Psychology

The term **fashion** applies to a prevailing mode of expression. Inherent in the term is the idea that the mode will change more quickly than the culture as a whole. The terms "fashionable" and "unfashionable" are employed to describe whether someone or something fits in with the currently popular mode of expression. The term "fashion" is often used in a negative sense, as a synonym for fads and trends. In this sense, fashions are essentially a relief from boredom, or a distraction from important matters, for the idle rich. The term is also frequently used in a positive sense, as a synonym for glamour and style. In this sense, fashions are a sort of communal art, through which a culture examines its notions of beauty and goodness.

Fashions are social psychology phenomena common to many fields of human activity and thinking. The rises and falls of fashions have been especially documented and examined in the following fields.

Of these fields, costume especially has become so linked in the public eye with the term "fashion" that the more general term "costume" has been relegated by many to only mean fancy dress or masquerade wear, while the term "fashion" means clothing generally, and the study of it. This linguistic switch is due to the so-called fashion plates which were produced during the Industrial Revolution, showing novel ways to use new textiles. For a broad cross-cultural look at clothing and its place in society, refer to the entries for Clothing and Costume. The remainder of this article deals with clothing fashions in the industrialized world.

Fashion and Status

Fashion can suggest or signal status in a social group. Groups with high cultural status like to keep 'in fashion' to display their position; people who do not keep 'in fashion' within a so-called "style tribe" can risk shunning (see also peer pressure). Because keeping 'in fashion' often requires considerable amounts of money, fashion can be used to show off wealth (compare conspicuous consumption). Adherence to fashion trends can thus form an index of social affluence and an indicator of social mobility.

Fashion can help attract a partner. Many people often use fashion as an indicator of what a person is like. As well as showing certain features of a person's personality that appeal to prospective mates, keeping up with fashion can advertise a person's status to such candidates. Perhaps even more importantly, it sends a signal of superiority to potential competitors of the same gender, who are frequently better informed about what's fashionable than the potential mates are. Conversely, a person who exhibits a fashion style that rejects or deliberately tries to offend the current trend may also have an advantage in finding other like-minded individuals.

"Fashion sense" consists of the ability to tell what clothing and/or accessories look good and what do not. Since the entire notion of fashion depends on subjectivity, so does the question of who possesses "fashion sense". Some people style themselves as "fashion consultants" and charge clients to help the latter choose what to wear. Designers show the public what is new and in style by using fashion models to display the clothing. Image consultants help people revamp or create fashion sense. Fashion can operate differently depending on gender, or it can promote homogeneity as in unisex styles.

Fashion and the process of Change

Fashion, by definition, changes constantly. The change may proceed more rapidly than in most other fields of human activity (language, thought, etc). For some, modern fast-paced change in fashion embodies many of the negative aspects of capitalism: it results in waste and encourages people *qua* consumers to buy things unnecessarily. Others, especially young people, enjoy the diversity that changing fashion can apparently provide, seeing the constant change as a way to satisfy their desire to experience "new" and "interesting" things. Note too though that fashion can change to enforce uniformity, as in the case where so-called **Mao suits** became the national uniform of Mainland China.

Materially affluent societies can offer a variety of different fashions, in clothes or accessories, to choose from. At the same time there remains an equal or larger range designated (at least currently) 'out of fashion'. (These or similar fashions may cyclically come back 'into fashion' in due course, and remain 'in fashion' again for a while.)

Practically every aspect of appearance that can be changed has been changed at some time. In the past, new discoveries and lesser-known parts of the world could provide an impetus to change fashions based on the **exotic**: Europe in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, for example, might favor things Turkish at one time, things Chinese at another, and things Japanese at a third. The global village has reduced the options of exotic novelty in more recent times.

Fashion houses and their associated **fashion designers**, as well as high-status consumers (including celebrities), appear to have some role in determining the rates