

U.S. Fashion Trends in the 1980s: Postmodern and Modern Styles of Dressing of Female College Students

1980s fashion

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Abstract *The purposes of this study were to document the fashions adopted by young women in the United States in the 1980s and to explore if and how the dynamic shifts toward postmodernist values influenced those fashion trends. Fifteen U.S. women who were college students in the 1980s were interviewed for the study. In analysis of the data, we focused on social changes during the 1980s and the cultural impact of postmodernism vs. modernism as influential factors. Both postmodern and feminist ideas challenged the mainstream cultural framework of capitalism. U.S. women's styles and behaviors concerning dress reflected characteristics of postmodern consumption patterns, which include nostalgia, ethnic dress, androgyny, eclectic and novel clothing combinations, surprising or humorous appearance, and nonconformity. Despite the critique of conformity and conservatism in dress that had emerged in the 1960s and remained in at least minority or subversive trends, the importance of brand names and designer labels increased in mainstream fashion. This study helps us better understand the dynamics of fashion as it reflects societal and value changes in a transitional time in history.*

Key words *cultural values, fashion, postmodernism, 1980s*

Introduction

Cultural value systems are guiding principles by which humans make choices and decisions (Kaiser, 1990). However, values are not static and undergo consistent modification during socialization processes within a culture (Inglehart, 1990). Changes in values also affect changes in fashion.

For example, the 1980s in the United States are recognized as a transitional period in political, economic, and cultural arenas (Ehrman, 2005), marked specifically by political conservatism, decreased job security, increasing conspicuous consumption of brand names, emphasis on individuality, tolerance of individual differences, rapid technological development, and the influence of MTV on the fashion market (Cunningham, Mangine, & Reilly, 2005; Ehrman, 2005; Steele, 1997). During transitional periods in a culture or organization, variety in behaviors is likely, including styles of dress (Littrell & Evers, 1985). Farrell-Beck and Parsons (2007) summarize fashion from 1979 to 1988 as "a period with a multiplicity

of often opposing silhouettes” (p. 237) and extravagance, which are characteristics of postmodern styles reflecting the dynamic shifts toward postmodern values in the society during the decade (Morgado, 1996). Therefore, it would be a meaningful study to uncover possible impacts of social changes and postmodernism on fashion trends of the 1980s.

Though there has been some historical research on 1980s fashion, previous research (Farrell-Beck & Parsons, 2007) focused on literature and media analyses such as fashion magazines. There may be a gap between the styles presented in the media and those actually worn by women. Thus, the purposes of this study were (1) to document fashions adopted by young women within U.S. culture during the 1980s, using recollections provided by adult women who had attended college at that time; (2) to analyze the meanings of the fashions attributed by the wearers; and (3) to explore if and how dynamic shifts toward postmodernism influenced those fashion trends. In order to suit our aims, we examined the styles adopted by women who attended college during the 1980s in several areas of the U.S. and their behaviors concerning dress during that period.

This study also builds on the findings of Kim and Farrell-Beck’s (2005) study of 1970s fashion trends in the U.S. and South Korea to explore changes over time; thus, this study borrows its method from their study. The findings of this study extend historical knowledge of young women’s fashions that were actually adopted in the U.S. and put them in perspective with societal and value changes in the 1980s.

Review of Literature

Social Changes and the Influence on Fashion in the United States in the 1980s

Whereas the 1970s in the United States were socially liberal, the 1980s were characterized by Ronald Reagan’s presidency, which ushered in a socially and economically conservative spirit (Ehrman, 2005; Strauss & Howe, 1991). “Reaganomics” led to increased power for corporations while the working poor expanded (Ehrman, 2005). “Power” was a common buzzword within the corporate mindset, and “power dressing” became the standard of executive style (Steele, 1997). Padded shoulders and broad lapels were considered expressions of high rank and commercial achievement (Cunningham et al., 2005). Search for rules for dress that facilitated success in a capitalistic, modernistic goal of monetary acquisition (i.e., more is better) was common (e.g., Molloy, 1977).

The cult of success was exhibited with an ever-increasing conspicuous consumption of luxury goods (Steele, 1997), and clothing was one of many ways to display material gain (Cunningham et al., 2005). Designer brand names and labels became fashion statements, and items such as high-priced fashion jeans exploded in popularity during the ‘80s, lending an image, though not often reality, of status to brand symbol wearers (Troy, 2005).

Although political conservatism reigned, value of and focus on past ways of living and doing things did not characterize all of the 1980s. Strauss & Howe (1991) noted that there was a growing element of cynicism and questioning among young adults during that time. Notable changes during the dec-

ade included decreased job security; increased emphasis on individuality; increased willingness to tolerate differences; rapid technological innovation; and the increasing availability of high-quality goods at reasonable prices, in part due to increasing globalization of the supply chain (Ehrman, 2005; Troy, 2005). The decade was a transitional period from the industrial age to the information age (Troy, 2005). This was most prominently apparent in the introduction and rapid development of items such as personal computers, Walkmans, and compact discs (Troy, 2005). Further, the emergence of MTV in 1981 greatly affected the culture of American youth throughout the decade (Farrell-Beck & Parsons, 2007). With the advent of MTV, young people could see how rock stars dressed and behaved, which led to extensive cooptation of rock and roll style into the commercial fashion market (Cunningham et al., 2005).

Androgyny in fashion, which reflected the feminist movement of the 1970s, became more prominent in both men's and women's clothing throughout the 1980s. Extremely masculine, sometimes military styles became fashionable among some women, and the craze for athletics, especially jogging and aerobics, resulted in trends toward body-conscious clothing (Farrell-Beck & Parsons, 2007). Mix and match of feminine and masculine styles in one appearance was fashionable and reflective of postmodern play with gender symbols (Kaiser, 1990).

Postmodernism and its Reflection in Fashion

Huyssen (1986) argued that the postmodern cultural movement first emerged in 1960s' painting, architecture, and literary criticism, whereas Harvey (1990) claimed that 1973 was the year of postmodern emergence. Pinpointing the exact date that postmodernism began is probably futile. Regardless of the exact year there is a common notion that since the 1950s, technologically advanced Western societies have experienced a postmodern cultural shift in conjunction with the global expansion of capitalism, which resulted in an explosion of mass media and the emergence of information economies (Gabardi, 2001).

Clark (1976) argued that bricolage, decentering, and pastiche are common postmodern concepts. Bricolage involves an eclectic mixing of aesthetic codes (Clark, 1976). According to Morgado (1996), bricolage refers to the integration of incongruous elements in appearance that challenges modernist ideas about authority and hierarchy (i.e. rules for dress) and that may incorporate playfulness, irony, or parody. For example, a heavy leather jacket might be worn with a thin, delicate skirt, violating traditional rules for wearing similar fabrics and styles in one outfit (Henderson & DeLong, 2004). Decentering constitutes challenges to modernist assumptions about what is central and significant to art and design, reconfiguring relationships within a work for inclusion of previously marginalized elements, such as minority ethnic patterns and fabrics, subcultural group preferences and symbols, or clothes that visually minimize gender identity (Morgado, 1996). Pastiche refers to an idea or feature imitated or quoted from works of a previous period but out of context—essentially parody without irony (Clark, 1976), such as Madonna's inclusion of corsets or bras in outerwear. Postmodern dress rejects the modernistic reliance on rules for the correct way to dress and valuation of hierarchical status expression in dress.

Postmodern consumers adopted and combined multitudes of old and new styles. Some apparel char-

acteristics reflecting postmodernism included the nostalgic recycling of retro styles and looks; volatile style change in one person's wardrobe; intentional challenges to aesthetic codes; combinations of incongruous styles and fabrics; the collapse of distinctions between high-end and low-end fashion; the popularity of many diverse styles within a given time period; the cooptation of ethnic and subcultural styles; an emphasis on ornamentation and decoration; concern with image and appearance for its own sake rather than as symbolic roles and position; and the distortion, confusion, and intentional undermining of clarity of identity categories such as gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual preference (Connor, 1989; Hebdige, 1989; Morgado, 1996).

Method

Sample

A convenience sample of 15 American women who had been undergraduate college students in the United States of America during the 1980s was selected via snowball sampling initiated through contacts of acquaintances of one researcher. Participants ranged in age from 37 to 49 years of age. The participants are members of U.S. generations identified as late Baby Boomers (Light, 1988) and Generation X (Paul, 2002). The women's hometowns and universities attended were located in a variety of areas across the nation, however about a half of them attended universities in Florida. Their fields of study varied, including business administration, marketing, economics, English, communication, psychology, history, interior design, art, art history, art education, and theater. Their current occupations included professor, teacher, photographer, technical writer, pharmaceutical representative, educational specialist, and office manager. The small number of women interviewed is a convenience sample that cannot be representative of women who went to college in the 1980s in the U.S.

Autodriver Stimuli and Interview Protocol

The 1980 through 1989 issues of the fashion magazine *Mademoiselle* were examined for style trends because college women were a target readership of the magazine. A representative stimulus set of apparel styles was compiled to use during interviews as autodrivers of conversation. For the stimulus set, we selected 34 styles that represented most frequently appearing styles in the magazine and that fit with college student lifestyles during the time period studied. After consultations with the three women who participated in the preliminary interviews, the initial 42 styles for the stimulus set were reduced to 34 styles, and the interview questions were finalized. The stimuli were shown to the participants only after they initially answered questions about what they wore for different occasions, in order to refresh the participants' memories of possible styles they wore in the 1980s.

The interview schedule consisted of 42 open-ended questions divided into five sections about: 1) personal background information (13 questions); 2) recollections of styles worn for different occasions (9 questions); 3) recollections of dressing behaviors related to postmodern style (13 questions); 4) recol-

lections of ideal styles and references for fashion trends (3 questions); and 5) cultural values and appearance (4 questions).

Semi-structured interviews of about one to two hours in length were conducted. During the interviews, participants were asked to exhibit photographs or actual clothing items that they had worn during the 1980s, and each interview was audio-taped.

The constant comparative method and open coding were adopted for the analysis of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The constant comparative approach involves tacking back and forth between categories, data, and existing theory to yield insights into patterns of responses and meaningful themes. Within each answer, broad themes were initially identified; then, sub-themes were identified to create categories of meaning. Words, phrases, clauses, or sentences that were meaningful were coded. During the process, the relationship between the themes and sub-themes was refined. In order to verify the accuracy and reliability of the coding, the second author checked the first author's interpretation of items placed within each theme. Out of the hundreds of responses coded, only three interpretations were questioned and negotiated between the authors.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of 1980s Fashion

"Big" ($n = 6$) was one of the major themes of 1980s fashion in U.S. culture. "Big shoulders with shoulder pads" ($n = 3$), "big hair" ($n = 3$), and "big accessories" (or "jewelry") ($n = 2$) were mentioned. One woman (A14) recalled:

Things were very over the top. So, if you had shoulder pads in your jacket, they weren't just any shoulder pads, they were the biggest shoulder pads in the world ... By the end of the decade shoulder pads kind of go away. '85 to '86, huge, the biggest shoulder pads ever.

Some analysts have suggested that such an exaggerated shoulder width symbolized women's aspirations to achieve a level of masculine or "executive" authority (Ehrman, 2005). Or bigness may merely reflect the pendulum swing of aesthetic trends from smaller to larger (Richardson & Kroeber, 1940) and postmodern exaggeration of the swing (Morgado, 1996).

"Synthetic fabrics" ($n = 3$) like polyester and "bright colors" ($n = 2$) were also mentioned by a few women, and other themes mentioned by one woman for each included diverse; "weird" or optically lively patterns; excess of accessories; oversized tops with tight bottoms; boxy silhouette; puffy sleeves; a lot of different lengths; and aerobics clothes. Styles included contrasts and expanded choices, reflecting postmodern expansion of choice (Kaiser, 1990; Kaiser et al., 1995) and pastiche through proportional extravagance (Morgado, 1996).

In contrast to the extremes of bigness, "conservative" ($n = 5$) was another important theme, represented by looks such as the "business suit," "masculine blazer," "tailored jacket," or "preppy look."

According to one woman (A3):

Between the '60s and '70s people were just letting out and relaxing, but then [in] the '80s people started becoming more conservative ... They were not liberal-thinking, relaxed people anymore. They were just more concerned about planning for the future, [which] showed in the style of the clothing. I don't think the clothing was particularly very stylish; it was lacking in creativity and relaxedness.

The baby boomer generation was heading toward middle age and raising families. Conservative styles reflected the increasing emphasis on careers, dressing for success in work life, and possibly the conservative political tone in U.S. politics (Strauss & Howe, 1991). For the competitive business world, a modernistic emphasis on rules for dress and limited style choice prevailed.

Styles Adopted for College Life

Campus wear. Comfortable clothes such as jeans ($n = 10$), other pants ($n = 3$), t-shirts ($n = 8$), and shirts ($n = 10$) were adopted in U.S. culture. During the early 1980s, the preppy look ($n = 3$) dominated many campuses. Buttoned-down shirts ($n = 5$) and straight-legged khaki pants ($n = 2$) were remembered as popular. Wearing a sweater on the shoulders or around the hips with the sleeves tied with a buttoned-down shirt was fashionable. In winter, windbreakers, parkas, corduroy or wool blazers, and big bulky wool sweaters were popular. The casual but conservative preppy look inspired campus looks in the early 1980s, reflecting conservatism in casual dress.

However, the 1960-1970s revolution of casualness for many social situations (Adler, 1995) and co-option of "cloth of the manual laborer" as style was still present in casual dress and solidly mainstream (Reed, 1992; Wilson, 1990). Jeans and denim skirts and jackets were very popular. In the late '70s to the early '80s, jeans were straight- or peg-legged and very tight by the later 1980s. Around the middle of the decade, comfortable straight-legged jeans as well as shorts worn with tights or knee-high socks became popular. As brand names and designer labels became more important, jeans became more prestige-oriented than in the previous decade and evolved to high-end fashion. The symbolism of prestige and expense overlaid on the humbleness and functionality of denim jeans juxtaposed contrasting meanings within one garment (Wilson, 1990). Toward the later part of the decade, stone-washed and acid-washed jeans became popular for further postmodern play with surfaces and ironic meanings that worn and torn were new.

The layered look was widely adopted later in the decade. One woman (A8) recalled, "We dressed up like Boy George—layering clothes to wearing a long coat like the Boy George style." The participant was remembering a subversive style of the times. The Boy George look was a mix of style components that reflected a borrowing of menswear into women's wear (and vice versa), and frequent androgynous combinations of both genders in one appearance. The style is an example of the distortion, confusion,

and intentional undermining of clarity of gender identity illustrated by Morgado (1996) as one of the characteristics of postmodern styles. The postmodern styles newly adopted by young women in the U.S. in the 1980s and the remaining modern styles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.

Postmodern and Modern Styles Adopted by Young Women in the U.S. in the 1980s

Styles Adopted	
Modern Styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The conservative look--"business suit," "masculine blazer," "tailored jacket," and "preppy look" b) Brand names and designer labels
Postmodern Styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Prestige-oriented jeans (contrasting meanings within one garment) b) Stone-washed and acid-washed jeans (play with surfaces and ironic meanings that worn and torn were new) c) The layered look d) A borrowing of menswear into women's wear e) Androgynous combinations of both genders in one appearance f) Clothes from previous decades g) Ethnic clothes or accessories h) Play with identity expression by trying different outfits i) Putting together clothing items in unexpected combinations j) Intentional adding of some elements of surprise or humor to the appearance k) Excess of accessories l) Coexistence of different lengths

Sources of Fashion Information

Television, including MTV, was important to many women ($n = 8$, $n = 4$ MTV) as a reference for fashion trends and guide in choices of styles. One woman (A7) recalled: "MTV, especially the late night show on the weekend called "120 Minutes" ... I would see new music videos and find new ways of putting outfits together or amazing hairstyles, it was very visual and I got to hear great music." Movies were a relatively important reference for four women. Store displays ($n = 3$) and magazines ($n = 3$) were also used, followed by peers ($n = 3$). Other answers included pop and rock stars ($n = 2$), people working in the theatre or dance ($n = 2$) and celebrities ($n = 1$), catalogs ($n = 1$), and their own sisters ($n = 1$).

Ideal Styles and Looks

Actresses represented most participants' notion of ideal style. Those mentioned included Audrey Hepburn ($n = 1$), Catherine Hepburn ($n = 1$), Jessica Lange ($n = 1$), and Molly Ringwald ($n = 1$). Besides actresses, musicians on MTV such as Madonna ($n = 4$), Annie Lennox ($n = 3$), and Cindy Lauper ($n = 1$) were influential for participants, supporting Cunningham et al.'s (2005) conclusions that MTV influenced almost every aspect of American culture during the 1980s such as theatre, film, advertising, marketing,

and fashion.

One woman (A13) mentioned Cindy Lauper, who was "... more fun and funky. She wasn't as revealing or sensual as Madonna's style, but they both liked the vintage look." The fact that many participants' ideal styles were worn by actresses and music stars relates to postmodern culture in that many MTV performers' sexually forward or gender-blurring appearances violated previous rules for appropriate dress in mainstream society. As Kaiser (1990) stated, Madonna's constant metamorphoses also illustrated a postmodern ideology that images and constructions of reality and self are ephemeral and available for sale as if they are commodities.

Political personalities such as Jackie Kennedy ($n = 1$) and Princess Diana ($n = 1$) were also mentioned as epitomizing participants' ideal styles. While postmodern styles were important, more conservative, traditional, and "modernistic" style icons like the Hepburns, Kennedy, and European designers and royalty held sway. Postmodernism may have had increasing influence on style, but modernism still had substantial influence.

Places to Shop

For most of the women, department stores and malls were the most frequented places to shop because of access to a variety of styles, good brands, quality clothing for cheaper prices on sale or clearance, and convenient displays of styles ($n = 9$). Other popular places included specialty stores and lower-end chain outlets ($n = 6$), including The Limited ($n = 2$), Express ($n = 1$), Casual Corner ($n = 1$), and Target ($n = 1$). Four women mentioned small local shops.

Five women shopped at vintage stores or thrift stores. Aside from low cost, some participants were particularly interested in unique and vintage clothing, thus contributing to the "personalization" of wardrobe and "retro" or nostalgic elements of postmodern fashion. "I like to treasure-hunt, to look through all the clothes. It was fun finding interesting fabrics, buttons or different things that I might like, and of course the price" (A11). The exploration or the "fun" element of the process of finding clothes—treasure hunting—was also important.

Postmodern Characteristics Reflected in Fashions

In order to directly explore the cultural impact of postmodernism on fashion in the 1980s, participants were asked questions about dressing behaviors related to characteristics of postmodern fashion. Themes related to nostalgic borrowing, eclectic consumption or decentering, androgyny, identity construction, and lack of seriousness (Morgado, 1996) were explored after participants discussed their recollections of what they wore in general.

Nostalgia. About half of the participants ($n = 7$) wore clothes from previous decades. One out of the seven wore clothes from the 1970s, three from the 1960s, two from the 1940s and 1950s, and one from "almost every previous decade" of the 20th century. The major source for finding these clothes were vintage ($n = 2$) or thrift stores ($n = 3$). Three women also mentioned hand-me-downs from the

'50s and '60s from their mothers ($n = 1$) or aunts ($n = 2$).

Ethnic dress. Nine participants answered that they wore ethnic clothes or accessories, which reflected one type of postmodern decentering. They wore items made in China, India, Guatemala, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Mexico, Africa (specifically Egypt and Kenya), and France as well as items made by Native Americans. They described items such as batik-printed scarves; a colorful Indonesian long flared skirt; a Guatemalan jacket with buttons made of coins; and Chinese flat shoes. Such items were often purchased at chain imported goods stores such as Pier 1 rather than in the country of origin.

Androgyny. Six women wore men's clothes borrowed from boyfriends or bought from thrift or vintage stores. Examples included a camouflage vest, a husband's jacket and tie, vintage straight-cut roomy men's shorts, and a father's button-down shirts. The reasons for such "cross-dressing" varied, including comfort, look, sense of intimacy with someone close, and cooptation of male power. One woman (A13) recalled:

I used to steal clothes from my boyfriends all the time ... camouflaged cut-off sleeve vest, shorts, a men's jacket, or an Admiral's jacket from the second-hand store ... On one hand, it just makes you feel tough to wear boy's clothes, and it just makes you think of them when you wear it. I just always feel more masculine when I wear men's clothes, and I like to feel that way ... so I would have to feel like I had a sense of strength and power. Clothes helped with that.

By the 1980s, androgynous styles were widely adopted in U.S. culture. Four women who did not wear actual men's clothing did buy masculine women's apparel. One woman recalled, "It was a skirt and a blouse [with] a tie ... it was kind of a power statement that men can wear ties and I can wear them too!" Women's roles were changing, and the adoption of men's looks helped to highlight women's equality with men and movement into roles previously held only by men.

Personalizing wardrobe. Most women ($n = 13$) said that they did a lot of mixing and matching. One participant reported play with identity expression by trying different outfits:

I mixed and matched everything all the time. My way of dressing was very different. I always had this crazy costume collection, so everyday I would just be like "well, what do you want to look like today?" ... But it's sort of like picking an imaginary character and dressing like [that] character ... (A14)

Seven women responded that they liked to put together clothing items in unexpected combinations. One participant (A8) said, "I remember mixing like a nice tailored jacket with really grungy punk rock—not grungy but punk rock—clothes underneath like ... leggings and miniskirts and a nice jacket." Another participant (A13) tried to shock people: "So, I would wear striped and polka dots together. And then the army fatigue jacket with the fur; it was a big contrast. Yeah, I would try the kind of shock factor. I'd like to dress to stand out..." These overt challenges to aesthetic codes are characteristic of postmodern sensibilities.

Surprise or humor in appearance. Nine women intentionally added some elements of surprise or

humor to their appearance, including a Mickey Mouse watch; many pins (sometimes cartoon characters); feminine rainbow-colored suspenders; glitter; jewelry ranging from vintage to punk safety pins; spiked hair and dying it in a variety of unusual colors; fedoras and gloves; and mixing masculine and feminine elements for fun. One woman (A6) recalled,

I [remember] the glitter and the earrings—the paper clips and safety pins. Yeah, I would have to say, yes! *What did it mean?* Just trying to be a little different ... always a good conversation starter. People would say, ‘You are wearing paper clips in your ear?’ I would say, ‘yes.’ It [was a] little attention-getter.

Another (A8) said, “Changing the color of your hair and spiking your hair! ... It was more of making a statement of not wanting to be part of mainstream culture ... I think it stood out, expressing individuality.”

Conformity or not. Seven women responded that to keep up with current fashion was not important. Three women answered that following fashion was important while a few felt that they only followed fashion somewhat or unintentionally. Some ambivalence as to importance of fashion trends reflected Kaiser et al.’s (1995) notion of ambivalence in the fashion process.

Brand names or designer’s labels. Seven participants responded that brand names or designer labels were not important. Six women said that brand labels were “a bit important” because “at that age you are heavily influenced by others and want to have whatever everybody else has. It’s mostly status.” Only a few women ($n = 3$) said that brand names and designer labels were important to show off and achieve status, to follow styles, or because they believed that brand names were of a better quality and fit. The guidance of brands as to what is in fashion and reflects status is a component of modernistic dress; however, most of the women recalled rejection or only limited adoption of hierarchical brand symbols.

Values and Appearance in the 1980s

The most important values recalled by the participants were “having a career,” “women’s independence,” or “women’s liberation” ($n = 5$). Strong feminist ideals developed during the ‘60s and ‘70s and continued to flourish and prevail in the 1980s.

In the U.S. during the 1980s, status, money, and power were “really big.” According to one woman (A14), “Donald Trump became like a big success in the ‘80s ... I know that status was really important.” Another commented, “I think in the ‘80s there was a lot of possibility. You could do anything you wanted ... I think it was ... like driven for monetary success. I think there was a lot of excess too, in terms of having things that were very flashy, like the clothing was flashy” (A12).

One woman recalled the 1980s as not only the beginning of consumer culture but also as an era that was less politically inclined.

I associate the '60s and '70s with more political activism—with women committed to the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] and involved in politics ... in the '80s ... it seems like we were more superficial, maybe, and into music and pop culture. (A8)

Responses reflected the emphasis on consumption and becoming prosperous identified by Strauss and Howe (1991) as characteristic of the 1980s. In congruence with the value in prosperity was career accomplishment, reflected in the participants' responses such as "hard working" ($n = 2$), "mature" ($n = 2$), "confident and determined," "professional," and "responsible."

In contrast were more postmodern values identified by five women who specifically mentioned value in looking "different" or "unique." Other answers related to value in being different included wanting to look "independent and strong," "artistic," "exciting or daring," "rebellious," and "not to be a mainstream (Republican)" or "not to be a part of a sorority."

Conclusions and Implications

Participants accounts reflected both modern and postmodern dressing. They recognized the prominence of rule-driven, modernistic power dressing in business contexts and the influence of conservative, upper class preppy looks early in the decade. Several mentioned the prevailing societal value of materialism and consumption, along with emphasis on status dressing.

Although a few mentioned their own aspirations toward purchase of prestigious brands or need for acquisition of career dress at the time, the respondents did not indicate that they engaged much in status consumption. As college students, some respondents' budgets for clothing would have been limited. In addition, extravagant expenditure on clothing and accessories for campus wear did not fit with predominant patterns of self-expression at state universities during the 1980s. Most participants mentioned the emphasis on casual and comfortable in the campus context, a continuation of a general trend in U.S. campus dress begun by the mid to late 1960s.

Particularly upon prompting, participants readily provided examples of postmodern approaches to dressing. Their appearance choices regularly included nostalgic borrowing of styles from the past, from ethnic dress and textiles, across gender boundaries, and from music groups and celebrities, resulting in eclectic mix and matching of pieces that would have been incongruent for rule-oriented power dressing of the times. This independent and at times individualistic dressing often resulted in humor and surprise. Respondents reflected on these styles as playful and superficial; however, the borrowing of deviant sub-cultural punk ideas such as spiked hair and paper clip earrings, eschewing of status brands through vintage shopping and *bricolage*, and androgynous style seem to reflect an underlying questioning of mainstream norms and appropriation of values from feminism and subcultural music culture that looked toward new freedoms of identity expression, women's roles, and diversity tolerance. About half of the participants valued nonconformity, reflecting the cynicism and questioning of mainstream that was not uncommon among younger adults during the 1980s (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Postmodernism decentering, eclecticism, play with surfaces, and rejection of conformity was evident in dress adopted by many of the

participants. Nevertheless, differences across individuals highlight the variety of behaviors during the same time period; both modern and postmodern patterns of consumption co-existed in that transitional moment in history.

This study provides some insights for the study of fashion. First, the examination of styles actually adopted by young women for different occasions in 1980s United States extends historical knowledge of fashion within U.S. culture. Second, the examination of social and value changes during this decade in the U.S. and the exploration of their connection with fashion changes provide insight into cultural dynamics reflected in fashion changes. Interviews to collect appearance histories are valuable in that memories of what people actually wore were accessed rather than reliance only on media and fashion industry controlled depictions of styles that in many instances might not have been adopted widely. In addition, the wearers' interpretations of meanings of styles are of great value as well as are recollections of how and in what contexts things were worn. The passage of a few decades may have helped participants to put meanings of style into perspective, as many of them had astute reflections on abstract social meanings of style and consumption patterns at the time. Of course, memory can lead to errors in recollections, and media coverage of the times can influence respondents' reflections. Nevertheless, the ratification of similar memories and interpretations across individuals as well as fit with theoretical interpretations helps to validate the findings and theories. Further efforts to collect near-history memories of dress from living persons could facilitate recording of dress history. These living histories will facilitate efforts of historians in the future.

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