

**Doctoral Dissertation**

**Consumer Desires in Fashion:  
Interagency of Consumers and Producers**

**by**

**Deniz Atik**

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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**Abstract**

The debate on the role of consumers as the active or passive agents of the market system continues to preoccupy scholarly discussions. Though, one area noticeably absent in the consumer research field is the broader analysis of the institutional forces that have shaped the market place and the consumer as a social category. This study shows the interagency of consumers and producers in mass consumption environments within the fashion context. Through an interpretive research, consumers' perspectives limited to those of working women and producers' perspectives limited to those of mainly fashion designers and a number of other fashion professionals, it explores the interagency involved both in creating consumer desires and fashion trends. On one hand, the findings point at the different tensions, pushing consumers towards conformity, caused by their socially constructed fears of not fitting in with the social norms, their mimetic desire, and the efforts of fashion institutions reinforcing this conformity through the availability of certain styles more than others. In addition, fashion institutions are influential, promoting idealized images of self in life, instructional for constructing one's style, and informative of the new fashion trends, at the same time fueling the restless desire for change of consumers. Thus, the share of the social institutional forces is rather prevailing in this process of interagency. On the other hand, the study also suggests that the greatest power of mass consumers may not come out as innovators but as the arbitrators of the socially accepted dressing norms, often not tolerant of radical changes. Therefore, producers' decisions are found to be highly influenced by the sales performance within these larger market segments. Finally, rather than declaring one side more dominant than the other, this study explores the tensions and paradoxes created during this process of interagency while also pointing at the broader social forces that are both shaping and constraining it.

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*To my mother & brother*

## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>A First Glance at Fashion Theory .....</b>	<b>10</b>
The Scope of Fashion.....	10
A Brief Look at Fashion History.....	11
Early Perspectives on Fashion Diffusion.....	13
Contemporary Perspectives on Fashion Diffusion.....	16
<b>Fashion as an Institution.....</b>	<b>18</b>
A Glance at the Fashion Cycle.....	18
The Construction of Meaning within the Fashion System.....	20
The Interagency within the Fashion System.....	23
Passive Consumers.....	23
Active Consumers.....	25
Interagency.....	27
<b>Consumer Desires in Fashion.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Distinction between Needs and Desires.....	29
Needs versus Desires in the Context of Fashion.....	31
Consumer Desires.....	32
Consumer Desires and Satisfaction.....	33
Mimetic Desire and Others.....	35
Consumer Desires and the Fashion System.....	37
Synthesis of the Literature Gaps and Research Questions.....	39
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>42</b>
Data Collection and the Empirical Setting.....	42
My Position as the Interviewer.....	43
Informants on the Consumer Side.....	45
Informants on the Producer Side.....	53
Data Analysis.....	59
<b>Consumer Desires within the Fashion Context.....</b>	<b>62</b>
Desire for New / Change.....	66
Conformity & Anti-Conformity.....	76
Beauty Myth as Thin, Tall, and Young.....	83
Seduction.....	88
Confidence and Power.....	96
Functions.....	100

<b>Consumption Angle of the Interagency.....</b>	<b>102</b>
Influences from Fashion Institutions.....	103
Looking Around and Window Shopping.....	103
Fashion Magazines.....	106
Fashion Shows.....	109
Prestige Brands.....	112
Stores.....	116
Summary.....	120
Influences from Broader Socio-Cultural Context.....	122
Celebrities.....	122
Others.....	125
Diderot Effect.....	128
Influence of Seasons.....	130
Consumer Agency.....	131
Consumers mix and match from different market sources.....	132
Some consumers are more resistant to change than others.....	133
Consumers interpret sent messages and make meanings.....	135
<b>Production Angle of the Interagency.....</b>	<b>138</b>
Trickle-up Diffusion of Fashion Mediated by Institutions.....	139
Influential Forces behind Fashion Creation.....	143
Consumers.....	145
Fashion Institutions.....	147
Broader Socio-Cultural Context.....	150
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>153</b>
Theoretical Implications.....	153
The Interagency in Creation of Consumer Desires.....	153
The Interagency in Creation of Fashion Trends.....	162
Managerial Implications.....	166
Limitations and Future Research.....	167
<b>References.....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Appendix I.....</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Appendix II.....</b>	<b>183</b>

## Tables

Table 1 – A brief synthesis from the literature about the Consumer Agency versus Structure	8
Table 2 – Informants on the Consumer Side	46
Table 3 – Pictures Presented to the Informants from Vogue Magazine, February 2005	52
Table 4 – Informants on the Producer Side	55
Table 5 – Informant Categories on the Consumer Side	63

## Figures

Figure 1 – The Endless Cycle of Desire	35
Figure 2 – Examples of Institutional Agents in Fashion Industry	53
Figure 3 – Consumer Desires within the Fashion Context	65
Figure 4 – Consumption Angle of the Interagency	103
Figure 5 – Potential Influences from the Fashion Institutions	121
Figure 6 – Production Angle of the Interagency	138
Figure 7 – The Interagency in Creation of Consumer Desires	154
Figure 8 – The Interagency in Creation of Fashion Trends	162

## Introduction

What drives consumer society? Is it corporations, who by their marketing and advertising campaigns ultimately determine what consumers want? Or is it consumers, whom producers must satisfy in order to stay in business? This deceptive simple question has been at the hearth of much scholarly literature, and continues to preoccupy both supporters and detractors of consumer society (Schor and Holt 2000, p. x).

On one hand, in social sciences, especially the followers of Frankfurt School have emphasized market's domination over consumer desires where consumers are passive agents or, in this context, fashion victims manipulated in mass conformity (e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer 1944; Ewen 1988; Haug 1986) while others have discussed the individual freedom and power to outflank marketers (e.g. Fiske 1989; Wilson 1985). Whereas, in the consumer research field, a strong emphasis has been given to consumer agency and consumers as culture producers (e.g. Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Fournier 1998; Ozanne and Murray 1995; Thompson and Haytko 1997), latest studies are suggesting further analysis involving the perspectives of institutional agents that have shaped the marketplace and the consumer as a social category (e.g. Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Murray 2002). Although these different perspectives are explored in further chapters, a brief synthesis from the literature highlighting this academic discrepancy can be found in Table 1. Interestingly, the focus on influential social and institutional forces is higher in other social science fields while this has been to some extent neglected in consumer research with more emphasis on the sovereign individual.



Table 1

A brief synthesis from the literature about Consumer Agency versus Structure

## Relevant Contributions from Other Fields in Social Sciences

Theory	Authors	Research Context
<b>Emphasis on Structure</b>		
Strong emphasis on Market's Domination and Passive Role of Consumers	e.g. Adorno and Horkheimer 1944 e.g. Galbraith 1958	
Emphasis on Structure - Manipulation can occur only if it is allied with the objective interests of those being manipulated	e.g. Haug 1986	Mostly conceptual
Emphasis on Structure - Marketing is successful in channeling consumer desires through brands	e.g. Ewen 1988	
<b>Emphasis on Individual</b>		
Emphasis on the power of consumers to outflank marketers	e.g. Wilson 1985 e.g. Fiske 1989	Mostly conceptual

## Relevant Contributions from Consumer Research Field

<b>Emphasis on Individual</b>		
Emphasis on Consumer Agency - Consumers as cultural producers (Creative Resistance)	Firat and Venkatesh 1995	Conceptual
Emphasis on Consumer Agency - Consumers filtering out marketing's influence (Reflexive Resistance)	Ozanne and Murray 1995	Conceptual
Emphasis on Consumer Agency - Consumers rework the cultural norms in terms of their value systems, constructing self-identities	Thompson and Haytko 1997	Empirical study with consumers in college setting
Emphasis on Consumer Agency - Consumers brand relationships to add meaning in their lives	Fournier 1998	Empirical study with female consumers
<b>Emphasis on Structure</b>		
Emphasis on Structure - Consumer resistance is a form of market-sanctioned cultural experimentation	Holt 2002	Empirical study with consumers in marginal positions (e.g. poor, jobless, or limited social network)
<b>Interagency</b>		
Consumers and producers interests are embedded in one another in a process of "Interagency"	Kozinets, Sherry, Storm, Duhachek, Nuttavuthisit, Deberry-Spence 2004	Empirical study with consumers and producers in spectacular consumption setting
<b>Suggesting Further Research on Interagency</b>		
Suggesting future consumer research embracing the dialectic interplay between agency and structure	Murray 2002	Empirical study with middle class consumers
Suggesting future consumer research involving also the perspectives of institutional agents, influencing desires	Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003	Empirical study with consumers: both college and middle class setting
Suggesting future consumer research with broader analysis of historical and institutional forces that have shaped the marketplace and the consumer as a social category	Arnould and Thompson 2005	Conceptual

Beside the research conducted in spectacular consumption environments (Kozinets et. al. 2004), this study shows the interagency in mass consumption settings within the fashion context as consumer and producer interests are embedded in one another. Furthermore, it extends the scope of this interagency to the broader socio-cultural forces at work on this interagency, both in shaping and constraining it. Looking from two different angles, the first one being the consumption angle, the study investigates the interagency involved in creating consumer desires, and from a production angle, it explores the creation of new fashion trends and the possible role of consumers in it.

The inquiry starts with a first glance at the fashion theory, looking at different perspectives on fashion diffusion as a social phenomenon. Then, it expands the discussions on fashion as an institution and the role of consumers within the fashion system. Furthermore, the last part in the literature review looks at consumer desires as the construct for developing a better understanding of fashion consumption. After revealing the methodology, a reverse pattern is followed while discussing the findings, by first exploring consumer desires in the context of fashion, spotting some of the major influential forces behind these desires, and investigating consumers' experiences dealing with these external forces. Subsequently, producers' coping strategies with the fashion system both in relation to consumer desires and creation of new fashion trends and consumers' possible role in production are also investigated, before arriving to the final discussion.

## **A First Glance at Fashion Theory**

In this introductory section, I intend to clarify the scope of fashion for the purpose of this study, to take a brief look at the fashion history, and the early and contemporary perspectives on fashion diffusion.

### **The Scope of Fashion**

Fashion has been a focus of study for many scholars from different fields such as history, sociology, anthropology, and for my main concern consumer research. It is a very complex process that operates on many levels. At one end, it is a societal phenomenon affecting many people simultaneously, and in this sense, it has attracted the attention of sociologists (e.g. Barthes [1967] 1990; Lipovetsky 1987; Simmel [1904] 1957). At the other end, it exerts a very personal effect on individual behavior such as the conformity issues and the personal creativity, attracting the attention of consumer researchers (e.g. Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Besides, having the effect of requiring objects to be replaced over and over again (e.g. McCracken 1988), fashion is also interesting from a marketing perspective.

Sproles (1974, p. 465) defines fashion as "a culturally endorsed form of expression, in a particular material or non-material phenomenon, which is discernible at any given time and changes over time within a social system or group of associated individuals." As a material phenomenon, Sproles refers to the process of social diffusion by which a fashion object such as clothing, automobiles, or an architectural design is adopted by a group of individuals. As a non-material phenomenon, he refers

to the dissemination or acceptance of practices such as the ideological movements, educational activities, scientific pursuits, or emerging lifestyles. Scholars have long recognized fashion as a phenomenon affecting many aspects of our lives. For instance, even at the beginning of the twentieth century, Simmel ([1904] 1957) suggested that any given form of clothing, art, conduct, or opinion may become fashionable. However, historically and theoretically, fashion has referred mainly to clothing and personal adornment, which have been recognized as interesting tools for constructing one's desired look (Davis 1992). Thus, for the empirical part of this study, the scope of discussions is limited to fashion in clothing, although the final part at the very end touches the notion of fashion in a broader context. For the purpose of the empirical part, fashion can be defined as "the process of social diffusion by which a new style (of fashion clothing) is adopted by some group(s) of consumers (Solomon 2002, p.503)."

### **A Brief Look at Fashion History**

From the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries, it was the inauguration phase of fashion in a systematic and durable manner, and this period within the context of fashion has been largely associated with the competition between social classes (e.g. Bell 2003; Lipovetsky 1987). During this period, Europe had seen fashion in clothing as it began with the court and moved through the nobility, the gentry, the middle class, and the lower classes (McCracken 1988). In this sense, in the early periods, fashion started as an upper social class phenomenon rather than involving all social levels. The luxurious and prestigious consumption of the Elizabethan period was associated largely with the noble class (e.g. Lipovetsky 1987; McCracken 1988). Then, through time,

fashion as a social phenomenon diffused to other social classes, in the first place through the emulation of the aristocracy by the bourgeoisie, and then through the ability of working classes to compete with the middle ones (Bell 2003). This social expansion of the fashion system throughout a widened consuming public is also tied to the idea of a transition from a traditional to a modern society (Slater 1997).

Here, it is also important to note that before the industrial revolution, men and women were equally concerned with fashion, but after that, as labor became disengaged from home, men adopted more conservative dress with less elaboration and more comfort while women became the vehicle for displaying household status through their appearance (Veblen 1899). Simmel ([1904] 1957) argued that woman, more than man, consisted in a lack of differentiation, in a greater similarity among the different members of her sex, in a stricter adherence to the social average. He based this argument on the weakness of woman's social position throughout the history for explaining her tendency towards generally approved forms of life. This statement could have been appropriate for the epoch Simmel lived in when woman did not have such a public image. However, nowadays, the situation has changed since sex roles are challenged by different social and cultural movements such as feminism, postmodernism, and countercultural youth movements (Firat 1994). Women are more present in the work place or politics, representing masculine qualities with their participation in production in the public domain, while men are taking part in so called women's duties such as housework and increasingly consuming fashion products and cosmetics (Firat 1994).

Thereafter, from the second half of 19th century until the 1960's, with the introduction of "haute couture", fashion, rather than being only a social phenomenon, had become institutionalized, presenting its original creations with its twice a year fashion shows (e.g. Lipovetsky 1987). This was the beginning of the period when public taste, fashion magazines, and movie stars, all started to make an impact on which fashion pieces will be in fashion. Nowadays, while haute couture designers may still be looked up to for fashion originality, the vagaries of public taste and the economic uncertainties of a mass consumption economy prevents them from dictating what fashions would be (Davis 1992).

### **Early Perspectives on Fashion Diffusion**

Veblen's (1899) notion of conspicuous consumption proposed that status then was a product of economic wealth, and fashion was mainly a practice of the leisure class. The wealthy consumed to display their prosperity by wearing expensive clothing. Good taste, which was termed as refined or cultivated, became associated with the expression of distance from the world of work, the practical or the natural world, which could be regarded as cheap.

Furthermore, another important sociologist of the same period, Simmel ([1904] 1957) developed the trickle-down theory as new fashions passed from the upper classes to the lower ones. In the course of their descent through the status hierarchy, they are diluted and vulgarized; as a result, they lose their ability to register appropriate status distinctions and soon came to be regarded by the upper classes as unfashionable and in bad taste. In this manner, the conditions are set for a new fashion cycle to be launched

by the upper classes. According to this theory, the upper class acts solely for the purpose of differentiation as they have no higher group to imitate, and the lowest-ranking group acts solely for the purpose of imitation as they have no lower group from whom they must distinguish themselves. An important strength of this theory is that the observer can predict a change in one group's fashion behavior from the moment there is a change in the behavior of a proximate group; however, for all the intermediate groups in the system, the motives for fashion change are not so predictable (McCracken 1988). These groups may undertake fashion change for the purpose of imitation, differentiation, or both.

Among the most precious contributions Simmel made to fashion theory was to point out that two social tendencies are essential for the establishment of fashion, and should either of these tendencies be lacking in a society, fashion will not be formed. The first one is the need for union, and the second one is the need for isolation. Although these are conflicting needs, fashion represents a way of seeking to combine the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change, which is also confirmed by the findings of this study.

However, the biggest problem with the trickle-down theory is that fashion nowadays does not diffuse only with a trickle-down movement. King (1963), with his horizontal flow concept, delivered a different perspective to trickle-down diffusion of fashion, by arguing that in mass production and mass communication environments fashions tend to spread simultaneously within each social class over time. Mass production makes new fashions available at all price levels while mass communication

rapidly disseminates information and influences new fashion offerings. Subsequently, with his "collective selection theory," Blumer (1969) suggested that fashion mechanism appears not in response to a need for class differentiation and class emulation, but in response to a wish to be in fashion and to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world. Fashion is followed by the collective and not only by the lower classes imitating the upper classes. A variety of simultaneous fashion trends can emerge and compete at the same time, and successful fashion leads to a progressive collective transformation in mass taste and habit (Blumer 1969).

In fact, even the upper classes do not start to change with the strategic purpose of class differentiation, but instead with the desire for expressing their individual identities and distinctiveness. Through this process, they are ranked in the social hierarchy, and their distinguished tastes for aesthetics show signs of "social excellence" (translated from Lipovetsky 1987, p. 69). Taste unifies those with similar preferences and differentiates them from those with different tastes, giving an individual a sense of his/her place in the social order (Bourdieu ([1979] 1984). Bourdieu also suggests that those in higher classes are far better able to have their tastes accepted and oppose the tastes of those in lower classes. However, these arguments contradict with the contemporary perspectives on fashion diffusion, especially the ones concerning the trickle-up movement where a fashion trend once initiated in the streets can diffuse to other social classes, including the upper classes. Bourdieu gives great importance to social class differentiation, but he refuses to reduce it merely to economic matters; he emphasizes more the occupational or educational levels.



## Contemporary Perspectives on Fashion Diffusion

Different socioeconomic, age, subculture, ethnic, and regional groupings, no matter what their relationship to the 'means of production' or the occupational structure of a society, adopt and frequently create their own distinctive fashions, some of which (e.g. blue jeans, punk-influenced hair styles, oversized men's shirts worn by women, men's earring, tie-dyed T-shirts, hippie beads, running shoes) soon spread, via lateral and even upward movement, to other subcultures and more inclusive social groupings (Davis 1992, p. 107).

Nowadays, fashion does not diffuse solely from the upper social classes on the consumer side or the haute couture designers on the producer side, initiating a new trend. It is rather a complex mechanism interacting with diverse social institutional forces and consumer categories (e.g. Davis 1992). For instance, haute couture designs now hardly function as the exclusive emblems for aspiring social classes; rather, they are competitive, aesthetically framed market statements, aiming to point a direction for a trend (Davis 1992).

Fashion can also emerge from the streets, in a trickle-up movement with individual consumers having social influence (e.g. Gladwell 1995). These are mostly cool adolescents who are sensation seekers, and they have the respect, admiration, and trust of their friends, for something different than just a kind of status envy. It is about a kind of revolution that sets earlier paradigms aside and says, in fact it is not at all concerned with those matters; the idea is about occupying a unique position in the culture (Gladwell 1995).

However; in a trickle-up movement, most trends in their earliest form are distinct, and they will never make it outside. They need to be altered and have their edges smoothed; they need to be repackaged for the rest of us (Gladwell 1995). Thus, trickle up diffusion of fashion does not happen in the reverse pattern of the classical trickle-down version, upper classes imitating the lower ones. It is rather mediated and aided by fashion institutions such as trend search agencies or cool hunters in Gladwell's terms, spotting some social changes, transmitting those to new designs, and communicating the new trends. Thanks to this process of institutionalization, for instance, a fashion trend such as vintage that once started in the streets can be found in high fashion windows, not through some elite people imitating some young students' choice of second hand clothing. In fact, any kind of fashion diffusion is aided by institutions such as fashion design and advertising, including a possible trickle-down diffusion through the presentation of products in high fashion windows or fashion shows.

For instance, Kotlowitz (1999), in his study of the urban poor in America, discloses how a young group of people helped to drive fashion trends. Those who did not have much control over other aspects of their life find comfort in having at least some control over their styles; this gave them a sense of pride. The Tommy Hilfiger clothing line, initially aimed at preppies, became hot in the inner city, sponsored in large part by rap artists who adopted Hilfiger's stylish and colorful designs. The Tommy Hilfiger brand to start with, did not aim at the inner city teens as a target market, but once they realized the demand, they were fast to adopt the desires of these inner-city teens (Kotlowitz 1999). Nowadays, such trends as loose-fitting pants of this

sub-culture have also diffused to other consumer categories all over the world, not only poor black teens in America. However, as it is also suggested here, fashion diffusion does not happen free of institutions. It is reinforced by institutional forces such as the rap artists in this case or a famous brand name like Tommy Hilfiger.

### **Fashion as an Institution**

The inquiry here starts with a quick glance at the fashion cycle and continues with discussions on the role of institutional agents and consumers within the fashion system.

### **A Glance at the Fashion Cycle**

The fashion cycle can be defined as the time from the introduction of a new fashion to its substitution by a successive fashion. In this process, a potential fashion object is introduced to the members of a social system, adopted by certain leading individuals referred to as innovators, and ultimately diffused to other social system members to a certain level of acceptance (Sproles 1974).

At the invention phase of fashion, the sources and circumstances of creativity are not very much different from those obtained in the arts generally; designers, especially those aspiring to international reputation, take pride in being thought of as original and innovative (Davis 1992, p. 125). Where designers get their ideas from is anywhere and everywhere. Designers have been known to consult books of costume history for ideas, as well as to borrow from their own earlier work and that of others, and they are usually in close contact with leading creative and progressive elements in

the arts, sciences, politics, and culture generally (e.g. Davis 1992; McCracken 1988). However, a strongly institutionalized motive is in place as the key players of the fashion world like the fashion press, sustain and reinforce the designer's quest for originality; also, the massiveness and demand constancy of the apparel market, along with heavy fixed capital investments in clothing manufacturing and distribution, restrain the creativity of designers more than in other arts (e.g. Davis 1992; Saviolo and Testa 2002).

The purpose of artistic creativity is not to satisfy the needs of a mass market. Artistic creativity is above all the means through which artists express themselves. Commercial creativity, on the other hand, does not have this freedom of expression. This is because its purpose is to achieve another subject's objective, the firm. The firm's reason for existence lies in its ability to satisfy market needs (Saviolo and Testa 2002, p. 23).

In the introduction phase of new collections, not all creations make it to the fall and spring openings where typically new fashions are introduced. The social construction of seasons, competition among designers and fashion centers, the fashion choices of buyers for big department stores, the fashion press, and the merchandising strategies, they all have a great deal to do with how fashion happens (e.g. Davis 1992; Saviolo and Testa 2002). By the time the new collections are displayed to the public, they have already gone through an extensive filtering process; "more gestures are arrested than completed, and more ideas are abandoned than kept (Davis 1992, p. 136)." How the crafts, skills, and talents are coordinated and integrated have a great role in the introduction of a new fashion and on the reception it receives (Saviolo and

Testa 2002). These tasks devolve upon the management of the fashion house rather than on the designer per se. As with cuisine, where the culinary talent of the chef hardly guarantees the success of the restaurant, so it is for fashion (Davis 1992, p. 137).

Once a fashion is presented to large department store chains along with members of the international press, there follows a period of uncertainty, in which interested parties attend closely whether key persons adopt the fashion. In fact, if an innovation does not diffuse to larger market segments, it is not likely to become a trend (Solomon, Bamossy, and Askegaard 2002). During the acceptance stage, new fashion enjoys increased social visibility and acceptance by the larger segments of the population. However, rarely, a new season's popular fashion is a dramatic departure from the past. The average consumer seldom accepts new styles that are radically different from what they are already wearing (Davis 1992). For many of us, style changes occur relatively slowly; it is evolutionary rather than revolutionary (Davis 1992); thus, producers decisions are also closely linked to the sales performance in the larger market segments. Finally, at the regression phase, the fashion trend reaches a state of social saturation as it becomes overused, and eventually it sinks into decline and obsolescence as a successive fashion starts taking its place (e.g. Davis 1992; Solomon, Bamossy, and Askegaard 2002).

### **The Construction of Meaning within the Fashion System**

As conceptualized by McCracken (1988), the fashion system can be defined as consisting of all people and organizations involved in creating symbolic meanings and transferring these meanings to cultural goods. In its first capacity, the fashion system

takes the new styles of clothing and associates them with established cultural categories and principles, moving meaning from the culturally constituted world to the consumer good. These cultural categories of meaning can be associated with time such as the leisure or work time; with space such as the public or private space, or with human communities through the distinction of class, gender, age, or ethnicity (McCracken 1988). For instance, nowadays, an individual participates in home life, work life, shopping life, recreational life, neighborhood life, and a variety of social lives where each life sphere requires different attention and qualities from the individual such as dressing for the occasion (Firat 1994). Different combinations of apparel with their attendant qualities are capable of registering sufficiently consistent meanings for wearers and their viewers. Such clothing features as fabric, color, texture, cut, weight, weaving, stitching, transparency, make a difference in how the garment and its surrounding ensemble is interpreted in society (Davis 1992).

“In order to get meaning into things, creative directors and fashion/product designers discover structural equivalents and draw them together in the compass of an advertisement to demonstrate that the meaning that inheres in the advertisement also inheres in the product in question (McCracken 1988, p. 120).” For example, one can secure athletic accomplishments, sex appeal, popularity, or status badges by consuming commodity signs (Goldman and Papson 1996). However, Thompson and Haytko (1997) suggest that the meaning transfer model is more dynamic and consumer centered than originally conceptualized by McCracken. During appropriation of cultural meanings, consumers are continuously engaged in an interpretive dialogue, reworking in terms of their localized knowledge and value systems. This active

reworking is further shaped by consumers' desire to construct self-identities through fashion discourses. Therefore, this meaning transfer is a diffuse, transformative, and also a consumer-centered undertaking.

In another capacity, the fashion system actually invents new cultural meanings in both modest and radical ways. In a modest way, some opinion leaders who may be high standing individuals such as the social elite or celebrities who are looked up to for their status, their beauty, or their talent, may shape or refine existing cultural meaning, encouraging the reform of cultural categories (McCracken 1988). These opinion leaders can also be regular people in the streets such as the 'cool' looking adolescents who are looked up to with respect and trusted by their friends (Gladwell 1995).

On the other hand, in a more radical way, the fashion system can promote the reform of cultural meanings as in the case of hippies, punks, gays, or paradoxically anti-fashion movements that end up being fashionable themselves (McCracken 1988). Anti-fashion takes some symbolic device of opposition, rejection, studied neglect, or parody for addressing itself in fashion of the time (Davis 1992). Fashion in a way is "a cultural production that both limits and enriches symbolic communication, constitute a site of freedom or restriction, submission or rebellion, eroticism or domination (Faurschou 1987, p. 69)."

However, as this study also shows, this meaning is not simply a product of a designer's intentions, and cannot only be what the designer says it is. It is neither the wearer's nor the spectator's intention of what is in their heads. It is not simply a product of the garment itself, but the real source of meaning is in fact within the larger

context, which may be considered as a fabric of intertextual relations that produce and construct fashion (Barnard 2002). Thus, the fashion system is animated not only with the involvement of producers and consumers, but also with influences from broader social context, involving social, cultural, or political happenings of the moment that influence both consumers and producers. For instance a war in Iraq can bring back military belts into fashion.

The process of fashion refers to the complex of influences, interactions, exchanges, adjustments, and accommodations among persons, organizations, and institutions that animate the fashion cycle from its inception to its demise (Davis 1992, p. 123).

### **The Interagency within the Fashion System**

Although not always in a clear manner, the scholarly discussions divide into two, in terms of defining individual's power within the market system.

#### ***Passive Consumers***

At one extreme, consumer is slave to desires rather than a rational calculator for them. Within this discourse, consumer desires are not independent but determined by others, by the needs of family, by social pressure, by fashion trends, by advertising, marketing, and the media (Slater 1997). Along this thought, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), important members of the Frankfurt School, drawing on Marx's theory of alienation in the workplace, argue that employers' needs for objectified and obedient workers created a parallel need for dominated, passive consumers. Thus, the producer has the function of both making the goods and making the desires for these goods (Galbraith 1958). A direct link between production and wants is provided by the



institutions of modern advertising and salesmanship with the function of creating desires, bringing into being wants that previously did not exist. Accordingly, consumers construct a self by purchasing and ingesting products featured in advertising (e.g. Elliot 1997; Ewen 1988). Friedan (1963) suggests that American housewives can be given the sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they lack, by the buying of things. Thus, Frankfurt school gives much emphasis to the powers of the modern cultural industries in the area of mass manipulation. However, Haug (1986) suggests that manipulation can occur only if it is allied with the interests of those being manipulated. Basically, even the manipulation phenomena must speak the language of desires.

Whoever goes courting makes themselves attractive and desirable. All manner of jewelry, fabrics, scents and colors offer themselves as means of presenting beauty and desirability. Thus, commodities borrow their aesthetic language from human courtship; but then the relationship is reversed and people borrow their aesthetic expression from the world of commodity (Haug 1986, page. 19).

For instance, sexual instincts are already anticipated in such products like fashion clothing, inspired by emancipating desires, and then these products are being purchased with longing akin to sexual satisfaction (Haug 1986), as in the case of Calvin Klein's "Obsession" ads (Kaite 1987). Furthermore, fashion environments such as the Madison Avenue offer commodities the route to pleasure and sexuality, through their ability to create identity, freedom, fascination, enchantment, beauty, and style (Ewen 1988). The continuous exposure to the seemingly apolitical propaganda for commodities, articulated in the language of temptation, needs, instinctual fears, of envy

and of compelling self-comparison with one's rivals is a way of exploitation via consumption (Haug 1986, p. 102). The lust for money is the reason why, under capitalist production, the commodity is created in the image of the consumer's desires.

It is, perhaps, this longing for a world of fantasy, this desire for the return, and the smell and touch of the body which the fashion industry (in fact all of our sentimental culture) capitalizes on (Sawchuk 1987, p. 59).

In the world of fashion, the media of style offers consumers the image of a utopian world where there are no conflicts and no unmet needs (Ewen 1988). Consumer ads typically tell stories of success, desire, happiness, and social fulfillment in the lives of the people who consume the right brands (Goldman and Papson 1996). However, "since reality cannot live up to the perfect worlds of daydreaming, inspired by advertising as well as by general mythologies of "the good life," the dynamism of the market does not depend on fulfilling desires but rather on their perpetual recreation (Belk, Ger, Askegaard 1996, p. 368)." "The power of late capitalism is in the imaginary, where subjects are maintained in a circuit of desire and anxiety (Sawchuk 1987, p. 61)."

### *Active Consumers*

At the other extreme in academic discussions, consumer is far from being a passive victim but rather an active agent in the construction of meaning. Within this discourse, consumers are constituted as autonomous, self-regulating, and self-actualizing individual actors seeking to maximize their quality of life (du Gay 1996). Individuals are free to interpret potentially constraining circumstances in ways that do

not create a feeling of being overly restricted or regimented by external forces (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994). Conscious reflection helps one to interpret, personalize, negotiate, and challenge collective identities or dominant consumption codes. This is reflectively defiant consumer (Ozanne and Murray 1995).

Firat and Venkatesh (1995) suggest that we are in a transitional phase of consumption towards postmodernity in which the proliferation of consumption styles will eventually liberate people from market's domination. Consumers are beginning to break down marketers' dominance by seeking their own culture, apart from that which is imposed on them. The activities of institutions such as advertisers, fashion designers, news reporters, retailers, and fashion merchandisers provide a critical communicative linkage between institutional factors and the diffusion of culturally shared consumption meanings; however, the relationship between institutional structure and diffused meanings are discursive rather than direct because a given cultural intermediary is likely to be responding to multiple institutional forces (Thompson and Haytko 1997).

Consumers are able to outflank marketers, reinscribing commodities with oppositional meanings through their consumption practices (Fiske 1989). Some consumers express far more suspicion than trust in the desire of marketers to meet their desires. For some, commercial information is understood as an appealing enhancement that often creates false hopes and real disappointments (Thompson and Haytko 1997). In contrast, word-of-mouth recommendations represent a voice of experience that conveys trustworthy information and liberate purchase decisions from the persuasive influences of commercial information (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994).

Consumers consult friends and relatives who can act as warm specialist (Lehtonen 2003). Furthermore, according to Eckman and Wagner (1995), in buying and using fashion goods, individuals are not just consumers, but also designers; they engage in a creative process of collecting aesthetic objects to enhance their wardrobe.

### *Interagency*

It is impossible to maintain a simple division between production and consumption since these two areas of activity are continuously overlapping (du Gay 1996). One of the latest researches on spectacular consumption environments shows that the interests of consumers and producers turn out to be far more overlapping, mutual, and interdependent than commonly recognized, and "consumer and producer interests are embedded in one another in a process of 'interagency' (Kozinets et al. 2004, p. 658)."

The study here empirically supports this process of interagency in mass consumption environments within the fashion context while analyzing both consumers' and producers' coping strategies with the fashion system, co-producing desires and influencing fashion creation. It also explores if the active roles of both parties are evenly distributed during this process of interagency. In fact, consumers are institutionally required to construct a life through the exercise of choice among alternatives (Slater 1997). "What has been termed 'consumer resistance' is actually a form of market-sanctioned cultural experimentation through which the market rejuvenates (Holt 2002, p. 89)."

Although more in line with Holt's argument, showing that the fashion institutions play the major role in fashion diffusion, inspiring consumer desires, this study also point at the hidden power of mass consumers maybe not as innovators but as arbitrators of socially accepted norms, often not tolerant of radical changes. Thus, producers are not free in their creations either, and their decisions are found to be highly influenced by the sales performance within the larger segments. Furthermore, the study suggests that the major dominative role is not necessarily in the hands of one party but the fashion system as a whole, which consists not only of consumers and producers, but a larger social system with influences from social, cultural, political, economic, or environmental happenings and the seasons from the natural world. The empirical analysis support this argument by showing not only how largely consumer desires are influenced by social institutional forces, but also how institutional agents in fashion industry are influenced by consumers, other producers, and social happenings of the moment.

The next section will now take a closer look at the consumer desires, as this is the main construct under investigation, exploring the consumption angle of this interagency.

### **Consumer Desires in Fashion**

At the beginning of this inquiry, I often used the term "Consumer Desires for Fashion", then I realized that this version could also be confounded with consumer preferences for fashion, consumer choices of fashion, or consumer tastes for fashion. Desire is neither of those terms, being a construct more complex to explore and explain.

Consumer desires are closely and deeply linked to consumers' fantasies, hopes, and expectations in life, and fashion is certainly not the only but one of the most cherished means, if not to satisfy them, to trying to soothe this heat of desire.

We burn and are aflame with desire; we are pierced by or riddled with desire; we are sick or ache with desire; we are tortured, tormented, and racked by desire; we are possessed, seized, ravished, and overcome by desire; we are mad, crazy, insane, giddy, blinded, or delirious with desire; we are enraptured, enchanted, suffused, and enveloped by desire; our desire is fierce, hot, intense, passionate, incandescent, and irresistible; and we pine, languish, waste away, or die of unfulfilled desire (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2000, p. 99).

Desires are these passionate feelings, the motivating force behind our consumption choices (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003). In this section, first explaining the distinction between a need and a desire, I explore deeper the meaning of desire. Then, I look at the never-ending character of desire in relation to hardly attainable satisfaction, and finally, I discuss further the interplay between consumer desires and the influential factors shaping them.

### **Distinction between Needs and Desires**

What is the need that these populations cannot satisfy? This need does not contain in itself the definition of an object that could satisfy it. No specific need is the need of humanity. Humanity has hungered and does even now hunger for food, but it has also hungered for clothing and then for something other than last year's fashions, it has hungered for automobiles and for television, it has hungered for power and for saintliness, it has hungered for asceticism and for debauchery, it has hungered for

mysticism and for rational knowledge, it has hungered for love and brotherhood but it has also hungered for its own cadavers, hungered for feast and for tragedies, and now it appears to be hungering for the Moon and the planets. One would have to be a complete idiot to claim that all of these hungers were invented because humanity was not able to eat and copulate enough (Castoriadis [1975] 1998, p. 135).

These passionate feelings are not about urgent necessities as Castoriadis suggests, but the endless, human desires. People are not guided by their needs created by their members, organs, and senses, warning for conditions such as tiredness or hunger. These warnings work automatically, and they do not require any human meditation. A man who is hungry does not need to be told of his need for food (Castoriadis 1998). Instead, people are guided by their imaginary emotions, by their hopes, and fears, by their illusions and disillusions, by their fantasies and dreams, and by their aspirations and passions, and these are not automatic as our so called biological or primary needs (Radkowski 1980). As from Deleuzian-Guattarian perspective, bodies only become subjects through an expression of their sense that is simultaneously a distribution of desire (Bogard 1998).

According to Radkowski (1980), needs do not even exist; the use of the word "need" is a linguistic illusion. It is only at the most horrific extremes of inhumanity, an economic catastrophe, or a war, when social and cultural life has completely broken down, bringing people to a point of starvation, where any food will do, and the cultural person has been reduced to a natural body; then, basic needs might emerge (Slater 1997). Though, even then, we are not completely isolated from our cultural beliefs and values; for instance, some people choose to starve to death in such conditions. In

normal life, "we invariably assert a right to more than a basic body (Slater 1997, p. 135)." It is impossible to establish what the real needs are; there are no given, essential or real needs for humans; rather all needs are always socially created. Beyond the threshold of survival, people no longer know what they want; and that is why they become vulnerable to alienation, exploitation, and mystification (Baudrillard 1969).

### **Needs versus Desires in the Context of Fashion**

Barnard (2002) suggests two main divisions for functions of clothing as material and cultural. For material functions, he refers to protection as shelter against heat and cold, modesty/concealment as covering shameful body parts, and immodesty/attraction as exhibitionism towards the opposite sex. For cultural functions of fashion clothing, he refers to communication of individualistic expression, social status, social role, economic status, political symbol, religious condition, social rituals, recreation, a state of fun, or a state of deeper pleasure. As discussed above, I rather avoid making such a distinction, with the belief that all functions or all meanings of fashion clothing are cultural and socially constructed. Clothing is neither consumed due to a priori need to stay warm, nor to adorn or modestly cover the body, but rather as an exchange of meanings that are articulated in the ensemble of color, form, fiber, and context (Faurischou 1987). For instance, an African tribe may not have the necessity to cover certain parts of the body, or they may not feel "modesty/concealment" through clothing. All consumption activities involve a meaning, we continuously interpret our sensations, experiences, and situations, and we make a sense of various objects in relation to our desires (Slater 1997).



## Consumer Desires

From a psychoanalytical perspective, one of the leading scholars who studied desires, Lacan suggests that we have a lack of being (*manque-à-être*) that arises at birth, from the division into being either a man or a woman; basically, the loss of the other half (Fuery 1995). Therefore, the entire existence of the individual is guided by the desire to recover his/her missing part, and this lack has been directed towards acquiring material objects. However, desire cannot be satisfied because it is otherness; it constantly extends by transferring or displacing itself on to different objects of desire. According to Lacan, this desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other hold the key to the object desired, but because the object of desire is to be recognized by the other. What is at stake is not so much the pleasures or pains of desire and desiring, but the sense of being and identity.

From a different perspective, desire can be perceived as a positive motivating force, looking for other realities and adventures in life. It is revolutionary with the wish of opposing and escaping from one's milieu, not so much because of "lack of being" as Lacan suggests, but it is actually about producing a plus, in the search of what is perceived as better conditions of being (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Radkowski 1980). Desire is this restless search and longing for an imaginary or an altered state of existing in life; it is the continuous force of otherness (Radkowski 1980). Objects become "a bridge to displaced meaning and an idealized version of life as it should be lived (McCracken 1988, p.110)." "What makes consumer desire attach to a particular object is not so much the object's particular characteristics as the consumer's own hope

for an altered state of being, involving an altered set of social relationships (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003, p. 348),” and the desire for a better or different way of life is acknowledged, and expressed on a material level, if not met (Ewen 1988).

On the other hand, what we do not want to consume is often as important as what we desire. The hedonic search for pleasure, the strength of desire is the engine that drives the market place, but people are also motivated by negative emotions like pride, fear, envy or the anxiety of consuming the wrong things (Wilk 1997). In Wilk’s study, as it is also confirmed here, most were concerned more with not being in fashion than they were with being in the latest style. Likes are often publicly stated in our choices of clothes, cars, or house, forming consumer groups while dislikes are more known to family and friends, and they set boundaries (Wilk 1997). Thus, these negative emotions are also incorporated into the analysis.

### **Consumer Desires and Satisfaction**

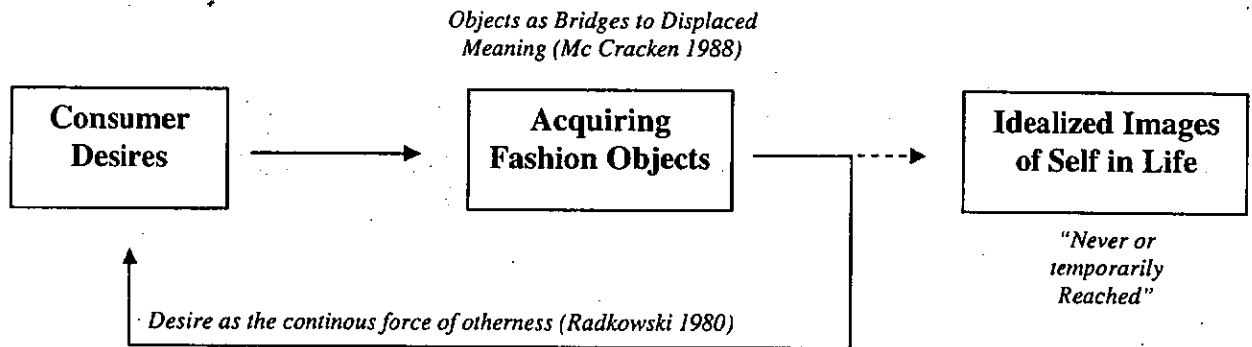
The illusion one falls for is like a mirror in which one sees one’s desires and believes them to be real. The people, as in monopoly capitalist society, are faced with a commodity world of attractive and seductive illusion and here, despite the outrageous deception, something very strange occurs, the dynamics of which are greatly underestimated. An innumerable series of images are forced upon the individual, like mirrors, seemingly empathetic and totally credible, which brings their secrets to the surface and display them there. In these images, people are continually shown the unfulfilled aspects of their existence. The illusion ingratiates itself, promising satisfaction: it reads desires in one’s eyes, and brings them to the surface of commodity. While the illusion with which commodities present themselves to the

gaze, gives people a sense of meaningfulness, it provides them with a language to interpret their existence and the world. Any other world, different from that provided by the commodities, is almost no longer accessible to them (Haug 1986, p. 52).

In a capitalist society, desires can only gain illusory satisfaction; anything beyond consumers' wages, which represent their share of consumption cannot be pleased (Haug 1986). Thus the limited resources of the individual consumer must therefore require choices to be made, choices of which desire to feed and which to deny, which meanings to consume and which to reject or avoid (Elliot 1997). Consumption is dynamic because disillusionment is the necessary concomitant of the acquisition of goods longed in fantasy (Baudrillard 1969).

From a different perspective, Campbell (1987) sees consumption as a romantic longing to become (an)other; however, whatever one becomes is never what one wants to be; thus, consumption fails to live up to the dream or the fantasy. However, rather than affording experiences of frustration, the delay of gratification heightens desire and provides a context for pleasurable states of dream. The persistent cycle of pleasurable expectation and disappointment explains the never-ending greedy character of modern consumption, why people continue to shop until they drop (Campbell 1987). The use of goods to recover displaced meaning is one of the engines of consumption in modern society; it helps perpetuate consumer appetite (McCracken 1988). As synthesized in Figure 1, desire rarely matures into longing when the object of desire is at hand; individuals buy them in order to take possession of a small concrete part of the life style to which they aspire. What is being bought is not the whole bridge but a small part of

it. "We must always have new goods to make our bridges if hope is to spring eternal (McCracken 1988, p. 116)."



**Figure 1 - The Endless Cycle of Desire**

### **Mimetic Desire and Others**

An historian, Girard (1977), first introduced the notion of mimetic desire. He found that besides the subject and an object, there is also a third presence; the subject desires the object because the rival desires it. The rival, then, serves as a model for the subject, not only in regard to such secondary matters as style and opinions but more essentially, in regard to desires. The reason is that s/he desires being, something him/herself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. This can occur in many circumstances, ranging from eroticism to professional or intellectual ambition. For instance, fashion becomes powerful exactly at the point when everyone agrees to differ; people all try to differ in the same way, and in no time, they all find their singularities to be identical; giving up a fashion becomes just as fashionable as taking it up in the first place (Girard 1987).

As a social phenomenon, at the hearth of fashion diffusion is the mimetic desire itself, since the aristocratic period until recent times (Lipovetsky 1987). Individuals are constantly engaged in study of others' lives to prove that their personal ideals have been realized (McCracken 1988). One's self has become the object of one's gaze and the gaze of the others; it has become the object of desire. Acquisition of identity has become the acquisition of products in the market that reflects the images of femininity and masculinity to others and, thereby, to oneself (Firat 1999). People largely make their judgments about others on the basis of what others consume and how they represent themselves through what they use, wear, and so on (Firat 1994). For instance, a woman of fashion dreams of being at once, herself and another; she can be demanding and sweet at the same time (Barthes [1967] 1990). The multiplication of persons in a single being is "the final luxury of a personality, rich enough to be multiplied, stable enough never to be lost (Barthes [1967] 1990, p. 255)."

... we see Fashion "play" with the most serious theme of human consciousness (Who am I?)... (Barthes [1967] 1990, p. 255).

Considering that all actions are in response to others, specifically to objects of desire, even the cognition of oneself, the idealized construct of modern self; then one who is in control of one's actions seems suspect (Firat 1999). "It (fashion) is a phenomenon which threatens the very stability of segregated zones: man/woman, subject/object, the personal/political, reality/illusion (Sawchuk 1987, p. 52)." Some scholars (e.g. Barthes [1967] 1990; Ewen 1988) tend to portray modern consumption as a shallow dream of identity. Modern life is so anonymous and people are so rootless and isolated by individualism that they seek goods to substitute for an internal

emptiness, assembling a commodity self. If style has become something people think they could buy, then what we are losing is wo/man her/himself; we are betraying our own self, we are selling our own inner being and replacing it for a more suitable one for modern society (Ewen 1988). Basically, a more secure self requires fewer security objects (Belk 1985). Fashion can be regarded as something external, at the periphery of personality, especially by the people who have the feeling of modesty, not caring of external appearances with the fear of perhaps betraying inner soul (Simmel [1904] 1957).

### **Consumer Desires and the Fashion System**

As can also be extracted from the above discussions, consumer desires are socially constructed between the interplay of consumers' fantasies and social institutional forces (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003). Fashion is like a good friend of desire, following its foot steps very nicely. It builds bridges to displaced meaning every season with its collections, giving temporary satisfactions with the restless longing for the next season. Fashion in a way acts like a vehicle for fantasy, which expresses the unconscious unfulfillable (Wilson 1985).

Fashion promises the utopic experience, an untroubled region designated the "free-world" where the individual liberates her self from the burden of a regulated and mundane existence and transforms daily life into ideal of endless and fantastic possibilities of being in the world (Emberly 1987, p. 45).

Newness is central to the economic and ideological interest of capitalism; the desire for new keeps the production processes turning and the money flowing towards

the producers (Fiske 1989). The fashion industry has been criticized for creating artificial newness and therefore artificial obsolescence to further its own economic interests and implicitly to work against the interest of consumers (e.g. Dardis 1974). However, this study suggests that since boredom can also be at the basis of this desire for new rather than any justifiable utilitarian reasons, then who is guiltier of this artificial obsolescence, the consumers or the producers of fashion, or the modern way of life itself? When the interagency is in place, then both parties are to blame.

Fashion is the logic of planned obsolescence – not just the necessity for market survival, but the cycle of desire itself, the endless process through which the body is decoded and recoded, in order to define and inhabit the newest territorial spaces of capital's expansion (Faurschou 1987, p. 72).

Fashion fuels this endless cycle of desire, the desire for new, with its new collections every season. Through a glamorizing interpretation, the world of high fashion provides an image of success that can be used to generate dreams for future related to envisioned ideals of the good life, which may include an exciting career, travel, or public recognition (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Celebrities also play an important role in fashion diffusion, representing images of seduction for the regular people to esteem and to follow (e.g. Lipovetsky 1987). For some, celebrities perform some functions of gods, or god-sent beings (O'Guinn 1991). It is the transformation of a human being into a heavenly being, a symbol of human potential realized.

## Synthesis of the Literature Gaps and Research Questions

As discussed above, Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003) introduced consumer desires as the motivating force behind contemporary consumption, suggesting that they are socially constructed between the interplay of consumers' fantasies and social institutional forces. They encourage future research involving the perspectives of institutional agents influencing desires.

Therefore, this study follows these suggestions for studying the institutional forces that have shaped the marketplace and the consumer as a social category (e.g. Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Murray 2002). For investigating the interagency in making of consumer desires, the study first starts by fleshing out:

What are the consumers' desires within the fashion context?

The study continues with exploring:

How are they constructed?

What are the possible social institutional forces, influencing consumer desires?

In which ways they are influential?

What are the experiences and the coping strategies of consumers dealing with these forces?

What are the tensions and paradoxes created during this process of interagency?

Then, the study looks at this interagency also from the production angle, exploring the consumer agency involved in fashion creation. It investigates the inquiries as follows:



What are the influential forces behind fashion creation?

Why does not every creation make its way to consumers?

What is the role of consumers in fashion creation?

Why is not every new fashion trend accepted by the larger market segments?

Why does even a successful fashion trend go to obsolescence at one point? For instance, is this only because of the institutional fashion cycle that requires a fashion trend to be replaced by a successive one, or is it also because of the continuous desire for change on the consumer side?

By exploring these inquiries, this study contributes to the latest research on interagency, which was conducted in spectacular consumption environments (Kozinets et. al 2004). It investigates the interagency in mass consumption setting within the fashion context. It shows the tensions and paradoxes created during this process of interagency. For instance, it shows how fashion institutions reinforce certain beauty images of women through its advertising and product design, and it explores women's experiences, both positive and negative, for trying to fit in. In addition, the discussion extends the scope of the interagency beyond consumers and producers to the broader socio-cultural forces at work on this interagency, both shaping and constraining it.

Furthermore, this study also contributes to the scholarly discussions, emphasizing the role of consumers as creative, reflexive, or interpretive agents (e.g. Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Ozanne and Murray 1995; Thompson and Haytko 1997) by outlining the influential role of institutions, showing the circumstances as consumers

are largely conformist with the social norms, and highlighting the situations when consumer resistance can be felt only at moderate levels.

Finally, fashion especially as a social phenomenon has attracted close attention of social scientists (e.g. Barnard 2002; Davis 1992; Lipovetsky 1987; McCracken 1988), while studies in consumer research field are still in limited numbers and lack the perspectives of the institutional agents. This study also tries to fill this gap. For instance, one of the latest studies about fashion, by Thompson and Haytko (1997), although recognizing the consumer as a social category, gives more emphasis to the interpretive role of consumers rather than highlighting the institutional structures that are designed to persuade and influence consumers. Whereas, Murray (2002), in his re-inquiry of Thompson and Haytko's (1997) study, first taking the analysis out of the college setting and placing it in a professional, middle-class context, suggests that future interpretive research in consumer studies needs to embrace the dialectical interplay between consumers and institutional agents, constructing meaning. The study here follows these suggestions and supports the scholarly discussions as the interpretive positions of consumers which can also become important information for market researchers (Holt 2002; Murray 2002). In summary, fashion as a mundane consumption practice for dressing up has an essential role in society, stimulating consumer fantasies for idealized images of self in life and perpetuating consumer desires (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997), which this study hopes to develop a better understanding of the tensions involved during the process of interagency between consumers and producers.

## Methodology

### Data Collection and the Empirical Setting

...the mode of understanding implied by qualitative research involves alternative conceptions of social knowledge, of meaning, reality, and truth in social science research. The basic subject matter is no longer objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted (Kvale 1996, p. 11).

When the construct under investigation is a passionate feeling such as consumer desire, qualitative methods are most suitable for data collection. Trying to quantify a construct as deep and as complex as desire would result in the elimination of much sensitive information related to consumption fantasies, wishes, dreams, or fears. Since this study focuses on the experimental and socio-cultural dimensions of consumption, its dynamics are not plainly accessible through experiments, surveys, or data base modeling (Arnould and Thompson 2005). "One cannot reduce the explanation of human behavior to any narrowly circumscribed and simplistic model, whether that model is behaviorist or psychoanalytic, ethological or anthropomorphic, cognitive or motivational: the behavior of people in general and of consumers in particular is the fascinating and endlessly complex result of a multifaceted interaction between organism and environment (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982)."

Thus, semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews are suitable for this type of research as they can provide a greater breath of data than any structured interview or questionnaire where the responses are more limited to the specific questions, and there is little room for informant's creativity (Fontana and Frey 2000). The semi-structured

interview is "an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale 1996, p. 5)."

This study is based on 29 semi-structured interviews, observations and projective techniques used during the interviews, which are conducted with middle class professionals composed of fifteen working women as fashion consumers, six fashion designers, and eight other fashion professionals, in Milan, Italy, in the spring of 2005. Milan, being one of the leading fashion centers in the world, offered access to a vast range of fashion sensitive consumers and experienced fashion professionals. The output of this empirical study entails about 30 hours of recorded dialogue and 400 pages of transcriptions. The following sections provide further information about the informants and the interview experience while more detailed descriptions of the backgrounds of the participants and the major findings in each interview are highlighted in Appendix II.

### **My Position as the Interviewer**

Besides the theoretical knowledge I have built throughout my PhD work about consumer desires and fashion creation, my professional acquaintance with the fashion world due to my two years work experience with fashion organizations such as the textile association in the Aegean region of Turkey, Fashion School in Izmir, and Istituto Europeo di Design in Milan helped to familiarize me quickly with some critical professional discourse, while being a woman, I could familiarize with the consumer discourse. On the other hand, I paid attention to maintain a higher degree of self-

consciousness and self-reflexivity during the interviews, so as not to let my existing feelings and thoughts manipulate the conversation. An interviewer must be as neutral and non-biasing as possible; otherwise, the results reflect the interviewer's own thoughts, not the participants' (Zaltman 2003). To enable this, I tried to avoid ineffective probes that could actually prompt the participants to affirm the expected answers. I paid attention to allow informants to finish what they were saying, letting them proceed at their own rate of thinking and speaking, tolerating pauses, listening carefully, trying to hear many nuances of meanings, and seeking for these nuances to be described more fully (Kvale 1996). When necessary, remembering what is said in different parts of the interview, recalling, and elaborating on them, I tried to clarify and extend the meanings of the interviewee's statements; providing interpretations of what is said, which may then be confirmed or disconfirmed by the interviewee (Kvale 1996). I also tried to listen to the emotional message, not only hearing what is said, but also how it is said. I avoided 'why' questions as much as possible as the subjects' own reasons for their actions may be important in their own right, and they could lead to an intellectualized interview, perhaps evoking memories of oral examinations and personal rationalizations (Kvale 1996).

Furthermore, the interview guides below are organized with respect to both a thematic (relevance for the research theme) and dynamic dimensions, motivating subjects to talk about their experiences and feelings (Kvale 1996). To enable a dynamic interaction, projective techniques were very helpful. They helped to bypass some of the defense mechanisms and rationalizations, which seemed to block the direct verbal accounts of some participants (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003) such as the

first questions of the interview guides below, as this will be explored in the next sections. These techniques also gave an opportunity to informants to express themselves freely, taking out the unconscious, what is otherwise unsaid. I also paid attention to metaphors, which help to interpret what is perceived in the world around. They are powerful because they hide as well as disclose thoughts and feelings, and they are effective at surfacing hidden knowledge (Zaltman 1997).

### **Informants on the Consumer Side**

Fashion consumption is a widespread practice of diverse consumer categories such as women, men, children, and not least, different sub-culture groupings. Women's fashion is the focus of this analysis as fashion in clothing in the modern world has been mainly concerned with women (Davis 1992). For instance, fashion magazines still show many more pictures of women than men (Barnard 2002). This is not to suggest that other consumer groups are less interesting to study, this is rather to imply the existence of a highly institutionalized system, working to perpetuate women's desires related to fashion consumption. Thus, women as the consumer category can provide rich data while exploring the influential forces on their desires and the consumer agency involved while coping with these forces. Table 2 provides the list of consumers who were interviewed, with brief information on their background; further information can be found in Appendix II. I deliberately selected working women as they are not necessarily financially tied to a husband or parent as a housewife or a student could be. Thus, they are hypothetically freer in their consumption behavior and have public images.

**Table 2**  
**Informants on the Consumer Side**

1	Cecilia	25, married	Master-Ind. Engineering	She is working in a consulting firm
2	Miki	26, single	Degree in Design	She works as assistant in a real estate company
3	Monica	27, single	Master in Economics	She is working in a bank
4	Luana	27, single	Degree in Art	She is working in an art gallery
5	Susanna	30, married, 1 child	Degree in French	She is working in an interior decoration agency
6	Teresa	37, married	High School degree	She works in a furniture shop
7	Maria	37, married	PhD in Business	She is an assistant professor
8	Nadia	38, married, 1 child	High School degree	She owns a real estate company
9	Roberta	40, married, 1 child	Degree in Business	She is the editor of an architecture magazine
10	Betty	41, divorced, 1 child	Degree in Marketing	She has administrative duties in a university.
11	Sofia	41, divorced, 1 child	Degree in Art	She is working in a design institute
12	Daniela	42, married, 3 children	Degree in teaching	She is giving civic courses for adults
13	Gabriella	44, married, 1 child	High School degree	She owns a cosmetics-beauty saloon
14	Barbara	52, married, 1 child	Degree in Medicine	She is a doctor in a hospital
15	Anna	53, married, 1 child	Degree in Literature	She has administrative duties in a university.

I also deliberately selected middle-income people, representing the mundane in Western developed countries such as Italy, rather than choosing the extreme social groupings such as the high income people who can afford high fashion on regular basis or the low income people who are highly limited in their consumption behavior. However, mass consumers can also be fragmented; for instance, some are more fashion oriented while others are more fashion skeptical. Thus, while selecting my informants, I also paid attention to have a combination of people in relation to their awareness and curiosity of new fashion trends and their interest in fashion consumption. I selected participants of different ages.

Once I interviewed some informants through social connections, then I used snowball (or chain) sampling, asking each participant, within their wishes and acquaintances, to introduce me to a new potential interviewee (Creswell 1998). Most of the interviews took place at the informant's home where she could also show me some clothing pieces from her wardrobe to stimulate the conversation about her desires and dislikes. The interview guide below provides an idea about the content and the types of the questions that were asked during interviews; however, the order, the intensity, and the style of the questions were continuously customized in each interview parallel to the flow of the conversation. For instance, it was not easy for most of the informants to answer the first question as below, at the beginning of the interview since it is a very general question, so I asked some questions more than once as both myself and the interviewee became more familiar with each other and the topic under investigation.



## *Interview Guide for Fashion Consumers*

### Introduction:

1<sup>st</sup> step: Introduce who you are and the overall purpose of the investigation, securing confidentiality for the information gathered, and explaining the possible consequences of the study (Kvale 1996).

2<sup>nd</sup> step: Get some demographic information from the informant such as age, marital status, educational background, and occupation.

3<sup>rd</sup> step: Ask permission to use a tape recorder.

### Guiding inquiries

1. When you think of fashion what comes to your mind? Can you describe your thoughts and feelings?
2. Can you please tell me about your way of dressing? What are your preferences? Are there any pieces of clothing styles you would never wear? Can you tell me more about it?

Projective Technique: Can you please show me from your wardrobe a piece of clothing that you like more? Do you remember your feeling prior to buying this piece? How do you feel when you wear it? Do you remember what made you buy this clothing? Do you have a clothing piece that you never wear or you don't like to wear in your wardrobe? Do you remember your feeling prior to buying this piece? What made you buy this piece? What makes you not wearing it?

3. What do you wear for which kind of occasion? How do you dress up in different social groupings (e.g. at home, at work, night-outs, etc.) How do you feel?
4. Do you have any favorite brands? What are they? What do you like about them? Do you shop in these brand name shops? Where do you shop the most? Do you have any brands you would never buy, or shops you would never go to? Can you describe your feelings?
5. Can you remember any styles of clothing you liked when you saw them worn by others? Did you acquire such clothing? Can you tell me more about it? Are there any styles worn by others that you really dislike? Can you describe your feelings?
6. Projective Technique: Can you please describe your feelings and thoughts, looking at these pictures?\* If any, which style/s would you identify yourself closest to, and to the contrary which one/s represent your style the least?

\* The informants looked at the pictures selected from Vogue magazine (February 2005), presented in Table 3. I selected these pictures, considering different moods and styles of women such as casual, formal, playful, or provocative. Some of them also reflected Spring / Summer 2006 fashion trends to explore if they were interested in or aware of the new fashion trends, and how much they feel like adopting them. These pictures were not taken from daily life on purpose to elaborate respondent's feelings on institutional forces such as advertising in Vogue Magazine. Different moods or styles of women are

certainly not limited to these pictures presented in Table 3; however, they helped to stimulate feelings and thoughts that could have been missed during the interview questions and responses. At the end of the projective technique, I also asked them to look freely at the magazine to see if there were any photos better suited to their desires or dislikes, and I asked them to talk more about these.

7. Do you read fashion magazines? How often? Do you watch fashion TV? How often? How about high fashion streets or windows? Where do you get your inspirations for dressing? Are there any other sources you follow fashion from? Can you describe your feelings and thoughts about these sources?
8. Do you watch TV programs such as the celebrity shows or the reality shows? What do you think about the people in these programs? What do you think about their way of dressing? Is there anybody you take as an example (e.g. celebrity, TV speaker, politician)?
9. In the process of selecting a piece of clothing to purchase, do you have some other people in mind? Your husband, your boy friend, your friends, your family, your colleagues? Are you influenced by these people? Can you tell me more about it?
10. What are you up to now? If any, what kind of new clothing would you like to buy? Can you describe your feelings about it?

The above interview guide is designed to explore the following inquiries:

What are the consumer desires, within the fashion context?

(e.g. questions 2, 3, 4, 6)

How are they constructed?

(e.g. questions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10)

What are the possible social institutional forces, influencing consumer desires?

(e.g. questions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10)

In which ways they are influential?

(e.g. questions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10)

What are the experiences and the coping strategies of consumers, dealing with these forces?

(e.g. questions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10)

What are the tensions and paradoxes created during this process of interagency?

(e.g. questions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10)

What is the role of consumers in fashion creation?

(e.g. questions 1, 2, 3, 7, 10)

Why is not every new fashion trend accepted by the larger market segments?

(e.g. questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 10)

Why does even a successful fashion trend go to obsolescence at one point?

(e.g. questions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 10)

Table 3  
Pictures presented to the informants from Vogue magazine, February 2005



ethnic, SS 2006



masculine



casual chic



colorful, SS 2006



provocative



classic elegant



girlish, playful

### Informants on the Producer Side

On the producer side, fashion industry has various institutional agents who may have a role in influencing consumer desires. Figure 2 below sketches out some of these institutional agents.

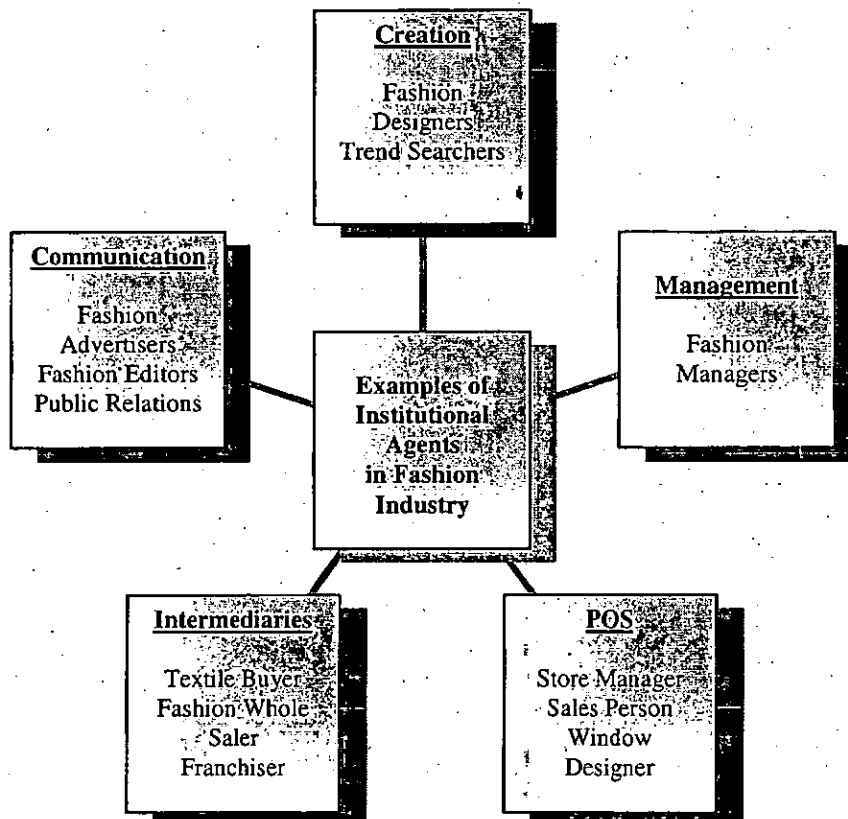


Figure 2 – Examples of Institutional Agents in Fashion Industry

It is hardly feasible in a PhD experience to access and interview all different kinds of fashion professionals and sufficient numbers in each category who may have a role in influencing or constructing consumer desires. Therefore, I decided to focus on one category to analyze in-depth and in addition to interview some other professionals to give richness to data. The main category emphasized here is the “fashion designers,”

aiming to develop a deeper understanding of their vision of fashion, their perceptions of consumer desires, how/if they can anticipate, construct, or even change these desires, which challenges they are facing within the fashion system, and where they get their inspirations for new designs. I deliberately chose fashion designers who have experience in women's fashion design, so they could relate to my informants on the consumer side. The reason I selected fashion designers is because they play an important role in fashion creation despite the filtering process their designs go through fashion managers, fashion advertisers, fashion critics, and not least fashion consumers. They can also easily talk about the new fashion trends, what is coming next, and why. Thus their expertise helps to develop a better understanding of how new fashion trends are created, who starts the trends, who sets them, and if consumers have a role in it.

Table 4 gives a brief description on the background of the fashion professionals interviewed; as mentioned earlier, further details can be found in Appendix II. To get access to fashion designers and these other professionals, I started using my contacts from my previous work experience in fashion industry. Then, I conducted snowball sampling (Creswell 1998) as I did with my informants on the consumer side. Some producers introduced me to others pertinent to my topic. I also tried to get interviews without having a contact, just like entering in a fashion store, trying to get an appointment with a store manager; however, these earlier attempts were in vain since I had no incentives other than goodwill to motivate them to spare time for an interview or to convince them that I am not a competitor.

**Table 4**  
**Informants on the Producer Side**

1	Fabiola	female, 37	Fashion Designer	Designing collections for medium size companies in her own studio (she also has previous experience designing for famous designers)
2	Vanessa	female, 33	Fashion Designer	Designed for D&G, for Moschino, now she will start her own collections
3	Pierluigi	male, 42	Fashion Designer	Designed for Cavalli, Versace, La Perla, etc; now producing collections for companies and for his own name in his own studio
4	Alessandro	male, 43	Fashion Designer	Designing collections for medium size companies in his own studio (also he has previous experience with famous designers)
5	Mauro	male, 31	Fashion Designer	Designed for Prada, Gill Sanders, Miu Miu, etc. Now, working for another high fashion brand, and preparing his own collections
6	Melina	female, 44	Fashion Designer (tailor)	Designed for Antonio Fusco, now she has her own tailor shop and her own collections
7	Gianni	male, 57	Fashion Buyer	After 12 years of experience as a fashion buyer for Rinaschente, now he has a consulting company advising on collections
8	Alessandra	female, 41	Trend Communication	She has about 20 years of experience with trends, textile, and colors. Now, she is working for a famous trend search company.
9	Claudio	male, 49	Producing Videos	He has his own company for producing commercial videos for companies, including videoing fashion shows.
10	Grazia	female, 33	High Fashion Retail Director	She is responsible for all stores of a well-known Italian high fashion brand (27 in Europe, 4 in the US)
11	Luisa	female, 60	Marketing	She has many years of experience in mkt & PR activities of companies like Ferre and Versace and previous fashion school director of IED
12	Francesca	female, 33	Press Office Manager	She is the press office and public relations responsible of a well-known Italian high fashion brand.
13	Manuela	female, 55	Product Manager	She worked for Romeo Gilli, Helmut Lang, and Costume Nationale; now she is responsible of an Indian company for their expansion in Italy
14	Rita	female, 32	Store Manager	She is the store manager of a well-known fashion brand.

Note: Some informants' names were changed to assure confidentiality.



## *Interview Guide for Fashion Designers*

### Introduction:

The introduction steps were similar to those of the consumer interviews, except I explored in more detailed each producer's occupational background such as the fashion companies they worked for; how long they have been in such positions, how much experience they have designing for women's fashion, etc. This interview guide was adapted to different fashion professionals.

### Guiding inquiries:

1. When you think of fashion in general what comes to your mind? Can you describe your thoughts and feelings?
2. Can you please describe your job? What is involved in creating a new design? Where do you get your inspirations? What are your feelings and thoughts of these? What are the possible challenges you are facing from inside or outside company? Can you tell me more?
3. Projective Technique: Can you please tell me your feelings and thoughts about the fashion trend inspirations – as shown in this trend book\* – for 2006 spring and summer fashion collections for women? Do you read such trend-books? What are your feelings and thoughts about these books?

\* I showed the 'inspirations' section in one of the leading trend magazines of Italy "Zoom on Fashion Trends, Creative Directions S/S 2006." The descriptions of different inspiration themes in this trend book are enclosed in

Appendix I, as directly taken from the magazine. The aim of this projective technique was to understand to what extent designers are influenced by the general fashion trends or to what extent the creation is freely performed.

4. Can you tell me about your customers? What do you think they expect from you? What are their desires? How do you know? What practices do you do to understand their desires? How can you influence their desires?
5. According to your experience, can you please try to tell me how fashion is changing? How was it when you first started doing this job? What were your feelings and thoughts then? And what are they now? And, how do you see the future of fashion?

This interview guide is designed to explore the following inquiries:

What are the influential forces behind fashion creation?  
(e.g. questions 2, 3)

Why does not every creation make its way to consumers?  
(e.g. question 2)

What is the role of consumers in fashion creation?  
(e.g. questions 2, 4)

What are the consumer desires, within the fashion context?  
(e.g. question 4, 5)

What are the possible social institutional forces, influencing consumer desires?  
(e.g. questions 2, 3, 4, 5,)

In which ways are they influential?  
(e.g. questions 2, 4)

What are the tensions and paradoxes created during the process of interagency?  
(e.g. questions 2, 3, 4, 5)

As explicit in Appendix II, the interviews with consumers generally lasted no less than one hour, while the interviews with the producers were shorter in some cases, the duration being the recorded time, excluding the time spent for greetings and the introduction. Although the length of the interview does not necessarily relate to the quality of the information gathered as also in shorter interviews very precious information can come out, I still intend to clarify here the reasons why the interviews with producers were shorter in some cases.

On the consumer side, I felt asking questions about their tastes, desires, emotions, or behaviors was an enjoyable experience for the informants. It was fun for them to talk about fashion, expressing their tastes, their thoughts and feelings, and they felt no threat on their private or professional life, especially after we built up a trust relationship together during the interview. Although most of them were very busy with family duties and professional life, they managed to spare me an hour or more for a fun conversation about fashion.

The situation was a bit different on the producer side because I was questioning directly their professions, in some cases, making inquiries about topics that could even be considered as professional secrets. Although I also built up a trust relationship with them; it was much more difficult to probe further than what they actually decided to share with me. Thus, I could not always get all the answers to all my questions. For instance, asking a store manager, even in an indirect way, about which practices they conduct in the store to influence consumer desires for keeping consumers in the store, attracting them to enter the store, manipulating their shopping behavior, or taking their

attention, the store manager felt a bit hesitant to share this professional information with me, especially working in a famous fashion brand store. I could have taken this information to a competitor. She never stated this, but I could understand her anxiety. Despite the hesitance, she shared much precious information with me. Similarly, I felt a hesitance with another manager, representing a famous high fashion brand. At one point, she even said that she wishes to keep the company out of the discussion. On the other hand, fashion designers were a bit more open sharing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, maybe because they are more involved in the creative side of the business, rather than the strategic management side; though especially for some who owned their own studio, I also had to gain their trust in the sense that I am no threat to their profession. Thus, I asked my questions with modesty, not pushing them too much when they did not want to elaborate further because more probing in some cases could result in negative tension between the informant and me, which I did not want to allow. Hence, I tried to build the trust relationship slowly during the interview, reminding them often of my aims as a PhD student, and usually, towards the end of the interview, all my informants were fairly relaxed with me, offering me their business cards if I needed further information. Although I had never met most of them up to the date of the interview, all my informants opened up their hearts, minds, and experiences to me to a fine degree. Thanks to them, I am now able to conduct this analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

After each interview, I took some field notes, highlighting some observations and critical points revealed during the interview, also writing down my most up front

thoughts and emotions. In light of these notes and memories, the quality of each interview was getting higher, observing what could be improved for getting richer data and which topics to probe further. Thus, the analysis started during the interview stage. Whilst conducting the interviews, I also started transcribing some of them, which helped to highlight some of the critical issues even more for the next interview. Most of the interviews were conducted in Italian. Thus, I first had to translate and then transcribe them. Once I had all my transcriptions in hand, I started in a more systematic way coding the data and grouping my findings for each interview. These mostly emic descriptions can be found in Appendix II. Already, these involved many re-readings of the data, looking for main themes relevant to the topic under investigation.

I followed some of the most advised steps for qualitative data analysis to conduct my study (e.g. Coffey and Atkinson; 1996; Kvale 1996; Silverman 2005). Once I coded and grouped all my findings for each interview, I started to compare and contrast them, looking for patterns as well as irregularities, splitting them into categories, sub-categories, linking them together when possible. Here, I paid profound attention not to ignore parts of the data that seemed not to fit any of the categories. In fact, in some sections, I avoided making categories, which seemed to violate the sensitive interplay between different groupings, or I left the categories as sensitive as possible to any deviant cases until these cases could also be included to interpretation (Silverman 2005). In fact, my categories are not built with un-breakable walls; they interact with each other.

During the analysis, to assure critical thinking, aiming at more valid findings, I paid attention not to jump to easy conclusions just because there was some evidence that seemed to lead in an interesting direction. Thus, I tried to refute assumed relations between phenomena, I searched for negative cases, and I continuously compared and contrasted different views (Silverman 2005). I also conducted constant checks with transcriptions, interpretations, and theory, at the same time questioning certain moral and ethical issues that could be incorporated into analysis. On the other hand, as Mick (1986) suggests, the complex human environment will not permit us to arrive at the truth; there can be multiple reality or multiple representations. Thus, the process of understanding is a never-ending process.

This inquiry now starts with identifying the main themes related to consumer desires within the context of fashion, which also initiates discussions about how these desires are constructed, how much women feel comfortable about the myths (e.g. beauty myth) reinforced by institutions, what their experiences are dealing with these forces, and to what extent they surrender or resist. Then, the study continues with presenting in a more systematic manner the influential forces, co-producing desires and the consumer agency involved in this process. Finally, the last section studies the interagency from a production angle, highlighting some of the challenges producers are facing while dealing with the fashion system, fleshing out the influential factors on institutional motives, and investigating the consumer agency involved in fashion creation.

## Consumer Desires within the Fashion Context

Out of the participants' statements during the interviews and my observations, the informants on the consumer side can be divided in two major categories as the ones who are more fashion oriented and the ones who are more fashion skeptical, presented in Table 5. For instance, some informants started the interviews, expressing how much they like fashion and follow the fashion trends while some others repeatedly revealed how fashion is less of a concern in their lives.

The ones who are more fashion oriented tend to be more aware and curious of fashion trends, observing fashion windows on a regular basis. They also tend to shop more often, showing more impulse buying behavior, which occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately (Rook 1987, p. 191). To begin with, they do not go shopping with a particular idea in mind, showing a behavior more emotional than rational. This consumer group is interesting for the purpose of this study because they hypothetically have a higher potential for being influenced by the fashion system. On the other hand, the ones who are more fashion skeptical tend to be less aware and less curious of fashion trends. Fashion consumption is not a primary concern in their lives as they often state. Although they also enjoy fashion consumption, they tend to think a lot before making a purchase decision usually for some utilitarian justifications, and they do not enjoy shopping as much as the impulse buyers. They are interesting for the purpose of this study because, hypothetically, they carry higher potential for showing consumer resistance towards the fashion system.

**Table 5**  
**Informant Categories on the Consumer Side**

**She is more Fashion Oriented (Consumer, FO)\***

1	Cecilia	25, married	Master-Ind. Engineering	She is working in a consulting firm
2	Miki	26, single	Degree in Design	She works as assistant in a real estate company
3	Luana	27, single	Degree in Art	She is working in an art gallery
4	Susanna	30, married, 1 child	Degree in French	She is working in an interior decoration agency
5	Teresa	37, married	High School degree	She works in a furniture shop
6	Nadia	38, married, 1 child	High School degree	She owns a real estate company
7	Sofia	41, divorced, 1 child	Degree in Art	She is working in a design institute
8	Betty	41, divorced, 1 child	Degree in Marketing	She has administrative duties in a university.
9	Gabriella	44, married, 1 child	High School degree	She owns a cosmetics-beauty saloon
10	Barbara	52, married, 1 child	Degree in Medicine	She is a doctor in a hospital

**She is more Fashion Skeptical (Consumer, FS)\***

1	Monica	27, single	Master in Economics	She is working in a bank
2	Maria	37, married	PhD in Business	She is an assistant professor
3	Roberta	40, married, 1 child	Degree in Business	She is the editor of an architecture magazine
4	Daniela	42, married, 3 children	Degree in teaching	She is giving civic courses for adults
5	Anna	53, married, 1 child	Degree in Literature	She has administrative duties in a university.

\*These labels are used with each consumer quotation.



However, these are not conclusive remarks about the participants. Here, I would like to point at the distinction between analyzing desires and behaviors. Desires are more passionate feelings linked to inner fantasies of consumers as discussed earlier (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003) while consumers can often rationalize their consumption behavior. For instance, shopping less often may seem like a form of consumers' resistance towards the fashion system, but this does not necessarily mean that their desires are less influenced by the system. My findings suggest that all consumers are part of and to different extent influenced by the fashion system. This division as fashion oriented and fashion skeptical mostly helps the analysis, exploring consumers' different coping strategies with the influential external forces.

On the other hand, some scholars suggest that young consumers are more fashion oriented than the older ones (e.g. Evans 1989; O'Cass 2004).

I think younger people follow fashion more closely. I, because of my income, because of my age, I buy a fashion clothing item, maybe it costs a lot of money, but I know it will not be in and out within three months; whereas, my daughter would buy four cheap things, knowing that next season, she won't wear them anymore (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

Hypothetically, younger people are often less settled in their lives, more open to change which they can experiment through fashion clothing while older consumers are more settled in their lives with settled clothing styles. My sample size is not large enough to quantitatively support or disconfirm this argument. However, my findings suggest that the desire for new and fashion orientation can be observed in all ages. For instance, while Monica, among my youngest informants, is highly fashion skeptical,

half of the informants who are more fashion oriented are in their late 30's, 40's, and 50's, settled in their lives with families and jobs, but still enjoying change and following fashion trends. Thus, for the purpose of this study, I would like to avoid categorization by age while analyzing desires. In Figure 3 below, on the basis of my findings, I highlighted the main themes linked to consumer desires within the context of fashion. Although all these different forms of desire are not necessarily complementary to each other, they often co-exist together.

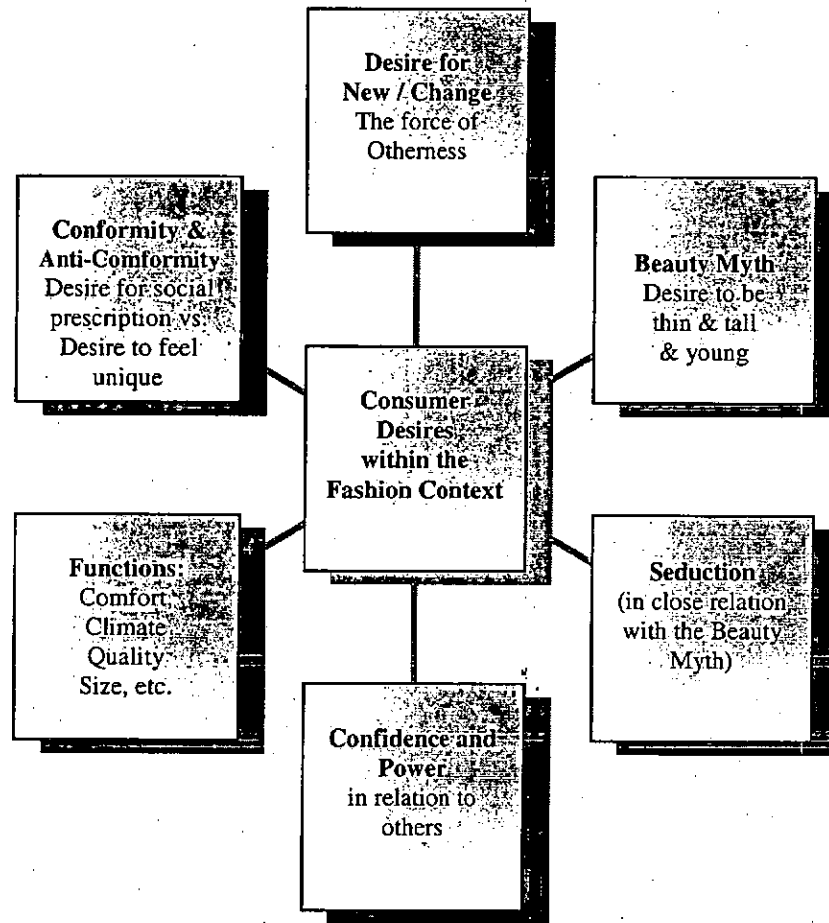


Figure 3 – Consumer Desires within the Fashion Context

For example, a consumer can accommodate her need to keep warm, her desire to look sexy, her desire to feel unique, and her desire for change with the same dress. As discussed earlier, consumption cannot be reduced solely to its functional dimensions such as to keep warm or protected through clothing (e.g. Slater 1997) since it is driven by more passionate desires (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003).

### **Desire for New / Change**

This restless desire for change, for new is perhaps the most crucial driving force behind fashion consumption, which is not about possessions, but about acquisition and quick disposal of the goods acquired so that the site is cleared for the next shopping expedition (e.g. Rojek 2004; Priest 2005). Holt's (1995) typology of consumption practices has been very helpful here, analyzing consumers' desire for change, which indicates consumption as integration, experience, play, or classification. The first three are explored in this section.

Fashion for me is something beautiful, something that gives color and changes to life, something that gives me idea and helps me to fix my own style... To be able to dress differently from one year ago, to see yourself differently in mirror... This is not something I am specialized in, so I am able to choose from a designer that I like, to get ideas for how I can dress, how I can make these little changes in my way of dressing up. For example, if I had flat shoes all last summer, and if the fashion is high heels for this summer; I can make this change in my self, to see a different self, to feel the new soul that the dress gives me (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

It (fashion) is an important part in every day life, more important to some others. More than anything, it is something positive I think because it can change; it can change how you feel, how you behave even towards other people, in both negative and positive senses. I think some people put too much importance on it, but it would be an awful place without fashion, without changing (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

Women buy something that stimulates their fantasies; so through these objects they desire... pants, a shirt... an object of clothing ... for constructing a new image of self to represent (Fashion Designer: Pierluigi).

People have been, individually and collectively, providing themselves with a different object and, through this, another definition of oneself (e.g. Belk 1988; Firat 1999). New fashion is first assimilated by consumers as an exemplary way of acting, and then personalized for their own style. Consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings, constructing new images of self to represent (Thompson and Haytko 1997); hence, they consume as integration (Holt 1995).

Fashion gives you the opportunity to change... dressing up (acting) differently in different occasions. It is a game; they identify themselves with these different selves (Fashion Designer: Alessandro).

With clothing, you can give yourself many personalities; it is fun (Fashion Designer: Mauro)

People need to change; otherwise you could wear a dress for twenty years, but change gives excitement, color, motivation to your life (Consumer FO: Barbara 52).

When you have something new in your wardrobe, it makes you feel good; it makes you feel excited about wearing it; excited about somebody commenting on it (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

I buy these things when I am in bad mood so, I need something "divertente" (fun), and "allegro" (light), then I buy these; these are important pieces of my wardrobe, but I wear them few times (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

Consumers have fun changing their images through fashion discourses; they enjoy dressing up for different occasions from work, for the gym, or night-outs. Thus, they also consume as play (Holt 1995). For instance, Monica (Consumer FS: 27), like many others, gets entertained by thinking what she will wear the next working day. Change brings color, excitement, and new motivations in life. It makes one feel different and happy. The third typology, consuming as experience, underlies these emotional stages arising during consumption (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Holt 1995). For Luana, change is also a way for keeping her mood up.

(Looking at an ad in Vogue magazine) I think it has its place... I think the world would be very boring if it was full of elegant dresses and suits, I think it is important to have different images, different styles, I would not personally wear it, but I don't have a problem with it (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

I get bored with some of them, after wearing them so much, especially for daily dresses, but for very special dresses, such as an evening dress, this may not be case. Getting bored is more valid for daily wear (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

Change takes away the boredom. If boredom can be at its basis, then this desire for change is not born because one is in lack or in need of something, but instead, in

search for new adventures, looking for other realities in life or a new image of self to present (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Radkowski 1980). The individual anticipates the possession of the good and, with this good, the possession of certain ideal circumstances that exists only in a distant location. In this case, goods help the individual contemplate the possession of an emotional condition, a social circumstance, even an entire style of life. They become a bridge to displaced meaning and an idealized version of life as it should be lived (McCracken 1988).

They (consumers) want to consume fast; some change every two weeks; they loose interest to what they already have; they like to change (Fashion Store Manager: Rita).

Some women are never satisfied; the moment they have one dress, they already start thinking about the next one (Fashion Designer/Tailor: Melina).

The lady in the law firm does not like to present herself twice with the same dress. Sometimes you just change the color, but you are the same after all. Her wardrobe never has peace. It is not like saying 'now I have what I need for at least a while'... important dinners, parties... this is also another category of person here; they are the difficult ones; you keep changing dress, but something inside is missing; these people are not easy to satisfy. They wake up in the morning and they are already sad to start the day. They come here and they talk... their doctor diet...they talk about everything... it is like being a psychologist... pieces from their lives... in one sense it is also good for knowing them better (Melina).

Whatever they are missing inside they try to recuperate it outside – through shopping (Fashion Designer: Alessandro).

They (women) have money; they can live alone, they can say yes and no, often no; they travel. If they have emotional relations that do not satisfy them, they decide to dump it. Ten – fifteen years ago this was not possible. Depending on the cultural level, education; southern Italy is different than north. They (from south of Italy) are not the consumers; consumers for companies have always been the ones in big cities; the ones that have money; the ones who are also living frustrating lives. You must wake up early, take your car, go to work, maybe a job that you don't like, maybe you work with colleagues who are not so sympathetic, then you come home at the end of the day, you may have a bad relationship with your partner; so what gratifies you? Go out and do shopping! You buy clothing! Whatever you like (Video Producer: Claudio).

Producers recognize this restless desire for change, yet some of them have a negative tone, emphasizing the emotional lack women feel as motivating their consumption. Some see this restless consumption as a weakness arising from women's internal insecurities. In fact, some scholarly perspectives especially the ones emphasizing the dominance of the structure over consumer desires suggest that women can be given a sense of identity, purpose, or creativity by the buying of things (e.g. Friedan 1963). On the other hand, Fiske (1989) offers another suggestion at the basis for this restless desire for new. Western societies see time as linear, forward moving, productive of change, and this brings the social sense of progress, improvement, and development. However, men experience this feeling of progress more than women, having jobs that are usually more goal oriented, offering a sense of achievement. Women's jobs tend to be repetitive and circular of which domestic labor is a primary example, and the secretarial labor is its commercial equivalent. Thus, Fiske (1989)

argues that involvement in fashion maybe women's prime, if not the only means of participating in this modern ideology of progress.

Although, many of the women I interviewed have goal oriented jobs like the real estate company owner, the doctor, or the academician, my sample size does not allow me to argue the contrary or to support this argument. However, I can argue that there are different motivating forces behind women's desire for change, which cannot be reduced to possible internal insecurities as some producers suggest or to the sole will for participating in this ideology of progress. From a different perspective, change brings color, excitement, and new motivations in life, which may also be connected with consumption as experience or play, as discussed above.

Furthermore, this study suggests different levels of how greedy the consumption can be. This desire for change is felt by all the participants; however, how often they acquire the new varies among the informant categories, reflected in their shopping behavior. The ones who are more fashion oriented also tend to be more passionate about the new. For instance, Nadia (Consumer FO: 38) shows a profound passion for shopping; she goes to an open market for clothing twice a week regularly. She spends hours there, searching for high fashion brand products at low prices. She is building new wardrobes at her house as the amount of clothing she has cannot fit in the existing ones. She feels very happy when she finds good deals, and she just gets them. She also shops at high fashion streets in Milan, during every sales period. She does not miss any such sales.



I am "La Patita" (Crazy!). I love to look around, go around in shops. I would love to have everything, but I cannot obviously. I like to change (clothing) everyday. I always buy diverse things from the ones I already own. When I enter to a shop, I need to buy the complete set because I don't have time or will to search for the matching pieces. But, I am a "patita" of fashion. I love fashion. I love fashion shows; I would love to be like those models (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

Nadia's and Teresa's shopping behavior are exemplary for the never-ending greedy character of modern consumption (Campbell 1987), and their desires are very much perpetuated by the fashion institutions like the fashion shows or fashion windows. On the other hand, the informants who tend to be more fashion skeptical tend to exercise more control over their desire for change, and they are more rational in their shopping behavior.

I meditate first. I think first. Maybe I see things that I like but I really have to think, maybe I go back to that shop later. When shopping, I am an incredibly boring person. I am difficult (Consumer FS: Roberta 40).

First of all, I must feel the need for it. I don't buy things just for the pleasure of having one more thing. Maybe I need something and I start searching for it. I make very long expeditions. I search for everything... price, quality, style... for example, I was searching for a skirt, long, red with buttons, I have never found it, so I never bought because I was looking for it in a period when red and long skirts were not in fashion; now, I see a bit around (Roberta).

I would like to buy something that is not binding, but if I already have seven pants... sufficient. I would not think of buying more (Roberta).

Such informants reflect a lot before making a purchase decision; they assert that they only shop when they need something in a way to legitimize their materialistic behavior (Ger and Belk 1999). Here, we come across the distinction between a need and a desire, as discussed earlier. For instance, the long red skirt Roberta was searching for can be linked to a desire rather than to a need of hers since if the aim was only covering up the body, any skirt could serve the purpose. Roberta also tries to rationalize what could be the limit of her needs. She puts an end to shopping when she feels that she already has enough. For instance, seven pants could be enough for her, but again one pant could also be enough if we were talking about the basic need to keep warm. Roberta, interestingly, also reveals that she is a boring person when shopping, suggesting that the social norm is to be more excited about shopping and to shop more often. Thus, this is the success of fashion institutions promoting consumption.

Normally, because I feel that I need something; I haven't got many things in my wardrobe. I have many more summer things; my summer wardrobe is colorful, it has many skirts. In winter, I feel very cold, so in winter my objective is to keep warm and keep comfortable. But in summer, I do have more impulse buying, more colorful. Maybe I have four pair of winter shoes, but I have more summer shoes. I think it varies on the season (Consumer FS: Maria 37).

How do I realize (I need something) because I look at my wardrobe and I think I don't have certain types of trousers, or some trousers I wear more than the others, or maybe I don't like them so much. Maybe something is old and I had it for a long time; I think it is more a utilitarian reason rather than... no but you could argue that I don't need anything so why do I buy it. I just feel that I need it, maybe boredom too (Maria).

Ninety-nine percent of the time, I have the exact idea about what I need. For example, I need a suit with light color, but I have only black so I think spring is coming, summer is coming, and I need more joyful stuff, so I start to look in these things. Rarely, I could count examples where I would see something and I buy it. But I buy what I look for. If I go to buy shoes I only look for shoes; I don't look at other things (Consumer FS: Monica 27).

Fashion skeptical consumers also feel this desire for change. For instance, with the approaching Spring and Summer, they also long for more color; however, they exercise more control over their shopping behavior. Maria similarly tries to explore what a need can represent for her, but she is still acting at the level of desire like all modern consumers since boredom can be a reason of her shopping stimulus. Similarly, Monica seems very determined in her shopping behavior. Her rationalization suggests that she is not seduced by any external forces such as the other products presented in the shops, and she suggests that she acts only on the basis of her needs. It may be true that she performs less impulse buying compared with some other consumers; however, her search for a new light colored suit is also at the level of desire. She is longing for not any business suit, but a light colored business suit, for which she most likely took inspiration from external social forces such as looking around or window shopping. Nevertheless, such informants tend to use utilitarian justifications for their consumption behavior, asserting more control on their desire for change.

On the other hand, this desire for change often is not about something highly radical. For many of us style changes still occur relatively slowly; it is evolutionary rather than revolutionary (e.g. Dardis 1974; Davis 1992).

Just the fact of red instead of orange or adding a special belt makes you feel different (Fashion Designer/Tailor: Melina).

I don't change radically in different occasions. You may have a style and just change a bit. I don't change too much. I may dress in all occasion feminine – not exaggerated, chic, and good quality (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

I have a style no matter if I work or I go out for night, I see myself; maybe I change to mini skirt, but the general style is the same (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

There are immortal things, such as a classical suit; there are also things of good taste that I will never change; they have special aspects, but yes, there are things I change every season (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

“I have my own style” is another discourse consumers often use. In this discourse, style is associated with continuity while fashion is associated with change. In a general example, one can choose to dress up always casual, at the same time adapting to changing fashion trends, thus having a style does not necessarily mean refusing the change. Sometimes fashion is about a change in color, which already makes one feel different. On the other hand, the styles also change over time, parallel to changes in people's habits and life styles (Saviolo and Testa 2002). For instance, the understanding of a classical business suit thirty years ago was most probably different from today. A classic (longer lasting innovations) is a fashion with an extremely long acceptance cycle; it is in a sense 'anti-fashion' since it guarantees stability and low risk to the consumer for a long period of time (Solomon, Bamossy, and Askegaard 2002). This risk is about not fitting in with the social dressing norms.

### *Summary*

The desire for new is the key motivator behind fashion consumption (e.g. Rojek 2004; Priest 2005). It takes away the boredom, bringing color, excitement, and new motivations in life. It is not born because one is in lack of something, but instead, in search for new adventures or new images of self to present (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard). While some consumers cheer this restless desire in the course of the never-ending consumption (Campbell 1987), some others try to control and calm it down through utilitarian justifications. In parallel, fashion fuels this lust for change with its new collections every season reinforcing new images of self to present. Even so, the average consumer seldom accepts new styles that are radically different from what they are already wearing; thus the style changes occur relatively slowly (e.g. Dardis 1974; Davis 1992).

### **Conformity & Anti-Conformity**

As stated earlier, Simmel ([1904] 1957) advocated that two social tendencies were essential for the establishment of fashion; the first one is the need for 'union,' and the second one is the need for 'isolation.' The need for union is associated with the desire for social prescription while the need for isolation is linked with the desire for uniqueness. People choose clothing to define and to describe themselves. Consequently, acceptance of one's clothing can either engage a person in the group, or exclude them from participation (Lurie 1981). My findings confirm that these conflicting needs can co-exist together in a person. On the other hand, no matter if

consumers show more fashion orientation or skepticism; they are mostly conformist with the socially accepted norms for dressing up.

I don't follow fashion; I did not like it not even when I was younger; I always wanted to go against fashion. Now, that I am older, I have a style, but I have it since many years; I am always in black. Sometimes if there is a color that I like I buy it, but in general I try not to follow fashion (Consumer FS: Daniela 42).

In a later statement, Daniela also says;

For example, if the fashion is the low waist pants, I don't go around with really high waist pants, but I don't put low waist either; it is somewhere in the middle (Daniela).

Daniela wants to go against fashion, but fashion becomes powerful exactly at the point when everyone agrees to differ; in no time, they all find their singularities to be identical; giving up a fashion becomes just as fashionable as taking it up in the first place (e.g. Girard 1987). For instance, being in black, as the choice of Daniela and also many others, has been highly fashionable for many years. "The increasing emphasis upon black, grey, and plain unadorned clothing at the expense of colorful, decorated or printed fabrics is based on considerable anxiety about making any kind of fashion statement that strays too far out of what have become conventionally accepted norms (Miller 2004, p. 123)." Afterwards, Daniela also implicitly reveals her fear of not fitting in with the social norms by not wearing really high waist pants when the fashion is low waist (Wilk 1997).

I don't like to be among the one of the hundred people around; we are all unique individuals with different personalities, and it is nice to make this aspect shown with little details on clothing (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

You know why they come here (to this tailor/designer shop); for instance, there is only two of this jacket. So they will never risk getting out of here and finding an identical jacket to theirs'. Do you understand? It is not exclusive here but it is limited. Good for the women who do not like having everything like the others (Fashion Designer/Tailor: Melina).

Many of the informants on the consumer side, as Daniela and Luana, no matter if they are more fashion oriented or less have declared that they do not desire to be just one of the many people around. Melina as a fashion designer/tailor also reveals this desire of women for feeling unique and special. It may be possible to show uniqueness with little personal characteristics in the way of dressing up; however, consumers are still part of the general trends, though not necessarily every new trend. For instance, during the interview, Luana was wearing some Levis jeans that she dyed with a vintage effect. It is probably true that this is a unique pair of jeans modified by Luana, but still representing a current fashion trend as vintage. Mass consumers do not reach the point of distinction from the system as in the case of some more rebellious consumer groupings like some feminist, choosing to dress as plain as possible, emphasizing masculine characteristics rather than bring out their feminine shapes (e.g. Wilson 1985).

I like to be different. I like to have an idea of the season's fashion, and then I like to create my own fashion. I don't buy a complete set from the same store. I like to dress up my own style (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

I don't like too much décolleté. I don't like this wild look in woman. I don't like to take too much attention. Or, I don't like too casual, like hippie type. As I said before, I

don't like the extremes. I am a bit more classical, not taking too much attention, something that is my own style, and I feel comfortable in it (Gabriella).

I like to follow fashion in a way, not too much. I am not too visible; my way of dressing is not so extreme. I like to dress up not much elegant but simple and clean in a way (Consumer FO: Sofia 41).

Similarly, Gabriela, despite her attempts to be different, likes to have an idea of the season's fashion trends, and just like Sofia, she does not like the extreme ends, taking too much attention. The tensions arising from consumers' efforts to develop a sense of individual agency and perceptions of social prescription can be felt here (e.g. Murray 2002; Simmel ([1904] 1957). "I like to make my own fashion" is another discourse consumers often use to feel special and different than others. Distinction never goes out of fashion as Thompson and Haytko (1997) suggest. Although this discourse gives consumers a feeling of being in control; this does not necessarily make them in control. For instance, shopping from different stores does not necessarily give consumers an active role in fashion creation since they are still selecting from the same market offerings, at the same time, getting inspired from seasonal fashion trends. "If one's customization of the code appears authentic, it has value, which is exactly what marketing research communities are after (Murray 2002, p. 439)."

The success of these big companies like Zara is that they give the chance to buy a lot and to change a lot (Press Office Manager: Francesca).

What I like about fashion is the capacity of changing. In a shop like Zara, there is a new collection every two weeks (Fashion Designer: Vanessa).



At this moment, market has changed. Products of medium price have almost disappeared with the launch of brands like Zara, H&M. They have lowered the prices; than there is the other extreme with haute couture and prêt-à-porter of luxury. So, there are these two big categories, and the middle range is more and more diminishing. A working woman who needs a night-suit maybe to use it only once, do not spend these high numbers (money) anymore, but goes to Zara, buy the complete set, use it, and dispose it (Fashion Designer: Alessandro).

Recently two new shops have opened up in Milan... Zara and H&M... there is no fashion, they have everything, all the fashion is squeezed inside Zara and H&M shops, with incredibly low prices, low qualities too, but now people want to spend less... and they just want to have nice things, nothing rich (Fashion designer: Mauro).

Nowadays, companies like Zara, H&M, and Mango, the fast food versions of fashion (Lee 2003) where consumers can acquire fashionable products at low prices promote even more uniformity and consistency. Some higher income consumers shop at Zara where they can find trendy products at better prices while some lower income people also shop at Zara where they can afford new fashion. Basically, the amount of people shopping in such stores has increased. Producers also suggest that since fashion consumption is not solely based on utilitarian reasons, when a woman buys a dress, she actually buys a new emotion, a new excitement. In an expensive high fashion store, she can buy one emotion while in a company like Zara, she can buy many more emotions for the same price; the idea is to change. Thus, Zara accommodates very well this desire of new by giving consumers the chance to change a lot.

I think human being has a problem as wanting to be different. Of course everybody is different, act different, but they all end up being similar. We all end up doing the same thing; we all use similar textile, colors, designs, we only try to make something little different. We all are the same after all, the consumer, the producer, maybe a little textile, color, cut change but after all everything is the same. We always want to be different that is why we consume a lot (Fashion Store Manager: Rita).

Rita suggests that we can only try to make little differences, but since we all shop from the same market sources, we all end up being similar. However, this feeling of control by mixing and matching from different stores or mixing and matching different fashionable items give a sense of freedom and creativity to consumers, which fashion institutions are aware of. Institutions by offering vast varieties of products accommodate this feeling of individual agency while in reality this is a market sanctioned consumption practice (e.g. Holt 2002).

Then, at the other end of the tension stands the desire for social prescription. Consumers do not like to attract too much attention, especially in a negative sense as discussed earlier. They are mostly concerned with not fitting in rather than with being in the latest styles (Wilk 1997).

In a world full of insecurities, the desire of accomplishing the impossibilities, it is also about feeling secure, feeling similar. If you approach somebody that you don't know, but in your style you feel more secure... these big trends also serve as a point of reference. This is a bit more psychological. There are all these political, economical insecurities, uncertainties. There is also problem of time; maybe students can spend 10 hours searching around the right things to buy, but a top manager does not have that

time, and goes to Gucci, buy 10 things in a few minutes and feel well about herself  
(Press Office Manager: Francesca).

The general fashion trends serve as a reference point for social equalization, which gives a feeling of security as fitting in. They reduce social inequities of class dynamics to a seemingly more manageable and acceptable forms (Thompson and Haytko 1997).

### *Summary*

Mass consumer acts somewhere between the tension of conformity and anti-conformity, without reaching the extreme ends. Even the consumers who express that they do not like to be one of the hundred people around are not rebellious to the point of being completely against the fashion system, with the fear of not fitting in with the social norms (Wilk 1987) while the ones who like to follow fashion trends are hardly always trendy, mostly due to their financial limitations. However, with the presence of companies like Zara, new fashion is available for larger consumer segments; this results in more conformity within the fashion system (Lee 2003). Such companies also make even more difficult to resist to this lust of change, offering vast variety of trendy products at affordable prices. Accordingly, they also accommodate the feeling of individual agency gained through mixing and matching while in reality this is a market sanctioned consumption practice (e.g. Holt 2002, Murray 2002).

## Beauty Myth as Thin, Tall, and Young

This is another important topic where the heat of desires can be felt higher; the emotions get deeper both in positive and negative senses, and this is also one of the places where fashion institutions play a great role. While looking at an ad in Vogue magazine, Teresa portrays her perfect look in mind as below:

The seriousness and the look of man is fantastic. I would feel a lot like manager, but I cannot permit myself to be dressed like this because I am fat. In my opinion, to be able to dress up like a man, you need to have a body like Julia Roberts, tall and thin. I am not such way. I am 1.57 tall and 56 kg. You need to be tall as 1.75 and weight like 52 kg. This would be my perfect look, with a white shirt, one button opened extra, would be my look (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

(Looking at an ad in Vogue magazine) I like it because she is thin, maybe too much. I also find this clothing very elegant; this could be my style, if I was 30 years younger, x kilos less; I like it very much (Consumer FS: Anna 53).

Fashion is something that fascinates me! It is like approaching something that is really not your world; it is like a fairy tale, everything is beautiful, models, dresses, accessories (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

Through a glamorizing interpretation, the world of fashion provides a fantasy of enjoyable moments and beauty ideals that are fascinating for consumers (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Wolf 1991). Teresa has an ideal look in mind, for which she gets part of her inspiration from a celebrity. Maybe she is not as tall as Julia Roberts, but she is certainly not fat at all; though she still wishes to be thinner. Women are continually bombarded with advertisements and commercials

for weight-loss programs and cosmetic products promoting younger look (e.g. Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991). Anna is fascinated by this ideal image of beauty, only if she could be younger and a bit thinner. Similarly Betty (Consumer FO: 41) and Daniela (Consumer FS: 42) like black and tight shirts because these can hide things and make them look thinner. Betty and Daniela are relatively tall and thin compared to the average woman. Wolf (1991) affirms that women both young and old reveal their fear of aging while women both slim and heavy reveal the suffering caused by trying to meet the demands of the thin ideal. Thus, this beauty myth creates a pressure on women for trying to fit in.

What they (women) want is to look more beautiful; they want to feel well, more beautiful. They want to hide things, and it is my responsibility to make them look better. This is not always easy; sometimes the defects are heavy; sometimes when you have these narrow shoulders or very big boobs; there is a limit to what I can do; then I feel bad, but it is not my fault. I try not to offend them; I must adapt the dress to the body. We are all different. I do my best. They really all want to look more beautiful. Once they are satisfied, they go away happy. They hug me, kiss me like if I gave them a big gift, and this is a great satisfaction for me (Fashion Designer / Tailor: Melina).

Many of us constantly observe and criticize our appearances and engage in activities such as buying specific styles of clothes or employing body-focused practices like dietary and exercise regimens, to transform the body into a more desired form. These activities enable individuals to accomplish goals and feel more contented with their lives (Thompson and Hirschman 1995). Among modern consumers, the desire to enhance physical attractiveness continues to motivate the consumption of fashion

goods; however, the aesthetic significance of a fashion object depends on how it appears on the human body. When a fashion object is worn, the elements of design such as the cut, color, or texture interact with the physical characteristics of the consumer to create a form. The entire form is then evaluated in terms of how closely it fits the cultural ideal of attractiveness (Eckman and Wagner 1995); nowadays it seems to be thin, tall, and young.

One reason I decided to loose more weight is to be able to find the things I like. For example, a shirt like this (showing her shirt), last year I could not put it on because first of all I could manage to find the size, this one is a large. Loosing some more weight, I find more easily the things to put on. The colors of large (over) sizes are usually very sad, and they are a bit too grown up. I don't like to dress up so seriously, but without overtaking the limit of looking ridiculous. One should dress up at her age. I am not 20 years old anymore, so I cannot dress up like that. It is important to find a balance, the right combination for your age ...as the time passes... this is a way of fighting back... so... one does not have lots of possibilities to recover, maybe trying to loose a bit of weight, making up... (Consumer FS: Anna, 53).

I have something to say. Fashion is too much oriented to thin people. Maybe I am a bit fixed minded here although I am quite normal as weight at the moment. You look at the shops and you find things for thin people, but half of population is not like that. This is a bit irritating because this makes you feel bad, not fitting in. I actually discovered a new shop, Conbipel; they seem to have normal sizes, not only for thin people, for example, this skirt, I bought it in Conbipel; they also have reasonable prices (Anna).

This restless struggle for trying to look more beautiful is not always a pleasant experience for all; most women do not fit to this ideal image of tall, thin, and young. Anna was getting emotional during the interview while expressing her struggle for trying to look a bit thinner, a bit younger, as she gets older. Fashion is too much oriented to too thin, tall, and young looking people. This is one of the reasons why Anna, when she had more weight, could not find nice colors and styles. The nice products are for thin people. The fashion industry through its models, advertising, and thin-oriented clothing design have caused some social problems like reduced self-esteem, eating disorders, body image distortions, and increased tendency for cosmetic surgery (e.g. Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991). Thus, there have been strong critics of fashion and advertising imagery as perpetuating a problem inducing beauty myth. Institutions continuously promote instructions for management of weight and physical appearances and reinforce that these characteristics are essential for women's self esteem and social success (Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991).

On the other hand, while trying to fit in, some consumers react differently to this beauty myth. For instance, on one hand, Luana (Consumer FO: 27) is not tall, and she likes to put on high heeled shoes on a regular basis to make herself look taller, while Maria (Consumer FS: 37) is not tall either, but she denies putting on high heeled shoes.

Because they are uncomfortable, also I think it will attract more attention to the fact that I am short. People will think that I am upset because I am short and wearing high heels, but I am not upset so... (Consumer FS: Maria 37).

Maria, interestingly revealing the existence of a beauty myth as tall, consciously denies fitting in, and she tries to demonstrate that she is happy the way she is. "Conscious reflection helps one to interpret, personalize, and challenge collective identities or dominant consumption codes (Murray 2002, p. 431)." This is the reflectively defiant consumer (Ozanne and Murray 1995). However, Maria also chooses dresses that do not make her look too old; she cares about the young ideal, and she is thin. Thus, all consumers get their share of the influences one way or another.

There is not a product of "signora" (older lady) anymore. Some years ago women of 50, 60 years old had a certain way of dressing up, certain style; today the styles have rejuvenated. A woman of 50 years old today, if she could, she would dress up like hip (Fashion Designer: Alessandro).

"It is age which receives the values of glamour and seduction (Barthes ([1967] 1990, p. 257)," the idea of still young, forever young. "The fashion apparatus presents the style of immortality, a brand new life-style where nothing decays or gets old, masking death, waste, poverty, and absence (Emberly 1987, p. 49)."

### *Summary*

Here, it is not possible to draw a simple conclusion such as that consumers who are more fashion oriented tend to show more effort for trying to fit in with this ideal beauty image while others show more resistance, since all my informants try to fit in up to a certain degree. Even Maria who shows confidence about her height does not like the look of older women, and all my informants not only pay attention to their weight, but most of them also complain about some parts of their body that they would like to



improve in relation to this ideal look (e.g. smaller breasts, less weight, being taller, smaller hips, etc.).

On the other hand, for some like Anna, her struggles to try to loose weight and choosing dresses that allow her to have this younger look has not always been a pleasant experience, causing reduced self confidence. Most women do not fit into this ideal beauty images reinforced by fashion institutions. "Since the media often constructs simulated identities, based around product and brand ensembles, which are portrayed as successful, healthy, secure, happy, youthful, and sexy, consumption sometimes becomes a source of false promises (Murray 2002, p. 436)." This brings out an ethical concern about fashion as an institution working not necessarily for the well-being of consumers, making them feel good about themselves, but instead working on the perpetual recreation of these insatiable desires for the system's own economic well-being (e.g. Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991). On the other hand, these far away idealized images maintain life more colorful and exciting, perpetuating the desire for change. The notion of goods as bridges to displaced meaning has been thoroughly domesticated and exploited by advertising professionals, which is one of the engines of consumption in modern society (McCracken 1988). It helps perpetuate consumer appetite.

### **Seduction**

Another aspect of this ideal look, in addition to its physical characteristics such as thin, tall, and young, is about being attractive and sexy. I would like to start here with a quotation by Vanessa, who was a designer for one of the famous high fashion brands, D&G.

D&G woman is very sexy and Mediterranean, very strong as a personality, a beautiful woman and showy. You know a woman who dresses up D&G wants to show, more than all very sexy... so they are keeping these major points firm in their collections, then they can play with colors, with various inspirations. Dolce says that when one wakes up in the morning and dresses up for the day she must say: I feel like "una figa" (really sexy – slang) like feeling on top, ready to invade the world; otherwise she shouldn't get out of the house until she feels that way; she should change the dresses. Dolce likes beautiful women so he makes them show their beauty with their way of dressing up (Fashion Designer: Vanessa).

Dolce has an ideology of woman in mind, and he introduces this to consumers with his products and advertising. Being one of the most famous fashion designers in the world at the moment, he reinforces this burden on women for fitting themselves to this ideal look as sexy, he promotes this as essential to women's self esteem and social success. If a woman does not feel confident with her way of dressing before she goes out every morning, then she will not be ready to face or with more emphasis to invade the world; and some women feel in a similar way.

It is like cooking, you can prepare a meal, but if you don't present it in a nice way, it is just a food that goes to your stomach; but if you present it in a nice way, it satisfies both your sight and your stomach; this is a bit like that. For me, to see myself well cared, chic makes me feel nice. I believe that a person when she wakes up in the morning should change from her night gowns and put something chic on. This is a kind of respect to your self, to your husband, to others, and you feel more secure about your self; you are ready to receive or confront any person (Consumer FO: Susanna 30).

The feeling of security for facing others also passes through contentment about one's look. Confidence mediated through clothing will be explored in detail within the next section; however, the question here is if all women can present themselves as sexy and daring as Dolce imagines them.

I was never sure about this. I think it depends on why you are doing it. I don't like the idea for example, if you go to a business meeting and you dress up very provocative, I don't like that; you are doing it for other reasons, maybe you want a promotion. I don't like using body for other means. You dress sexy because you enjoy it, you do it for yourself; other people will look at you and that makes you feel good; then why not? (Consumer FS: Maria 37).

You realize that when I teach, the major part of my students is male adults. I cannot show anything; I cannot be provocative. I have to be serious, but otherwise, I may like showing a bit, using transparent (parts) dresses, some little opening cuts, but I don't like breast décolleté since I have nothing to show; instead I like showing a bit the legs. That is why I like mini-skirts a lot, maybe with some shoes with low heels or boots (Consumer FS: Daniela 42).

In work life that is still mainly the world of males, you run the risk of... if you want to do business, why do you go around naked... Even when I am with mini-skirt, I maybe put a jacket, with some modesty; you must balance the seriousness a bit (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

Some feminists fought against the erotic look of women, open to exploitation while they focused more on the value of clothing to the body, movement, health, and activity (Wilson 1985). Consumers assert that seduction is something that has to be

performed outside the work atmosphere, assuring a serious image for the aims of the job, avoiding any seduction games between opposite sexes. However, they also enjoy the sexy look up to a certain degree, and especially using décolleté for the parts of their body that they are most proud of. Different parts of the female body are the focus of sexual interest, and women use clothing to highlight or hide these parts (e.g. Solomon, Bamossy, and Askegaard 2002).

I don't really like to use too much décolleté or to take out my feminine shapes, but I would have liked because you can do it if you have it in your soul. There are women who can present this way of being in an appropriate, or in contrary in a very vulgar manner. If you have this in your soul, to show your feminine shapes, to look sexy, you may carry it nicely. Then, you can even take attention even if you don't show anything. I don't know it well because I don't have this soul. If I dress décolleté now, I also would take attention, but it is like telling I want to take your attention using my feminine shapes. I don't like this very much... It is about having a little feminine touch in your way of dressing up and behaving feminine. I just don't like to exaggerate this side, but I like to look chic and feminine, not vulgar (Consumer FO: Gabriella, 44).

I don't like for example very short skirts. I think they are vulgar, but maybe a normal skirt with a little piece showing is more sensual and interesting. I like that nice women feel themselves good in their skin, but to show too much is not useful; you may have the contrary effect (Consumer FO: Sofia 41).

Without too much visible emphasis, exaggeration, without being vulgar; a woman should emphasis her femininity. A woman should dress up like a woman (Consumer FO: Barbara 52).

If the dress is nice I think it's good to show it a little. Not with ordinary clothing, but... It's not like unbuttoning a regular shirt far down low, but... I like some décolleté on a nice piece of clothing going to an elegant place. How do I feel? I feel very good and beautiful. As long as you keep it in that measure there is no problem (Consumer FO: Cecilia 25).

I have a friend who uses chest décolleté often; she is proud of her breasts, so she makes them seen. I love that! If one day I see such piece with chest décolleté that I think it would look good on me; I would not think twice and put it on. I love it, but I would not put it at work; outside, night time (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

Consumers like to feel sexy, sensual, and feminine, communicating these with their way of dressing up; however, they point to a fine line between looking feminine and overstating sexiness. The first one can look chic and elegant while the latter becomes vulgar. They like to feel sexy, but not exactly to the extent Dolce (D&G) imagines them. However, this is not to suggest that these promoted images of sexiness do not increase their appetite for becoming one. But, as discussed earlier, mass consumers do not choose these extreme ends. Despite their drives for individuality, they incline towards conformity with the social norms, not wanting to draw too much attention, especially in a negative sense like overstating sexiness, which may be interpreted as vulgar in society. Alternatively, they are not at the other extreme either like some feminists who fight against the erotic look of women (Wilson 1985). Furthermore, some rationalize their desire to feel sexy as feeling sexy for themselves, not for others.

More than to look sexy, I enjoy feeling sexy. I often enjoy preparing to go out maybe for a dinner; having a nice long bath, making up. All that makes me feel sexy (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

Some women want to show to men. I want to show myself to myself because if I like myself with mini-skirt, I will wear that skirt. For example, if I have beautiful legs I want to see my legs, but it's not that I want to show them to men. And then I think that if a woman is beautiful, she can show the beautiful thing that she has. For example, I know that I have small breasts so I am not going to put some dress that has large... how to call it... you know what I mean (décolleté) because, I'll be ridiculous, so I'll put things that maybe... not that they hide but they make me look good. Also, if you show and don't show at the same time for example if you have a skirt... how to say... little cut, it's much better than having a very short skirt, because if you show everything than there is nothing to discover (Consumer FS: Monica 27).

Then, Monica also says;

I go also with girls (to shopping), but first of all most of my friends are boys, second if you go with girls they go to all the shops. Even if you need shoes, they enter in the shops for dresses, for skirts, for everything, and you are loosing three times more time than what you need. Men are also better in choosing what is best for you; they look from a men's point of you (Monica).

There are conflicting messages in the statements of Monica. She starts with saying that she does not wear mini-skirts for men but for herself, yet in the second statement, she expresses that she enjoys shopping with men because they choose from a man's point of view. Hence, Monica does like the gaze and cares about the opinions of men after all. "Feeling or looking sexy for myself" is another discourse consumers use,

similar to the other discourses like "I like to make my own fashion," or "I have my own style", as seen earlier. These are the efforts of consumers trying to assert their individuality, their sense of control, or freedom from social forces like "looking sexy for others" in this case. In reality, Monica dresses up also for others.

Fabiola, as a fashion designer, looks at seduction from a different angle;

A lot of things have changed, maybe some years ago, a young girl of 25 years old was looking for settling down, creating a family, while now a 25 years old is still studying, does not exactly know what she wants in life. Everything seems a bit delayed... maybe first child... you think of it after 30... even 35... of course you have to think well, then it may become too late. Women are different than men when they start passing the age of 40; maybe they want to be a bit more observed compared with a young girl; then it is obvious that a woman wants to be admired, courted; so you see all these plastic surgery just for becoming younger. Really, this phenomenon is becoming crazy; then we all look like the same. A man after 40 years old... maybe already has a secure position (job), and knows what to do in life... such man can still be interesting (wanted), so a man of 40 can go out with women in their 20's and even live together, but such situation for a woman in her early forties is more difficult and less known, so the system of fashion now is highly attached to seduction... remember Cavalli phenomenon... woman who wants to be sexy, provocative... Cavalli and D&G emphasized a lot this phenomenon; instead Prada who emphasized minimalism, with a woman who is more covered was selling less lately; so it has been important to emphasize seduction in the collections (Fashion Designer: Fabiola).

Fabiola here points out how women's lives have changed in recent years and how for the years invested in education, the life course of a woman is delayed while

being young is equaled to being sexually attractive (Haug 1986). This again confirms the severe burden on the shoulders of women especially in their mid and older ages to being part of this seduction game. As Fabiola states, the cases of plastic surgery have increased relentlessly in recent years (e.g. Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991). Among my informants, Susanna had plastic surgery to have better breasts. Gabriella had eye lifting. Sofia and Barbara mentioned having had cellulite treatments, and more or less all my informants are conscious about their weight, desiring less (weight). Fashion helps to enhance this imaginary better look, hiding some unwanted characteristics; it gives chances for emphasizing sexiness through sexy designs like those of Cavalli or D&G.

#### *Summary*

The system of fashion is also attached to seduction, emphasizing women's desire to feel and look sexy, bringing out their feminine shapes through clothing. As the life course of a woman is delayed, emphasizing seduction through fashion consumption becomes a way of fighting back against age, especially for women in their mid and older ages, as high fashion brands like Cavalli or D&G emphasize this aspect. However, my informants point to a fine line between looking feminine as they enjoy and overstating sexiness. The first one can look chic and elegant while the latter becomes vulgar. Their desire to bring out their sexiness for public view is not as prevailing as some new designs imply. This also linked to their fear of drawing attention in a negative sense, and thus their desire for conformity with the socially accepted dressing norms.



## Confidence and Power

“Dress for success” has been a topic of interest for many scholars in social sciences (e.g. Davis 1992; McCracken 1988; Molloy 1975), as the division of sexual roles has been challenged especially with women pursuing professional careers. Already mentioned above, this section is about aiming for self-esteem and social success mediated through clothing. This discourse appeared more explicitly with my informants while talking about their work atmosphere.

I work alone, so the (art) gallery is very important and elegant; everything is nice around, so for the people who visit our gallery I dress nice. I have the feeling this gives them security about the profession. There is a difference between meeting a person smiling, well-dressed, secure of herself and meeting a person who is not happy with the work she is doing, reflecting it with the careless way of dressing up (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

The way you dress up at work has to fit and complement the concept of the job you are doing. For example, I am working in an ultra-modern interior decoration agency for homes; in such a job atmosphere, to be too casual in front of your clients is not the right thing to do, and it does not give security. You have to look serious, not too much accessories, modern (Consumer FO: Susanna 30).

When you have a job that requires you to have social relations, your appearance is very important. You at least have to look clean and tidy. This has an effect on the performance of the business relationship you have. To deal with a person who is nice and beautiful... if not beautiful... at least chic and cared, reflects some kind of seriousness. The appearance is really important. You cannot warm up to a person you

just met, immediately. You have to have a dialogue with them; your appearance also complements this process. At first sight, when you meet a person, it is important to have nice feelings. Receiving a client with careless way of dressing up definitely has negative effects on business (Susanna).

Visual communication is often established before any verbal interaction; and it may even convey whether such a verbal exchange is possible or desirable (Barnes and Eicher 1992). The desire to dress appropriately is driven by consumers' desire to maintain their social identities and to locate and define themselves in the social environment (Johnstone and Conroy 2005). As can be synthesized from the above statements, dressing up suitably for work is essential to transmit the self-confidence one feels for gaining confidence and respect of others. The first impressions are important in society and can have an impact on social relationships.

The image is very important, the communication you pass; how you are dressed up; how you fix your hair. Just your appearance can say a lot of things about you, but this is a mirror image, maybe then, you open your mouth and the whole image is destroyed, but still appearance in our society is very important (Fashion Designer: Fabiola).

On the other hand, Fabiola points at the artificialities of appearance. If individuals are judged by how they look or by what they own, this reinforces superficial views of identity, self, and style (e.g. Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Some consumers also revealed such concerns. The outside look may not always reflect the reality about a person, but still image has an important role in the way social relationships are conducted.

(My aim is) To be aggressive! I must be secure, and my security comes very much from the way I am. You must first feel secure yourself to be able to give security to others. I must be sincere... if the others like me I feel more secure. So for me, the most fundamental thing is the security... power. If one morning, I don't like the way I am dressed up, everything goes bad that day because I don't manage to express and pass that security (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

(A fragment from an earlier quotation) The seriousness and the look of man is fantastic. I would feel a lot like manager (Teresa).

Women's fashion market often employs masculine motives (e.g. Davis 1992, Wilson 1985). Teresa refers to a power image, which is represented by the look of a man, feeling like a manager. Indirectly, Teresa conveys a cultural linkage of male image, representing power and seriousness, which she hopes to feel by her way of dressing. Women have adopted the clothing of male colleagues in the workplace in order to appropriate its expressive qualities in pursuit acceptance as a competent and equal partner at work (McCracken 1988). Then a paradox is created here. If some women to assert their social power, instead of using their female characteristics (not necessarily overstating sexiness) adapt masculine characteristics that do not really belong to their world, is this power or weakness? This is in a way accepting that it is the world of men that rules. Davis (1992) points at the identity ambivalences, revealing contradictory and oscillating subjective states. Dress then serve as a kind of visual metaphor of identity for registering culturally anchored ambivalences that resonate within and among identities, and because these ambivalences spring from the cross-flows and clashes of the basic cultural categories, they are deeply moral and collective

in character, upon which fashion designers seek to impress their interpretations and new coding (Davis 1992, p. 25). This is not to suggest that all female consumers find power in socially constructed masculine images; on the contrary, as discussed above, many of them like to take out their feminine allure, without overstating sexiness, and feeling good about themselves.

Generally, consumers emphasize the importance of feeling well in their clothing to achieve self-esteem. This is about consumption as integration, assimilating and personalizing object meanings (Holt 1995). Consumers have an image in mind about what looks good and what looks bad on them. If they don't feel well with what they wear, this is reflected on their emotional being possibly as lower self-esteem. Certainly, dress does not tell all about a person, but consumers pay attention to dressing appropriately for the occasion.

### *Summary*

The critical issue here, whether they are more fashion oriented or not, consumers pay great attention to their way of dressing up appropriately for the occasion (Johnstone and Conroy 2005). This is all about conformity with the social norms for dressing up, aiming for self-esteem and social success mediated through clothing. Some consumers may be less concerned about following the latest fashion trends, but they are certainly concerned about fitting in with these social norms (Wilk 1987). Once they feel well in their clothing, they can also feel more confident facing others because appearance is important in society.

## Functions

I reserved this section for last, not because it is the least important, but instead to confirm that there are so many different tensions animating fashion consumption, besides its functional motives. It is also noticeable throughout the interviews that even though consumers enjoy fashionable clothing, they still expect it to fit well and be comfortable (Dias 2003).

Certainly the desires of women change with time and they are certainly attached to the evolution of the type of life they pursue... they work, they run, they move, they live a life of rush... and the taste varies of course (Fashion Designer: Pier Luigi).

If it is both comfortable and beautiful is great, but I don't sacrifice commodity to being in fashion. First of all, comfort is important. Also, I must feel myself, fitting me. For example, this can be the most beautiful dress in the world, but if I don't feel myself well in it, then I am not "a posto" (Consumer FS: Anna 53).

For night out, I change completely. Yes, I put high heels. I like to show myself and take the attention. Instead, at work, I still like elegance, but more sportive, and comfortable. We go around showing houses, climbing stairs, so I have comfortable shoes (Consumer FO: Miki 26).

From earlier quotations by Anna, we know that one of the reasons she lost weight is to be able to find nice fashionable colors and younger styles of clothing; thus Anna's desires are not solely at the functional level; however, comfort is also very important for her. For consumers, the best is often to reassure physical comfort while accommodating more passionate desires.

For instance, most of them do not like putting on high heeled shoes on a regular basis since these are very uncomfortable, though very beautiful and fashionable as they say. Some put on high heeled shoes only on very special occasions when they do not need to walk long distances. Some emphasize the freedom of movement in clothing, especially at work. Except, for Luana (Consumer FO: 27), shoes are a great passion, she asserts that she can give up her comfort for looking taller and for the sake of being more chic and elegant, on a regular basis. Miki (Consumer FO: 26) also feels that way especially for night outs, for looking more beautiful and enjoying the gaze of others. However, in general, consumers try to choose items that are both comfortable and fashionable. For instance, one of the reasons Daniela (Consumer FS: 42) likes turtle neck shirts is because they keep her throat warm; she gets cold very often, but they are also tight, and they make her look thinner. Gabriella (Consumer FO: 44) likes her lapin fur because it keeps her warm without sweating, and at the same time it is very chic and elegant. Clothing accommodates these basic needs combined with more passionate desires.

Furthermore, consumers also pay attention to the practicality of use; most of them mentioned their desires for products that can be washed and ironed easily. Quality of the material is also important, enabling a long term use, especially for more expensive fashion items like a leather jacket. There are also some health concerns. Some expressed their desire for natural fiber that does not have much synthetic inside. Size is also an important issue; for instance, for their petite size, Miki and Maria, can only shop in certain stores; it is not easy to find their size.

I like Zara! also Benetton because their jackets fit me (the only place). I am a petite person, so it is difficult to find my size, but Benetton has stuff for girls of 16 years old. They have my size. Maybe at Zara, I don't always find my size, but there are a lot of stuff, and I like it (Consumer FO: Miki 26).

### *Summary*

It is highly evident that people consume not solely on the basis of their functional needs; however, it is also noticeable that they like to be fashionable without really giving up their comfort (Dias 2003), especially in daily lives when they need to work and move in a rush. Still, for some special occasions like the night-outs, they can also give up their comfort for more beauty and elegance and to receive the admiration of others.

The next section will present in a more systematic manner the influential forces behind consumer desires.

## **Consumption Angle of the Interagency**

The previous section has already revealed the power of various institutions influencing consumer desires such as the ideal beauty images imposed on women by fashion advertising and design and the desire for change fueled by new collections every season. As synthesized in Figure 4, this section studies the interagency in a more systematic manner disclosing some of the major influential forces both from fashion institutions and broader socio-cultural context, co-producing desires. In parallel, it also explores consumers' experiences dealing with these forces.

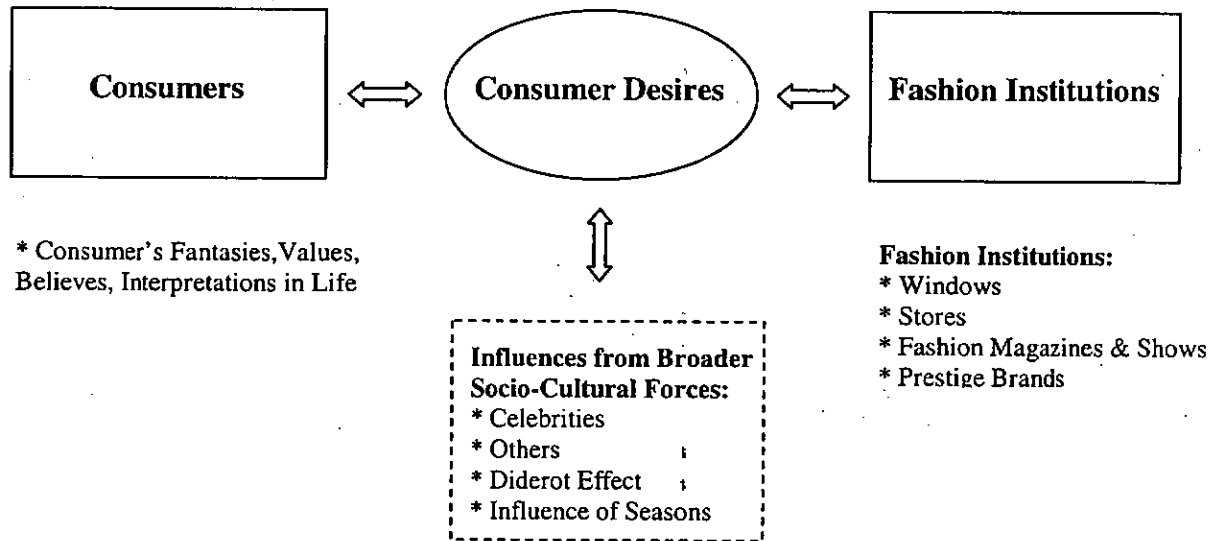


Figure 4 – Consumption Angle of the Interagency

## Influences from Fashion Institutions

### *Looking Around and Window Shopping*

“Looking around and window shopping” come front among the most inspirational sources stimulating consumer desires presumably because even if not for shopping, we still look around and observe our surroundings.

Usually looking around... I sometimes see certain fashion around, and I also feel like buying it, but not because the others are putting them on, but because I see them around and I start liking it myself. For instance, I never liked the pointed shoes before; I always looked for the ones with more round edge, and I could not find them. Finally, I ended up liking these pointed shoes, and bought them (Consumer FO: Nadia 38).



I go a bit with the world, you take steps forward, just like the pointed shoes I did not like to begin with, but then they turn out to be my favorites, like a song; the first time you listen, you may not like it. If you keep listening 20 times more, then you get used to it, and you may even like it (Nadia).

...also you don't find the pieces you may desire certain times, maybe old fashion, so they push you to like the new ones, so you like them by force (Nadia).

Here, the statements by Nadia explicitly disclose the power of fashion system shaping her desires. A fashion trend such as the pointed shoes, which did not represent Nadia's taste for shoes, was introduced to her, and by seeing them so often in windows and looking around, she got used to the idea and even ended up liking this new style. Now, Nadia owns many such pairs of shoes. This is a new desire for her created by producers; she was not planning for it. The widespread availability of this new style in the market rather than the older ones reinforced conformity with the new fashion trend. Gabriella (Consumer FO: 44) also adopted the pointed shoes trend for the same reason.

For example, the pointed shoes have been in fashion. I did not like them because they make the foot look very long and big, but finally I ended up buying one, thinking it is fashion (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

On the other hand, two more informants, among the ones who are more fashion skeptical, Maria (Consumer FS: 37) and Roberta (Consumer FS: 40) also brought up the same topic. The difference from Nadia and Gabriella is that they were never able to adapt to pointed shoes trend, and they never bought such shoes. They expressed how happy they were lately since the round edged shoes were coming back in fashion, so

they could find them more easily. This suggests that hypothetically some consumers are more resistant to change, or consumers do not adopt every new fashion trend.

Via Torino (middle class), I like to go to Pimko (very cheap, a bit crazy, trendy young store). I like to go around. I also go to the market. Looking at the windows, if I like something, I enter to the shop immediately and I buy because then I don't like saying: Oh! I liked that but I cannot find it anymore, it is finished. In the afternoons after work, I go around also because I am curious to know what is around (Consumer FO: Miki 26).

Window shopping is very influential for Miki as for many consumers. She gets attracted by what is presented in windows and makes a purchase decision instantly as an impulse buyer (Rook 1987). Window shopping involves a seemingly casual but actually purposeful wondering from shop to shop which means wondering from potential identity to potential identity until a shop identity is found that matches the individual identity or rather that offers the means to construct that identity (Fiske 1989). Just looking and shopping around has been theorized as integral parts of the pleasure women get from contemporary consumption, which offer a feast for the eyes, tantalizing imaginations for idealized versions of life and stimulating consumer desires (e.g. Bowlby 1985; Campbell 1997).

Windows are important, the story on the windows to take their attention. Every decorative piece on the window has a meaning... the timing is also very important, the pieces you choose from a collection (to put on windows) really depend on the timing of seasons, events such as the New Year (Fashion Store Manager: Rita).

On the producer side, Rita confirms that visual merchandising is also highly crucial to attract consumers to enter the shop, stimulating their desires for change with new stories presented in windows. Producers also emphasize the importance of opening new stores in appropriate locations, increasing visibility of the brand, which is one of the tools of the marketing mix (Kotler 2000). For instance, Francesca (Press Office manager) suggests that a high fashion shop in the perimeter of Milan, with lower income inhabitants, would have less chances of success. Thus, producers are doing the best to get the benefits of consumers' widespread 'looking around and window shopping.'

### *Fashion Magazines*

Fashion Magazines are another influential source on consumer desires, in terms of the anticipatory, imaginary, and experiential consumption they invite (Stevens and Maclaran 2005).

It is probably a wishful thing; it is almost like a pretend world; it is also about gathering information, what is in, what isn't in, not only clothing, but make-up, hair cut, shoes; part of it is... when you look through a magazine it is like wishing you were in that picture; you know she represents certain life style (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

In the afternoons after work, I go around also because I am curious to know what is around; also when I have some magazines, I take a look at them to know what the fashion of next season is. (Consumer FO: Miki 26).

Some details... the way it is worn. It is suggesting me a way of putting the jacket. Maybe I cannot put Prada jacket because it is too expensive, but I can buy something

similar and use it in similar way with similar accessories. It gives some suggestions (Consumer FO: Sofia 41).

I look at the magazines (Io Donna) that are attached to Corriera della Sera (one of the major daily news paper in Italy). I look at what is in, this season. I am not very skilled in dressing myself up, I don't have a nice eye, and so I look and try to learn (Consumer FS: Roberta 40).

On one hand, through a glamorizing interpretation, fashion magazine advertisements can be an inspirational source for idealized images of life, representing a pretend world that is fascinating to consumers, of which they would like to be a part of (e.g. Stevens and Maclaran 2005; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Wolf 1991). These magazines are a source book for desirable consumer goods, which may offer a key to a better and more pleasant life. On the other hand, they can be informative about new fashion trends and instructional for constructing one's own style as Roberta and Sofia reveal. However, many of the same and other informants also suggest that these ads do not present people in daily life, with ordinary physical shapes.

I think that these magazines are showing clothing that one cannot put on. I find theses dresses really disconnected from daily life. Generally, I don't like fashion magazines; I don't read them. Sometimes, I receive them with news papers; even in the newspapers, the part about fashion, I jump. I always ask myself... where can you put such a dress? I don't find these ads, reflecting what I could be wearing, too much out of reality; normal people are not like these women; the dresses can be nice, but where can you put them, maybe you can have one occasion (Consumer, FS: Anna 53).

I don't buy fashion magazines to construct my own style, but I look at them and say... I like this, I don't like this; maybe I am influenced. For example, if I have to buy a dress... I don't know... for a wedding; I don't look at the magazine, I go around in the shops and try to find what I need (Consumer FO: Sofia).

Often, I think... Yeea... nice, nice, nice, I will never wear these things, that is why I don't buy the magazines, and one thing I never do is going into a shop and buying something I have seen in magazine. I never do that (Consumer FS: Maria 37).

What I don't like is that some people look at a magazine, and go buy the same dress, even sometimes that is bad taste; the pictures you see in magazines are of models with perfect bodies; we are not like that, so we cannot just choose out of magazines. I don't like a woman in her 50's wearing a mini skirt because it is fashionable; it is bad taste, and it bothers me; dress has to fit to the person (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

However, Luana also says;

Now you will make fun of me... When it is the time for new collections, I buy a fashion magazine like Vogue, and learn about next season's trends, and sometimes, I make some notes, or keep those pictures for next season, and when the season arrives, I look for those new trends in shop windows (Luana).

Most of my informants do not buy fashion magazines. However, these magazines sometimes come across their way, free with daily newspapers or in different social surroundings such as doctors' waiting rooms or hair dresser saloons. Related to earlier discussions about the tensions coping with the beauty myth, some consumers have negative reactions towards fashion magazine ads, presenting women with 'perfect' bodies, relative to the socially constructed ideal image as tall, thin, young, and

sexy. Considering that most women do not fit to these 'ideal' physical characteristics, fashion magazines may not be a direct reference point for selecting products for oneself, but rather, they are an inspirational source for idealized images of self and for constructing new styles.

I have a good feeling about it. Maybe, I will not buy the lingerie so aggressive, but I like it because it is more similar to my size, my body size, so I identify myself with her. For example, if I have to buy the dress for this wedding. To what can I refer myself in this magazine? ...with these young and thin women. I cannot enter to such dresses. That is why I don't look to advertising in magazines to choose my own style, but for example, this is a nice woman, thin woman; she has forms and she is not so different from a normal look. Also for lingerie, I have a size; when I go to a shop, it is very difficult for me to choose lingerie that fits me, so when I see this kind of lingerie worn by woman near to my body form, I say... Oh! What is the name of this company? and I go look for it (Consumer FO: Sofia 41).

Sofia expresses how happy she is, looking at an ad presented by a more ordinary looking woman; she identifies herself with her, and she may even recall the brand name. On the other hand, as this will be discussed next, the extravagant presentation of products perpetuate consumer desires most, not the regular representations.

### *Fashion Shows*

The reactions of my informants to fashion shows are very similar to those for fashion magazines, and most of them watch Fashion TV very seldom.

Even if it happens that I look at them, I first think who would dress up such a way, like going to a carnival. How can you apply it to daily life? I look at them a bit laughing. It happens that you sometimes see some nice dresses, maybe Valentino sometimes, but again, I can never put such dresses. (Consumer FS: Anna 53).

In normal life people don't dress that way... yes I may like few things.... But who knows how much they cost; it is good to look at sometimes (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

Imagine yourself looking at a fashion show... how do you feel? Normal people don't get inspiration from that. I don't consider myself normal because I am still inside the business but... them ... there is nothing for them in a fashion show... it is fantastic... would you go around the streets with such a dress? (showing a picture from a trend book, just like the ones from a high fashion fashion show)... nice for art... the people of daily life they need practicality; they live, they run, they get out of the car; this is the real life... Some customers even complain about the fashion shows, about the exaggeration; they even feel offended sometimes, saying that they could never be able to put such a dress... because the models are too thin always; most of the people do not look like models (Fashion Designer/ Tailor: Melina).

Just like the fashion magazines, many of my informants react to fashion shows as not reflecting images from the real world. However, fashion shows still give them an idea about the current fashion trends even if these are not a reference point for their own style. Grazia (High Fashion Retail Director) reveals that only 10% of the production is for catwalk while 90% is for mass consumption. Although not sold as much as the more regular merchandise, this 10% of the collection still plays an important role in the sales of other more regular products, as keeping the image and the prestige of the brand among other producers as well as in the eyes of consumers.

Francesca (Press Office Manager) also confirms this argument disclosing that with their advertising, they try to attract consumers' attention by presenting eccentric products. Certainly more simple products sell more, but for communication purposes, they present more fashionable and new products to attract attention. It is about appealing to consumers with the attractiveness and fanciness of the fashion world with these extravagant presentations of products while daily, more regular presentations of products, may not be able to fulfill this dream.

Furthermore, from a different perspective, Gabriella (Consumer FO: 44) confirms below how designers' extravagant creations can serve to enhance her confidence towards the brand name; although she may choose to purchase more regular products.

When we think of fashion, it is really about extreme ends, fashion should use these ends, but I just don't choose these extreme ends. I would not choose this style, but then I may choose this brand because this ad takes the attention. It takes my attention because a company that is able to create such an extreme style can also produce normal styles, so I may say they know the business (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

This logic suggests that a company spending this vast amount of money on advertising expenses and engaging in spectacular presentations of products in fashion shows may as well know the business and produce more regular merchandise of good taste and good quality in Gabriella's terms.



### *Prestige Brands*

Consumers build stereotypes in their minds about certain brand names that they are most familiar with (e.g. Fournier 1998). For instance, although not all can afford it, many of the participants mentioned confidence in Armani products for its clean cuts, simple lines, its fit, and its quality while they find D&G and Cavalli designs too colorful and sometimes exaggerated.

I always look at the Armani clothes because I like the clean cut, not exaggerated. I would go buy an Armani suit, if I could afford it, but If have to chose I would choose Armani; it will not age, you would wear it for a long time (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

No, I never had such piece, but probably just because I am not aware of it. You know why I keep buying Armani pants because I know those pants fit me, and I only look for them, so maybe I don't see the others, or don't even consider (Consumer FS: Daniela 42).

The professional discourse reveals that the minimalist Armani designs represent the fashion of the 90's while D&G and Cavalli designs are of the latest trends. Thus, Armani designs in a sense are more classical, guaranteeing stability and low risk for the consumer whereas D&G and Cavalli designs are more experimental. As discussed earlier, style changes occur relatively slowly for mass consumer (Davis 1992), and not every consumer is ready to adapt to these extravagant latest designs.

On the other hand, the common discourse consumers use for justifying their choice of high fashion brands is referring to the brand's quality and its fit, mostly at the functional level.

For jeans, I really like Diesel; then there is a boutique next door, I really like their styles and cuts. But, what I buy does not have to be necessarily those brands, because if I find a clothing piece that carries the same cuts and style elsewhere I may also buy those. There are many companies producing jeans, but Diesel jeans has a very nice fit, no matter which style you buy from them. It fits well (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

Not necessarily that things have to be of brand names, but I like good things. Good does not always mean expensive, but I believe that for certain things, it is worth paying the high price because I use them longer. Rather than buying something cheap and not being able to use it; this is I think a much worse loss. I try to buy less but with higher quality from its use to its material (Consumer FO: Barbara 52).

I like them not because they are high fashion brands but there are some brands in the world that demonstrated themselves such as Gucci, Chanel, Versace... next to their extreme creations, they also have products for you to have in your wardrobe for a long time, like a business suit that I was talking about, or a jacket, a bag. The quality is very important, the durability of the material, not the kinds you buy for one season and then you dispose it. Zara, Mango is more for quick disposal, for one or two seasons (Consumer FO: Susanna 30).

Hypothetically, these high fashion brand products often have good quality and fit; however, it would be mistaken to suggest that quality and fit cannot be found elsewhere such as the more regular brand stores; thus, consumers pay these high prices also for the prestigious label of the high fashion products. They often disclose utilitarian reasons in a way to legitimize their conspicuous materialistic behavior (Ger and Belk 1999). While looking at their wardrobes, their excitement about showing beautiful high fashion pieces was explicit, not necessarily for their quality or fit, but for

their style and trendy characteristics. For instance, Gabriella (Consumer FO: 44) enjoys very much wearing Diesel jeans, representing the latest trends, not only for their fit. Maria (Consumer FS: 37) loves her Camper shoes that are quite expensive for its type but highly fashionable lately. Furthermore, these prestige brands also serve as a reference point for social prescription.

...There is also problem of time; maybe students can spend 10 hours searching around the right things to buy, but a top manager does not have that time, and goes to Gucci, buy 10 things in a few minutes and feel well about herself (Press Office Manager: Francesca).

Some working women who also have family duties at home complain about not having enough time for fashion involvement; thus, they find security in buying prestigious brands as Daniela (Consumer FS: 42) finds with Armani products. Only few of my informants like Nadia and Teresa stated very openly that using prestigious brand products makes them feel better, communicating certain high class level.

(D&G) it is a symbol of fashion, and even if it is not the best piece, it makes you feel better, so if somebody looks at you, they see a beautiful piece that costs high prices, it means a certain level. This is normal, no? but you must search for the right pieces, for example, I like Cavalli, but it is sometimes exaggerated; the pants with many designs and colors, same for the jacket; it becomes too much; then you go to Viale Zara (the street where the prostitutes hang around at night) with this dress of 20000 colors may be suitable, or suitable for Rio festival, they really produce some strange dresses (Consumer FO: Nadia 38).

Wearing fashionable brands offers a way to combat some of the stigma; as a result of skillful impression management fashion can serve as a democratizing force that one overcomes barriers (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Nadia spends hours at the open market, searching for high fashion products at low prices, given that with a middle-class income level, she, as the rest of my informants, cannot afford to buy high fashion products on a regular basis. Thus, she tries to choose high fashion pieces for long term use, not for quick disposal.

I go to Monte Napoleone and via della Spiga during sales (the most famous fashion streets in Italy). I go to Versace, D&G, and Moschino; I also buy for Alexia (her daughter) although Moschino closed their kids' line. 50% discount still costs a lot, but maybe you get really beautiful pieces. I may like a leather jacket at Versace, I wait for sales, and I get it. I don't pay 100% price; this is something you get and you have it in your wardrobe for many years. I don't spend this big money on a piece very fashionable, that will pass quickly, but I rather spend it on a black leather jacket that goes always well in your wardrobe or a suite (Consumer FO: Nadia 38).

Alessandro (Fashion Designer) confirms that if one is dressed for example in Armani, she is recognized on the streets. The social norm is that the prestigious brands do represent a prestigious level of the person wearing it. As discussed earlier, the appearance does matter in society. The efforts of consumers like Nadia or Teresa, hoping to achieve the prestigious level they are imagining through the consumption of high fashion brands, give evidence for the trickle-down (Simmel [1904] 1957) diffusion of fashion even if this is not the only way fashion diffuses nowadays. Melina (Fashion Designer/Tailor) also discloses that many of her customers bring magazine ads of high

fashion brand products to replicate. This recalls Holt's (1995) typology of consumption practices as classification when consumers use consumption objects to classify themselves in relation to others.

They (Big brand names such as D&G, Cavalli) will influence the tastes with all their power of advertising, dressing up singers, TV stars. They will certainly influence the tastes; on the other hand this does not mean that they put the dogma. They will be successful only if they are able to interpret the tastes of the moment... then, you see their products in every fashion magazine... of course, they have an influence (Fashion Designer: Fabiola).

On the other hand, these prestigious brands with their power of advertising and dressing celebrities can influence the tastes of the moment as this will be explored while discussing the production angle of the interagency.

### *Stores*

This section suggests that the sales people or the store atmosphere may also affect consumer's notion of fashion and their desires.

Shops also depend on shop assistants. In London, you can go to a shop, you pick up, you can try, you can change. Here in Milan, in some shops, the moment you enter to a shop a person comes next to you and asks if you need some help; sometimes you just want to browse; there was one shop which had very nice things; the shop assistant told me that I could not touch anything. I never stepped in that shop again, and I never will. The atmosphere in the shop... the other people, customers are also important; it has an effect on you; if you go to a shop full of old ladies, you question if you are in the right place; also I hate department stores; I go very rarely; it feels like too much for the

masses; when you go into a small shop, at least you can pretend that there are not going to be 50 other women wearing the same thing; it feels more fun, more original; probably it isn't but I feel better, more special (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

The behavior of sales people, the store atmosphere, the size of the store, and also other consumers, all have an effect on Betty's desires and actions. She reveals her desire for uniqueness, shopping in a small store and she reveals her inspiration from the youth myth, with her fear of being identified as shopping with old ladies.

I don't like to be pressed looking at something. If you go to smaller stores, there is always a sale person who is trying to convince that a piece looks good on you even if it does not. This bothers me a lot. I like to be free. I look at things, touch them and feel them, I decide, I don't need somebody telling me if something looks good on me, when this may not be the truth. So, I prefer to go to big stores (Consumer FS: Anna 53).

On the other hand, the sense of personal accomplishment that is gained from playing the shopping game enables consumers to maintain a sense of autonomy and control (Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994), which Anna experiences in big stores.

The behavior of sales people is very important here. Some of them they don't pay attention to you at all, while some others are very pushy on you. Both situations bother me a lot. They should at least give some guidance without being so pushy. That boutique that I was talking about has really nice sales assistants; they also know my style now. The decoration is also important, the lightning, how the products are exhibited; you must find what you are looking for comfortably (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

I remember something; a brand name that I liked a lot, I used to buy a lot; they changed the location of the store, and I don't go there anymore. I don't like it anymore because it is smaller, tight; I cannot find the things that I am looking for; I don't go there anymore. The space in the store is very important; how things are exposed. The behavior of the sales people is also very important. They have to make you feel comfortable. I hate when they follow your foot steps, being pushy; I can just leave the store at that moment. They have to be helpful to you without pushing you (Consumer FO: Barbara 52).

As explicit in most statements, consumers expect the sales assistants' help at a moderate level, without getting too much pressure or being too much neglected. Once they are open to assistance, the role of sales people with the potential of shaping their desires becomes crucial.

Since I was a child, when I entered to a shop, they used to dress me up from head to toe; I am not capable of mixing and matching, so I was getting out with feeling secure about being dressed well. When I go around, some times I manage to find some nice pieces and feel secure, but not being able to dress up myself properly, if I enter to a shop (she is referring to a high fashion brand shop) and they dress me up from head to toe I feel better and more secure of being dressed well (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

Teresa almost completely surrenders to the institutions by letting the sales people dress her from head to toe, so she can feel secure about herself.

People want to be free, comfortable, and they want the attention of sales people, but balanced. They don't want to be pushed around nor completely left alone. They want to receive attention when they ask for help. When sales person asks: "Can I help" too immediately, too often, most of the people don't like it. They first want to look and

warm up to the environment, to the shop. They want to observe. They ask for help later... also the sales people should be nice, smiling, helpful (Fashion Store Manager: Rita).

The most important thing is to touch and to go around with the product in her hand and feel like the proprietary of the product... letting them free... this is very important (Rita).

I think this store is the place where they feel the best, and the place where they are acting as who they are. All other places, they are not themselves (referring to other social places such as work etc.) While shopping they are themselves... this is something personal. In normal life, many times, we act as we are supposed to. You could be a nice person but you may have to act tougher; you may be tempered but you act nice... of course this is not a generalization... but here, a person is who she is; if she is too much picky, she shops picky; if she is self-confident, she shops self-confident; if she is an unhappy person, she does not like anything. The moment she enters from the door, she becomes herself; this is the general behavior; I think they find comfort here while shopping, free from duties as a wife, mother, employee, whatever. This is time they spare for themselves, and they feel better afterwards. They don't find comfort elsewhere that is why they shop so much. Being yourself makes you relaxed. Our aim is to keep her longer in the shop (Rita).

Rita's observations suggest that consumers' desires can also be formulated during the time spent in the shop, looking around and feeling the products. During this time, consumers feel relaxed; they also observe, feel, and fantasize. This is a sort of meditation for some, an escape from the daily burden of life. The longer they stay in the store, the more they shop. Presentation of commodities, design of sales location, its



architecture, colors, lighting, background noise; the sales staff, their external appearance, and behavior; the whole business of sales and its environment is designed for the dissolution of the commodity into a form of entertainment, impulse buying, and the distraction of people (e.g. Haug 1986; Saviolo and Testa 2002).

...also, what I dress... the dresses I put on receive the most sales (Store Manager: Rita).

What Rita wears also receives attention because she dresses in the latest trends from the newest collections as the store manager. This is how some consumers ensure they are up to date with fashion trends. One interesting point Manuela (Product Manager) reveals on this issue is that people involved in the fashion business are the first fashion victims. They are the most important fashion consumers because they are the first to buy, to show, and to go around; thus, they also have a crucial role in diffusing fashion.

### *Summary*

Figure 5 presents a pictorial summary of some of the potential influences from fashion institutions on consumer desires. On one hand, institutions such as fashion advertising and design can be inspirational for consumers' idealized images of self in life, like the ideal beauty images or the images of success reinforced on women. These idealized images perpetuate consumer desires, giving them new excitements and motivations in life (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003). On the other hand, some of these images like the youth myth reinforced by fashion advertisement or the thin-oriented fashion design can also cause anxiety in people as most women do not look

like that. Thus fashion has been criticized for reinforcing a problem inducing beauty myth (e.g. Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991), as discussed in earlier sections.

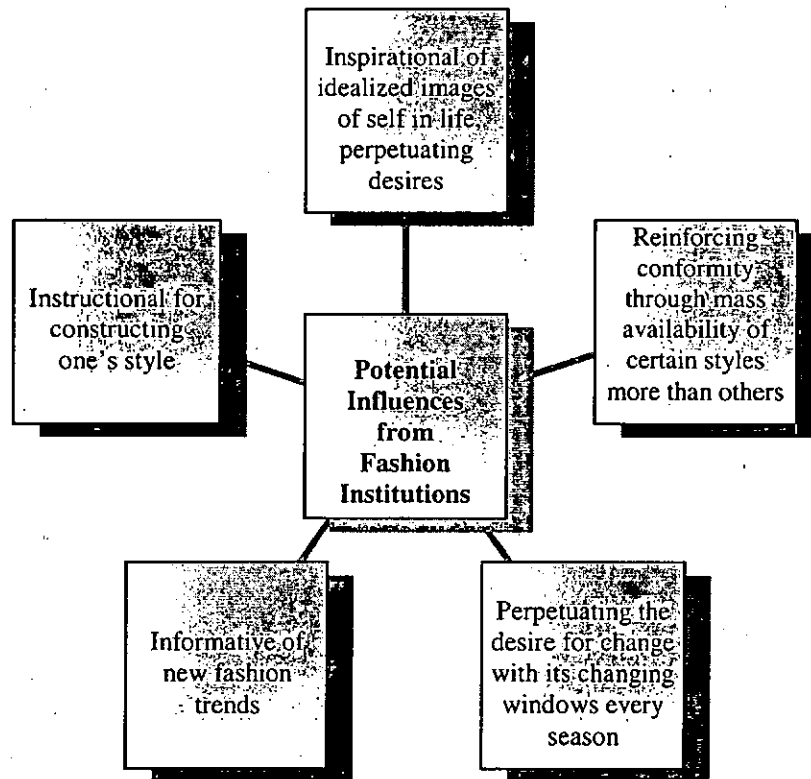


Figure 5 – Potential Influences from Fashion Institutions

Fashion also encourages consumers to adopt the new trends with the widespread availability of certain styles more than others, accordingly promoting more conformity within the system. Although they are all inspirational, some fashion institutions are more prominent than others. For instance, consumers are reluctant towards fashion magazines and shows, criticizing the unrealistic advertised images. In fact, for the thin oriented images, magazines often are not a direct reference point for selecting products for oneself, though they are still inspirational for idealized images of self and at least

informative of the new fashion trends. Hence, a more common practice than reading fashion magazines or watching fashion shows, looking around and window shopping come to the front as a vital influential source behind consumer desires, where consumers also feel, touch, and mix and match once in the store. Finally, fashion constantly perpetuates and fuels the restless desire for change with its new collections every season or even more often as it has institutionalized and structured its very survival on the managed exercise of change (Davis 1992).

### **Influences from Broader Socio-Cultural Context**

The previous section has dealt with influences from fashion institutions. Still not isolated from this institutional world, the inquiry here fleshes out some other influential forces on consumer desires from a broader socio-cultural context.

#### *Celebrities*

Celebrities are an important medium, inspiring consumers' idealized images of self, presenting images of seduction for the regular people to esteem and to follow (e.g. Lipovetsky 1987).

The movie where Gwyneth Paltrow played "Great Expectations", she had a very beautiful green dress, I really liked it a lot, and I bought something similar, maybe not green (Consumer FO: Susanna 30).

I would go for doing shopping like Pretty Woman in Boulevard... how does it called... (Rodeo Drive); I would go to Monte Napoleone to every shop, get dressed "da barbona" (like a clochard), and I would say: I want this... this... that... this... Oh! What a nice dream! I love shopping! (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

Movies are great inspirational sources for consumers, stimulating their fantasies. In a way consumers built fewer defenses towards celebrities than some institutions like fashion advertising of where consumers are conscious of the commercial intentions, whereas celebrities' primary role is not to sell fashion. Teresa expressed earlier how much she admired the look of Julia Roberts from the movie "Pretty Women," which endorses a kind of feeling on top, accommodated by unlimited shopping. Similarly, Maria (Consumer FS: 37) bought a dress and boots with inspiration from the 1960's like Barbara Streisand way of dressing up. Daniela (Consumer FS: 42) likes the editor of Vogue USA for her style who she is in her 50's and really keeps herself well physically. Miki (Consumer FO: 26) admires Eros Ramazotti's ex-wife; she likes everything about her, her beauty, her sympathetic behavior, her high spirit, and the way she dresses. When consumers admire a celebrity, this is usually not only for their way of dressing up, but also for their personality traits. In a way, consumers identify themselves with celebrities, imagining idealized version of selves (e.g. Lipovetsky 1987; O'Guinn 1991). Brand, media, celebrity images from the world of movies, television, music, video games, sports are profoundly interrelated and practically inseparable from consumers' self-images (Kozinets et. al 2004). On the other hand, some informants were more hesitant towards celebrities.

I don't look very much at such TV shows, and if I do occasionally, I may like the way the actresses dress up, but I like only for looking, like looking at a panorama, but not as an inspiration to how I would like to dress up myself (Consumer FS: Anna 53).

Similar to the reactions shown to fashion shows, some consumers legitimize their indifference towards celebrities by arguing that these cannot be an inspirational source for their own styles; however, as Anna, they are still influenced for having an idea of the new styles.

You have to increase the appetite of your consumers with an image attached to your ideal consumer, with advertising, dressing up celebrities... On TV, everybody is young and beautiful... They (consumers) make themselves formulated by advertised images (Fashion Designer: Alessandro).

Media for sure will condition fashion because maybe Madonna dresses up in a certain way, or for example, D&G dresses up Simona Ventura because she is very much loved by the public, so certainly she will influence the public taste a bit. For example, Cavalli who dresses up normally a woman who is quite showy; women who dress up Cavalli almost look like prostitutes sometimes; it is like playing with an idea, but it works like this (Fashion Designer: Fabiola)

Celebrities play an important role in fashion diffusion (e.g. Lipovetsky 1987). By dressing celebrities, producers perpetuate consumer desires, offering them prospective ideal images of self. Francesca's (Press Office Manager) company dressed a celebrity in the last San Remo Festival, paying attention to choose young and beautiful women reinforcing the beauty myth. In addition to these physical characteristics, they also paid attention to select an intellectually rich personage, referring to higher education levels, aiming to reflect a higher quality brand image.

### *Others*

Fashion is a complex mechanism intermingled with the aspects of individual, social, cultural, and aesthetic life that is actually a representation of individual in harmony with the collective union; it is a rapport of self with others (Lipovetsky 1987). Thus, others are found to be among the most central influential forces, co-producing desires. The inquiry here expands in two different directions. The first one involves the mimetic desire (Girard 1977), imitation of others. The other aspect involves consumer's choices based on the opinions of some special others.

What I see the most on other people is fashion for me since I don't follow fashion shows or fashion magazines very much. Trend is what I see the most in the street (Consumer FO: Cecilia 25).

This year, Cecilia has seen flat boots very often, and finally she decided to buy a pair. Lately, she has seen others wearing beige trench coats, now she is longing to have one.

When I take a walk in the shop, I see people looking at other people's hands to understand what they are buying. The dresses that are tried on in dressing rooms are also very important. The largest part of sales is executed in dressing rooms. In dressing rooms, they always look at each other... what does she wear? What does she buy? Does she look nice with it? (Rita)

Fashion diffuses also through the mimetic desire (e.g. Girard 1987; Lipovetsky 1987) with consumers imitating each other or taking the other as a reference point. People largely make their judgments about others on the basis of what others consume and how they represent themselves through what they use, wear, and so on (Firat 1994).

I have a coat. I bought it because one day some friends came from London, and one of the girls was wearing this coat, and she looked so fabulous in it that I asked her to order one for me and bring the next time she comes over, and she did so, and I hated it on me! I never wore it, and still sitting in my wardrobe; ok that was an unusual situation when I did not actually buy it myself, and I had somebody else buy it for me, but I also think it depends on the mood you are in; you can go to a shop, try it on, like it, and then you don't see yourself in it anymore. (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

You know when I see somebody who is dressing up the way that I like I just enjoy it. I mean because I think that everybody has his/her own style, and if it stays good on him or on her it does not mean that it will stay good on me because maybe the dress is very beautiful, but if my personality is different then I will be silly with this dress even if it's beautiful because if I don't feel like wearing it; but what happens usually is not about exactly the dress but maybe if I see somebody, some idea about what I want to buy comes to my mind but not the same thing. Or it shows me the line, the style of the pants or the shoes for example, I don't know. I say... I want something like that (Consumer FO: Monica 27).

What consumers like on others is not always what suits to them, but still they get inspirations for constructing their styles, even if they do not copy others directly. On the more extreme side, some consumers like Nadia (Consumer FO: 38) express that when she really likes a dress on another person in the street, she may even go ask where the dress was bought from, so she can buy the same.

I am not a very beautiful woman like in the center of attention, but it is clear that with a mini-skirt, you attract attention. I feel secure because I realize that I am liked by

others. First of all, I like myself like that, so others also like me, so I feel secure (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

I like Jean Paul Gautier very much. It (his products) is strange, extravagant. If I could, I would dress up his way, but walking around with such extravagance is not easy; especially in Milan, they critic a lot. All the strange styles, they notice immediately (Consumer FO: Miki 26).

On the other hand, consumers enjoy the gaze of others (Firat 1999), being liked and admired by others. Conversely, Miki tries to avoid the gaze of others in a negative sense, avoiding extravagant styles. This confirms the importance of others to the extent of opposing one's own desires with the fear of not fitting with the social norms. Different combinations of apparel and its features make a difference in how the garment is interpreted in society (Davis 1992).

Furthermore, special others can also influence consumers (Lehtonen 2003).

I believe that a person when she wakes up should change from her night gowns and put something chic on. This is a kind of respect to your self, to your husband, to others, and you feel more secure about your self; you are ready to receive or confront any person. Also, it is nice to look nice and beautiful to your husband, to be liked by him; this is also a positive energy for the relationship (Consumer FO: Susanna 30).

If my husband does not like something, he may even throw it away. So, after mine, the opinion of my husband is important. So, I pay very much attention while shopping because I know very well his taste. He also buys a lot for me. Most of the things I have are gifts from him (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).



I don't like shopping with a friend, sometimes with my husband, he gives me nice ideas  
(Consumer FO: Gabriella 44).

Consumers care about the opinions of their husbands or boy friends. For some like Daniela (Consumer FS: 42) and Maria (Consumer FS: 37), their husbands play an important role often convincing them to go shopping, also stimulating their desires. On the other hand, children's opinions can also be essential. For instance, Roberta often wears pants, but just because her little son desires so, she also wears skirts. Similarly, Betty, Barbara, and Anna care about their daughters' opinions, aware of fashion trends, in fact nobody else as they state. Cecilia and Miki care about their mothers' opinions beside the tastes of their partners. Thus, consumers also consult these significant others who can act as warm specialist (Lehtonen 2003).

### *Diderot Effect*

'Diderot Effect' is based on the story that once Diderot – a French philosopher – received an elegant night gown as a gift, and he had to acquire more products to match with it (McCracken 1988). Diderot's observations suggest that consumer goods have a kind of harmony or consistency, somehow 'go together' (McCracken 1988, p. 119). For instance, a new dress requires new shoes, a new hand bag, or matching make-up (Haug 1986). In another mode, Diderot effect also serves as an opportunity to change tastes and preferences and create new patterns of consumption. Once the consumer has been persuaded to make an initial departure purchase, an entire set of purchases may as well follow (McCracken 1988, p. 127). On the other hand, it also has a barrier effect since not just any product will complement the existing ones; thus, Diderot effect

encourages a consistent, unchanging pattern of consumption, sometimes preventing the entry of an object that may have inconsistent characteristics with those of the existing ones.

For example, once my husband gave me as a gift a pair of Hogan with yellow in it; so I was looking for pullover with yellow that would go very well with my Hogans. I finally entered to a shop to ask for this and I ended up buying such a pullover, but also a mini-skirt, some pants and more, so I often search for pieces if I need them not because I have seen them on others. I shop this way, looking for one piece and ending up buying any pieces or I just go around shopping. If I go back home and if I have not purchased anything, I am really sad (Consumer FO: Teresa 37).

At the moment of the interview, Teresa was also planning to purchase a pair of blue pants because she had a blue pair of Hogans and a blue jacket and because these pants could go well with many pieces that she had in her wardrobe. Similarly, Barbara was planning to buy some clothing in brown and burgundy colors because she had some accessories in these colors, and she heard that these colors were going to be in fashion. From the moment of introduction, a new good begins to demand new companions; in this case Diderot effect is a motivating force for acquiring these matching goods.

One thing that has been always in my dreams is going to a shop that has everything from shoes, to bags, hats, watches... everything... you know these personal advisers, people that help. Often I see a dress, I really like it, I would like to buy it, but then I ask myself what shoes am I going to wear with it? or I have an idea, but then I have to go look for them. I just can't be bothered, so my dream is to have one stop shop, to

have somebody who can advise you and help you to choose because I would imagine that such a shop would have so many choices; that is the kind of place I get confused too (Consumer FS: Maria).

Having personal advisers for dressing is not a very common practice in Italy, at least in mass consumption environments; although some consumers seek assistance for matching products. Having a personal adviser would probably be the case when the influential role of an institutional agent can be at its maximum, shaping consumer's desires, even deciding for her.

### *Influence of Seasons*

Giving that Spring approaches, I now become more aware of the shops again. I hate winter; it is so nice to see the spring colors, light colors. Spring is the time I shop the most because it is the beginning of a new year (in nature); you want something new in your wardrobe (Consumer FO: Betty 41).

Shoes... I am addicted, so I will always buy, but now, I really would like to have a night dress, for spring. I need to change... new season... (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

Spring! I feel the season changing, alive, so when the season starts, I would like to buy something, dresses, different, and new (Consumer FO: Sofia 41)

I would like to buy light colored shoes. I feel like wearing light colors. I can feel the season (Consumer FS: Monica 27).

This is another inspirational source of consumer desires that is not directly connected to institutions but certainly endorsed by them. The whole fashion industry is constructed around seasonal changes (e.g. timing of fashion shows, presentations of

Spring/Summer or Fall/Winter collections in windows etc.). It almost seems like fashion has institutionalized seasons; although seasons are there by nature. Consumers have new desires stimulated by the coming of spring, given that the interviews were conducted in the spring of 2005. Spring represents the re-birth of nature, sun light, color, so people feel more alive, more energetic, and happier; these feelings are also reflected in their consumption behavior. They desire the new, fresh, and more colorful, and these desires are reinforced by the changing windows every season.

### **Consumer Agency**

Although there is still the production angle of the interagency to explore, so far in the analysis, the influential roles of the fashion institutions and the broader socio-cultural forces are highly evident, shaping consumers' desires and their notion of fashion. Consumers, on one hand with their fear of not fitting in with the social norms and through their mimetic desire observing others, show conformity with the fashion system. On the other hand, fashion institutions reinforce this conformity even more through the widespread availability of certain fashionable items more than others. However, this is not to suggest that consumers are simply passive agents of the system, easy to manipulate. As discussed earlier, manipulation can occur only if it is allied with the interests of those being manipulated (Haug 1986), and mass consumers seldom accept new styles that are radically different from what they are already wearing (Davis 1992); thus, producers are not free in their creations either. Hence, the interagency is evident in mass consumption environments, and consumers certainly have a role within the fashion system; however, how active this role is needs further clarification. Here, I

suggest three different circumstances where consumers may potentially have active roles.

*Consumers mix and match from different market sources*

I like different things of various designers. I like for example night dresses of Gucci because they are taking out the femininity of women; I like the elegance of Armani, clear, linear... shoes of Manolo Blani... classics of Prada... there are many things I like of different designers, and I like a lot vintage (Consumer FO: Luana 27).

(Looking at a picture in Vogue) Africa... ethnic... It is nice but I would never be able to put the whole ensemble; maybe the necklace, but not the dresses... yes, yes maybe the skirt is nice, but on me this would look ridiculous... all these colors... nice... these are not for every day people; they are beautiful because you can have the idea for the season, but then you construct your own ensemble; you can have the zebra design, but not on the whole dress, maybe a little part of it... a little touch... but these things are not practical, they are nice on journals... nice to look at (Luana).

Like I was saying earlier, some years ago the brand name was setting the rules. You could dress Versace from head to toe, and you could feel confident, but today the individual makes the fashion... I like that jacket... I like these pants... putting things together... these shoes, that bag... so, every individual has taken control of his/her self; she decides herself what to put on, having less confidence to just one name or designer; she may still have some sympathy for certain brand names, because it fits her, she feels better inside, but she is not anymore solely attached to that name, but she decides how to dress up; maybe she goes to the market, buys a used fashion piece, puts them with certain jacket and shoes (Fashion Designer: Alessandro).

The professional as well as the consumer discourses suggest that nowadays there are no labels that set the rules, with an inclination towards more individualism with consumers mixing and matching from different market sources. The answer is actually hidden within the last sentence itself; consumers are mixing and matching from different market sources, thus acting within the fashion system limited to the market offerings, which highlights the fashion trends of the moment. Consumers are encouraged to shape their lives by the use of their purchasing power and to make sense of their existence by exercising their freedom to choose in which one simultaneously purchases products, services and assembles, manages and markets oneself (Du Gay 1996). Mixing and matching are consumers' efforts for trying to develop a sense of individual agency; it is like saying "I like to make my own fashion" for a desire of uniqueness and to feel more special. Mixing and matching is a creative consumer practice within the fashion system, also foreseen by producers. Unless this is a special mix and match of products, which may initiate a new trend; acquiring fashion objects from different market sources is not an active role of consumers in fashion creation. "Since the market feeds off of the constant production of difference, the most creative, unorthodox, singularizing consumer sovereignty practices are the most productive for the system (Holt 2002, p. 88)."

***Some consumers are more resistant to change than others***

I think a woman in her 30's or 40's already has a style; she knows well what is best for her, which colors, which cut; they also feel more secure about themselves; you can use a bag for five years, wear the same suits (Fashion Designer: Vanessa).

From the beginning, I avoided classifying consumers by age in reference to their fashion involvement since more than half of my informants who demonstrate fashion orientation are in their 30's, 40's, or 50's. Still, hypothetically, younger people may be more open to experimentation while as the years pass, people are more settled in their lives and more confident with their styles (e.g. Evans 1989; O'Cass 2004). However, this does not confirm that these elderly people are not influenced by the fashion trends. As discussed in earlier sections, style changes occur relatively slowly (Davis 1992), but still they are subject to change, even the classics. The findings suggest that no matter what their ages, consumers like to have an idea of the fashion trends inspiring their styles. Certain favored stylistic aspects may stay firm while adapting to some current trends like not putting on markedly high-waist pants when the fashion is low waist. Mass consumers showing more conformity towards the social dressing norms already suggest that their style also changes over time as these norms evolve within the fashion system.

However, some consumers may be slow adopters of new trends or more resistant to change like when Roberta and Maria were not able to adapt to the pointed shoes trend, while Nadia and Gabriella ended up developing a taste for it. Thus, for some consumers, especially for the ones who are more fashion skeptical, it takes longer to get a feel of the new offerings; they are more conservative in a way. They also show more resistance towards the fashion system by not shopping as often as the fashion oriented consumers, revealing some utilitarian justifications; however, "the social nature of desire implies that preferences of consumers are far from being independent (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003, p. 348)".

*Consumers interpret sent messages and make meanings*

Certainly, the consumption of market-made commodities and desire-inducing marketing symbols is central to consumer culture, yet, the perpetuation and reproduction of this system is also dependent upon the exercise of free personal choice in the private sphere of everyday life (Holt 2002). Since the moment we come to life, we are exposed to external forces that we must identify ourselves with. These social forces range from institutions such as family, education, or religion to institutions like fashion in this case. Building unique experiences, reality in our lives is interpreted in a different way for each of us; it is immensely diversified, having as many different schemes and patterns as there are different organisms in the world (Cassirer 1953). Consumers make meanings in reception and do not simply receive or ingest sent messages (du Gay 1996). Consumers find meanings by selecting fashion statements that align them with specific cultural values and subject positions in reference to their life style preferences, personal history, life goals, localized context, or material conditions of everyday life; this is socially situated consumer as interpreter (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Consumers' often negative reactions towards advertised images of women as thin, young, and sexy and towards thin-oriented fashion design have been discussed in above sections, and their struggles for trying to fit in with these images, which is not always a pleasant experience. Some like Maria do not wear high heeled shoes on purpose just to assert that she is comfortable with her relatively petite size. On the other hand, all my informants pay attention to their weight, desiring less, somehow under the influence of these idealized beauty images. Some even expressed very explicitly that they would like to be like those models in fashion shows and part of



this glamorous fashion world. Paradoxically, some consumers complain about these images, at the same time trying to fit in, which confirms once more the social nature of desire. In addition, these interpretive positions of consumers become important information for market researchers (Murray 2002).

They want ideas; they don't want anymore garments. You are not buying garments anymore, you are buying the philosophy of the garment. You have plenty of garments, plenty of jeans; you want to buy the philosophy that garment implies. Last year 50% of Italians in Milan have bought ecological products that help the environment, Africa, very poor countries, etc. Especially in food sector, more and more the products are made with respect to environment, people, etc. I think this is a trend. I think if 50% of Milanese people bought such products, the philosophy of 3rd millennium would be to be more respectful for people, for environment, and this kind of things. I think garments will also move to this direction (Product Manager: Manuela).

This is another area where consumers' interpretive meanings could lead to some resistance concerning some moral, ethical, or environmental issues. Some scholars (e.g. Priest 2005), as well as Manuela, suggest that future fashion will take into account changing life stages, cultural cross over, political and ethical motivations and individualism as aspiration, with increasing interest in the well-being of consumers. However, in my findings, these ethical and environmental concerns were not the dominant discourse among consumers. Only Monica (Consumer FS: 27) mentioned her feelings about brands that abuse human rights. She mentioned Nike with exploitation of children and Benetton using child labor in Africa; whereas these topics were brought up more often on the producer side.

At some point I was thinking... but there are people dying in the world, and I think of the form of a shirt neck... this creates in you a bit of anxiety... but at the same time, dressing up is like eating; it is not that you will go around naked... then, to create a beautiful collection, to give satisfaction to people and to work for it is important; it also gives me satisfaction... after all, clothing is a necessity (Fashion Designer: Fabiola).

...because after all, they are only dresses... considering all what is happening in the world that is already very drastic, harsh... I don't like the people (in the industry) who take it too seriously to sell (Fashion Designer: Mauro).

Some designers, more than some consumers, question the meaning of their job and its relevance to society's and consumers' well-being.

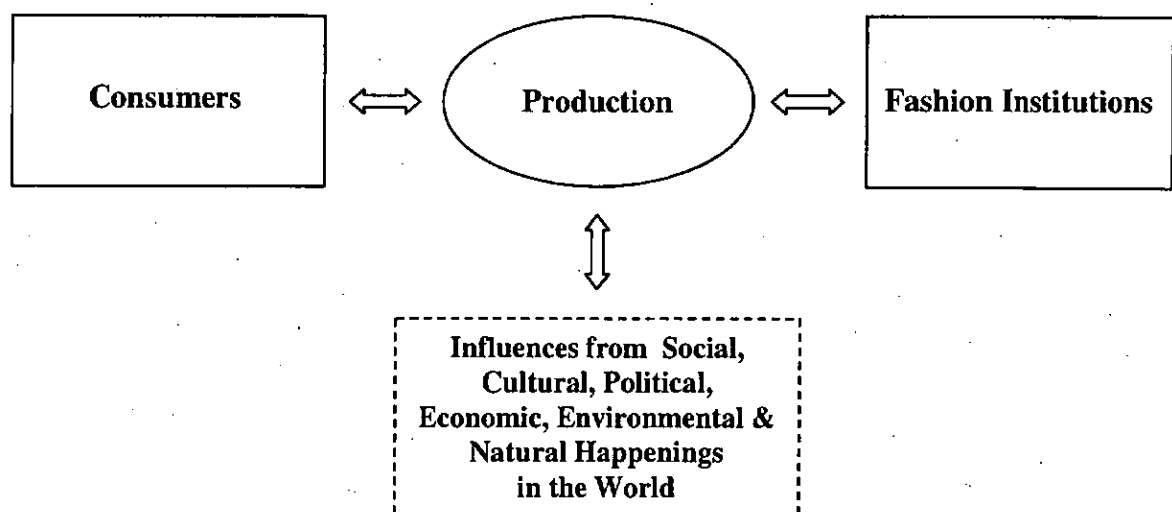
I am not a fashion victim! I take it as a joke, knowing what is behind the big names, and then maybe buying a shirt from the market... since I know the trend of the season I can find no name fashion pieces reflecting that trend; it bothers me a bit the high prices of these famous brands; the really big gap of prices (Fashion Designer: Vanessa).

On the other hand, as Vanessa reveals, some consumers pointed at an ethical concern about the unreasonably high prices of certain high fashion products when similar qualities and styles can be found with more regular brands. Again, ironically, some others without questioning this aspect enjoy and prefer the consumption of these prestigious labels. Thus, it is dubious that consumers' interpretive meanings or actions are always deeply reflected for their own or society's well-being while many of them just enjoy conspicuous consumption in states of fantasies and dreams in an attempt to reach idealized versions of self in life through their looks. "Aesthetics has become the basis of decision making in everyday life; the question is no longer 'is this a good thing

to do?' but 'does it look good?' (Featherstone 1991, p. 65)." On a positive last note, all informants on the consumer side mentioned that despite the excessive amount of clothing they may have in their wardrobes, they do not throw away or waste any clothing. They often share the ones that are not worn with family, friends, or people in need. The next section will continue to explore the consumer agency from a production angle, highlighting two more circumstances where consumers may have active roles. The first one is in relation to creation of new fashion trends, and the second one is when producers are in direct contact with consumers, listening to them.

### **Production Angle of the Interagency**

As synthesized below in figure 6, this section looks at the interagency from a different angle, exploring consumer agency involved in fashion creation and some of the influences behind institutional motives.



**Figure 6 – The Production Angle of the Interagency**

### **Trickle-up Diffusion of Fashion Mediated by Institutions**

This section takes a closer look at the phase of new creations for exploring a possible consumer agency involved in this. Gianni (Fashion Buyer) suggests that big textile organizations' research on social trends is highly crucial leading the fashion trends of the moment. Organizations (textile fairs) like Moda-In in Milan and Premier Vision in Paris control a major part of the textile supply in the world. Such organizations establish a common ground for co-operation and provide visibility to the innovation of the companies that belong to this value-adding network, and legitimize them as the benchmark to which all other companies in the industry will adapt to. Rinaldo, Golfetto, and Gibbert (2005) disclose in detail this highly institutionalized process, involving collective investment for trend forecasting, consensual agreement on future styles, communication of new trends to exhibitors, incorporation of these trends into new fabric collections, and finally their presentations to visitors. The creative experts engaged in trend forecasting spend a considerable amount of time in the observation of street-style and often travel around the world, identifying consumption patterns through which they anticipate the directions in which society as a whole will move (Rinaldo, Golfetto, and Gibbert 2005).

(Fashion) trends are set with an observation of real life; artistic, social, cultural, political waves. Trend searchers translate what they feel around in words and images and these are used by designers' creative and technical people to develop products (Fashion Trend Communication: Alessandra).

(Trend search is about) to have look at what is going on the streets; a trend setter can also be an event, a cultural event, or Madonna when she had some dark dresses. Tattoo started on the street; piercing started on the street (Fashion Buyer: Gianni).

A few years ago because of the war of Iraq... that is an absurdity if you think... all were against the war, but we were all dressed up like military style; this is really inexplicable, to be against the war and to dress like that (Fashion Designer: Fabiola).

Everything can influence... certainly street fashion is the most interesting, also in a city like Milan, this is very important. I am very attentive to the fashion of the street. Of course in the streets, there is everything, so it is important to frequent the right places like the right restaurants, discothèques, parties, work environment; all kind of occasions can create a stimulus, then also some knowledge on actuality like a music group, a film in movie theatres... everything (Fashion Designers: Fabiola).

Also, if you are a buyer, you know that there are some places, some streets in town as trend setters. I go to Milan, to Florence, but also to London for instance. I go to America if my current project is beach wear; I go to L.A. or to Miami because, on the sea, it is easier to find some people. If my aim is different maybe I go to NY, because NY is the center of the world; it is also good for vintage; I go to Tokyo; it is also good for vintage... I talk about students, models, or simple young people that like fashion and want to be different than their fathers and mothers. They have no money so they buy vintage. Also, journalists are important; many trend setters are journalists because they have to find a new story everyday so; every time they see something they write about it; they select novelties... For instance, Diesel has 40 people that are sent all around the world. These are young designers, young journalists... one is in Brazil, one is in NY, etc... and they report to Diesel. For instance... young people are listening to

this music, they are drinking this kind of beer... and this is the style of people, and Diesel is able to connect all this information from all around the world because they must do only one collection, and decide the new style (Fashion Buyer: Gianni)

We are now in a situation where trends are coming from the bottom up (e.g. Gladwell 1995; Kotlowitz 1999). However, it is crucial here to make a distinction between who starts the trends and who diffuses them. For instance, a cultural event can be a trend initiator, not a trend setter. Gianni explains how young consumers' buying behavior can eventually influence fashion trends and become an inspirational source for designers or journalists. Low-income students do not necessarily start buying second hand clothing with the conscious intention of starting a new fashion trend such as vintage, instead their behavior observed by designers or journalists, becomes an inspirational source for new collections. In this case, the young students initiated a trend, having an active role in fashion creation, but institutions helped to diffuse the trend. Thus, the trickle-up diffusion of fashion to larger market segments is mediated by the process of institutionalization, and once institutionalized, a fashion trend like vintage can also spread to other consumer categories like the working women in this case, not through working women imitating low-income students' consumption choices. Otherwise, such trends can also stay as a little sub-culture practice, not for the mass. Vintage fashion with a worn out look on clothing can nowadays be observed in high fashion windows.

Similarly, Francesca (Press Office Manager) explains that a fashion designer can take Indian sandals from India, where the poorest people wear them, transform it, and sell it for one thousand euro in high fashion stores in Milan as part of an ethnic

trend of the moment. Once more, the trend setters are not these poor Indians, but the designer with an observation of people in other exotic cultures. Maybe the poor Indians will never have a chance to even hear about these high fashion Indian sandals.

Producers are constantly on the look out for social happenings in the world, and thanks to their abilities to reflect these observations into fashion clothing and a whole process of institutionalization through advertising and promotion that follows, new fashion can also attract larger market segments. This study does not aim to flesh out each process and the dynamics of this process of institutionalization, but it rather suggest that fashion diffusion does not happen solely through different social classes or fragmented consumer groupings imitating each other, but through the mediation of institutions such as fashion design, advertising, and certainly any other people and organizations involved in fashion production. The earlier paragraph discussing the role of big textile organizations points at a major part of this process of institutionalization, managing the fashion trends of the moment.

Dolce (D&G) is able to understand before the other; he has observations of thousand of people with thousands of ideas. He is able to understand which idea is good and will be accepted by the upper class (Fashion Buyer: Gianni)

Besides these collective investments of big textile organizations, successful designers are also known to have instincts for imagining what is perhaps nebulously desired by consumers (Davis 1992). Designers point at the skills and sensitivity needed to feel things in advance and to interpret the social happenings of the moment, which are also gained through years of experience. Furthermore, there are other forces both

within the fashion industry and within the broader socio-cultural context at work on designers' creations, some of which is explored in the next section.

### **Influential Forces behind Fashion Creation**

This section now takes even a closer look at the phase of fashion creation to explore the forces at work on these institutional motives, especially those of designers. Accordingly, it will also explore the consumer agency involved in fashion creation.

If the major fashion trends are largely managed by the influential textile organizations, how much creativity is left to a single designer? While showing one of the latest trend-books to my informants, as a projective technique for exploring how much they are influenced by the general fashion trends creating new designs, I found two different perspectives, one being much more dominant than the other. All designers, except one, revealed that they do not mind taking a look at the trend-books of the season (which are often in line with the presentations of textile organizations) mainly to get some ideas or to confirm and check their own ideas. This does not necessarily mean that they follow exactly the trends declared in these books or copy exactly the same ideas. However, Mauro totally denies using trend-books because he thinks these are insult to his creativity.

...at my first job, the lady asked me to go buy these trend books, exactly this one that you are showing me now. It gave me a mortal boredom... useless... why should I go read this book... yes, information is good, but if you work in this business, you already feel and have an idea of what is coming, an idea of yours... the things coming out of journal, everybody sees... if I want to give this little touch more... who will give me



this? (inspiration)... you don't find it in this journal... these books... they help more if you want to do something commercial, but if you want to do something else, new, fresh; then you have these feeling of saying... what the hell with these books! Everybody does it. If I wanted to do what everybody else does, I would not choose such a creative work for my self (Fashion Designer: Mauro).

When I was working for Gill Sanders... you need to have a name in your CV, so I was working there... at the beginning, I started to work, thinking about my CV, so if you want to come to a good level, you cannot just design whatever you like... after all, it was a nice experience, but the product was not attracting me too much... it was not the typology of woman that I like to dress... it is true that, the woman of Gill Sanders is intellectual, cultural, etc, but Gill Sanders also emphasizes minimalism, and I am not minimalist, being Sicilian... I just cannot be minimalist... I like black, but I cannot like black always. Gill Sanders always had these 8 colors in their catalogue, Black-red, black-blue, black-brown... and I did not like this very much, so after 1.5 years, I decided to quit, and I decided to make my own fashion show. The purpose of that show was not to sell; the aim was to produce everything that I was not allowed for 1.5 years... I put in this show everything I liked... it is like making a 'minestrone' soup (Mauro).

Mauro emphasizes his artistic freedom despite the possible downside as not selling, yet Mauro has always worked and is still working for other designers. In the commercial fashion world, most designers are far from free in their creations, which are constantly subject to tuning in reference to sales performance. Some of these tensions involve consumers, other producers of fashion, and broader socio-cultural forces.

## *Consumers*

I don't think creativity can only be what you create your self... although I belong to the generation of people who like to force their limits to their best to create something new... we are in a period when creativity is mentioned very little because everything is attached to the rules of marketing... so I pay attention... my creativity can get married with products of easy acquisition... I present my self to a target quite high not really for price but more then all, for cultural level to which I refer myself... the capacity of reading a product compared to others... I always say my creativity must apply also a perfume of exigency of clients that I feel at a particular moment (Fashion Designer: Pierluigi).

We give a lot of feedback to our designers. We inform them about how the collection was bought by the customers. One is the catwalk and the other one is your findings on the stores. You have to customize a bit the collection because many things that you see on the catwalk are not things you can wear. You have to put them down to earth. I am responsible of the 'buying' (choosing / deciding the collections) for the stores. 90% of the stores are daily wear and the other 10% is the collection and catwalk (High Fashion Retail Director: Grazia).

Grazia suggests that only 10% of the creations are like the extravagant presentations in fashion shows while 90% of the production is for mass consumption or in other words for what mass consumers desire. Thus, creativity, in the case of fashion design, cannot be isolated from sales performance, as consumers' and producers' interests are highly embedded in one another through a process of interagency (Kozinets et. al 2004). Mass consumers greatest power lies in the fact that they just do

not accept radical changes of styles from the ones that they are already wearing (e.g. Davis 1992).

There is not anymore solidarity work, I go to shops to ask my clients what they like, what they don't like... what they think of my designs... It is never just the fashion designer (Fashion Designer: Alessandro).

I first listen, then I suggest... then, they (consumers) usually listen to me and change their ideas. There are plenty of things to suggest, models, colors, styles... usually at the end, they find something they like (Fashion Designer / Tailor: Melina).

They (consumers) may also bring a design they like (taken from a magazine); they sometimes come with an idea because they like a certain color or style. For example, they may like Armani designs; and then they find out that this may not be so good for them, they usually change their minds, and this is very much fun for me, I like it in the sense that I like to reason with them, sometimes we talk for hours about what is best for them, every details, colors, length, what they can put on top, or they tell me what else they have in their wardrobe. The whole discussion becomes about telling all kind of feelings and thoughts, and I must find a solution (Melina).

Some designers like Alessandro get feedback directly from consumers, trying to develop a better understanding of their wishes and desires whereas Melina's case is probably the most explicit form of the interagency when, on one hand, as a tailor / designer in direct contact with consumers, she has a role in shaping their desires; on the other hand, the consumers may have an active role in new creations, expressing their thoughts and feelings; though they may still be influenced by the external forces such as a design taken from a magazine.

### *Fashion Institutions*

Besides reading the trend-books of the season and participating in international fashion fairs, designers also mentioned other designers' work (big names such as D&G, Cavalli, Versace, or Gucci), as an inspirational source for their creations, observing their windows, watching their fashion shows, and reading fashion magazines like Vogue. Although this does not necessarily mean that they copy each other's creations, there is a clear interaction among designers and other producers within the fashion industry.

If a product is successful, it is certainly dependent of the talent of the designer, but also the power of advertising. When they make the collection, they do not know to start with that this bag will be the highly demanded bag of the season, but after making a big advertising campaign, they know that among that huge collection they have created certain objects that will be in demand more, so the role of the magazines also are very important here (Fashion Designer: Vanessa)

Moschino does not do advertising on intimate wear, instead D&G is always present because they want to sell; it is an effort you make in vain because nobody sees it. I really was not getting the fruits of my work because nobody sees it (Vanessa).

For example, Dolce & Gabbana, they don't do a collection every 6 months, but every month... also 'La filiera' is very important. 'La filiera' is all the people (organizations) involved in producing a product; for instance, production factory, dying factory for jeans, stylist, buyer, retail shop. All these people must have the same information about consumer. Dolce is very good because he is able to involve people; for example

a dyer can take a decision in respect to the idea – general concept of the collection (Fashion Buyer: Gianni).

The little pieces that form the product, raw materials such as fabric, buttons, zips, etc., those pieces are already given, you know what to expect (Press Office: Francesca).

You need a big name to sell, starting the road with an unknown name, I cannot afford all the advertising expenses; I want to start producing little collections, meeting the right people, and understanding the business (Fashion Designer: Vanessa).

These are only a few examples of the inter-dependent institutional mechanisms, all influencing each other and the fashion creation (e.g. Davis 1992; Saviolo and Testa 2002). For instance, the little pieces that form the product can constrain some of the characteristics of new creations, and limited advertising resources, like Vanessa reveals, can hamper the visibility of new creations. On the other hand, higher investment in advertising and successful management of the supply chain can enhance new creations' success, thus acceptance by the larger consumer segments.

Those involved in this complex process (of fashion) include fashion designers (independents, or those operating within a fashion-house or industry, or retailers), producers (of semi-finished or finished products), distributors, retailers, mass media, research and trend institutes (including fairs), consumers (opinion and market leaders), product category associations, banks, and government (Saviolo and Testa 2002, p. 13).

Accordingly, the major influential force on consumer desires lies behind the whole system of fashion as an institution, not the independent single agents of the industry. Within this complex mechanism, each institutional agent must work in harmony with each other, even then success may not be guaranteed.

Consumers, especially women are not like a computer. Today, every company that has strategic marketing does not sell because it is not mathematical what they (women) want; it is more psychological (Fashion Buyer: Gianni).

It is important to increase popularity of the brand, using the right channels of communication... There are so many details involved for achieving this popularity. For example, in fashion shows, we choose the best hair dresser (the most famous in the world), for make-up, similarly, the best people to make the hats, so the level of my company, each operation, each person (HR), everything have to be at a high level...the people who work for you... let's say, if you are working for African market, you try to find the person with best experience, consultants with great experience. There are one million synergies. It is too easy to say for example, I go to the right place, so it is OK, it works. For example, our store in Paris, located in the best spot (Champs-Élysée), next to a Gucci store; the shop is two floors, elegant, beautiful, but it does not work. Every French... no... Parisian because the reality is Paris... just buy famous brands, so it does not work, while in Germany, we sell one million shoes, even if we are in a small town, but also, I must confess we don't have a big communication budget for France. We go there, we talk to Madame Elle, we got some editorial, but it depends. There are so many variables... so many... it is not only the designer... it is not only the selling point... it is a mix of everything and if everything is well calibrated... probably it works... also during (economical) crisis, even the best the most famous companies have problems. You can never say, I am there so it will sell. Everything must be done in a perfect, at a very high level, and even if you do the best work, it is never sure that it works. You never know in fashion... maybe it is famous Gucci bags... it also depends of the age of the company... also, the price strategy... Ok I have these shoes, I sell them for five euros, maybe you don't succeed; maybe your price is too low, you

loose the "allure" of the object; it is very complicated; we can stay here talking 36 hours (Press Office: Francesca).

In the real world, producers do not take anything as self evident, do not leave their cultural knowledge in the background, and do not treat anything as fixed (Slater 2002). There is a high risk and high cost involved in predicting what will sell, and even if a company has the best marketing mix, it may still not work; it is not so easy to predict what consumers desire. Advertisers act as cultural anthropologists and sociologists, conceptualizing goods and markets in terms of concepts of use value; however, they do so within an instrumentally rational framework, with the practical intent of increasing sales and beating competition (Slater 2002, p. 74).

### ***Broader Socio-Cultural Context***

There is a strong re-dimensioning, in the fashion show performed last February; in general, everything is being re-dimensioned. Everybody is looking to produce something easier, less poetic, less conceptual, what a pity! just because of the crisis, because they want to sell more. Everybody is suffering a bit (Fashion Designer: Fabiola).

I think we are in a period of transformation, which an economic crisis has brought, a dramatic problem of licensing in the sector with people who are not selling, confused negotiators not knowing what to propose... These economic situations causes companies to take steps back, less creativity, less research, more fear, and then throwing away to the market always the same product with the fear of not selling (Fashion Designer: Pierluigi).

The struggles of producers recall a similar tension to that of consumers, involving their desires for uniqueness versus their desire for social prescription. Economic uncertainties drive producers towards conformity with the market place, which means investing in what sells most, while differentiation through new creations involves high risk, considering that mass consumers do not accept every new creation. Though, some producers are still willing to take this risk or at least to try for a chance of bigger success. This is a critical tension experienced especially by fashion designers between their artistic freedom and sales performance (e.g. Saviolo and Testa 2002).

On the other hand, as consumers' desires are socially constructed, designers' artistic inspirations are also socially constructed. As discussed in the first part concerning trickle-up diffusion of fashion, designers observe their surroundings and social happenings in the world for potential new fashion design ideas. They have mentioned practices like observing streets, traveling, meeting new people, being updated about actuality such as following music groups, films, or concerts, reading books of art, design, fashion, or cinema, watching TV, or using the internet for developing the sensitivity towards understanding the social happenings of the moment.

Furthermore, the background of the designers is also important. For instance, Alessandro emphasizes being Italian and the cultural heritage of creativity from artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. Mauro similarly points at the fact of being Sicilian and not willing to produce minimalist and simple designs, preferring more vivid and colorful creations. Designers also have idols in mind just like consumers



who are inspired by celebrities. For instance, Mauro got his inspiration for his first fashion show from an American soap opera.

When I was in Sicily, I was not going out very often, but I was looking at TV all the time. I was looking at these soap operas... and people... like in Dallas... in any moment of their lives... tragic, comic... these women have always make up, with perfectly combed blond hair, very nice dresses... these things always made me laughed. People were asking me "why are you looking at these things?" I also know that these things don't mean anything, but they make you forget your own things, and they take you into another reality, dimension... that is fake... this is the world of Barbi... they have family problems, money problems, but they are always beautifully made-up. When I was watching these things, my moral was going up, so I wanted to produce things that entertain people, so my fashion was very much fun (Fashion designer: Mauro).

Mauro also expressed his admiration for celebrities like Madonna, Marilyn Monroe, for artists like Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo, for some saints in Christianity, for one of the greatest costume designer in Hollywood, and finally for a symbol like Barbie Girl, very happy, smiling. Similarly, Vanessa pointed at D&G's symbols like the zebra and leopard and Moschino's hearts and cows. Therefore, both consumer desires and producer motives are subject to influences from broader socio-cultural forces. As Barnard (2002) suggests the source of meaning is within the larger context, which may be considered as a fabric of intertextual relations that produce and construct fashion.

## Discussion

### Theoretical Implications

Besides the evidence in one of the latest researches conducted in spectacular consumption environments (Kozinets et. al 2004), this study shows the existence of interagency also in mass consumption settings within the fashion context as consumers' and producers' interest are embedded in one another. It investigates the interagency both in creation of consumer desires and new fashion trends, showing the tensions and paradoxes created during this process of interagency. The following sections integrate the major findings of this study and its contributions to consumer research literature.

#### The Interagency in Creation of Consumer Desires

This study first contributes to the previous literature in the consumer research field about fashion consumption (e.g. Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997), by involving the analysis of the institutional forces co-producing desires and proposing a framework of consumer desires in fashion, outlined in six different themes (Desire for change, conformity/anti-conformity, beauty myth, seduction, confidence/power, and functions). The following sub-sections highlight the tensions and paradoxes created during the process of interagency in creating these desires.

##### *Desire for change / new:*

Desire for new is the key motivator behind fashion consumption (e.g. Rojek 2004; Priest 2005). This restless desire for change is often born out of boredom even for the most fashion skeptical consumers who try to exercise more control over it.

Even they, despite the utilitarian justifications they propose, shop out of boredom since consumption in modern societies is not at the functional level (e.g. Slater 1997). Change takes away the boredom, bringing color, excitement, and new motivations in life. This desire for change reinforces the obsolescence of any fashion trend with a restless longing for the new while concurrently fashion institutions for their own profit fuel this lust for change with new collections every season. Thus, the obsolescence of fashion products, for which the fashion industry has been criticized for creating waste in production and consumption (e.g. Dardis 1974; Fiske 1989), is caused by the interagency of consumers and producers, not just the fashion institutions. When the interagency is in place, then both parties are to blame for all the good and the bad reasons.

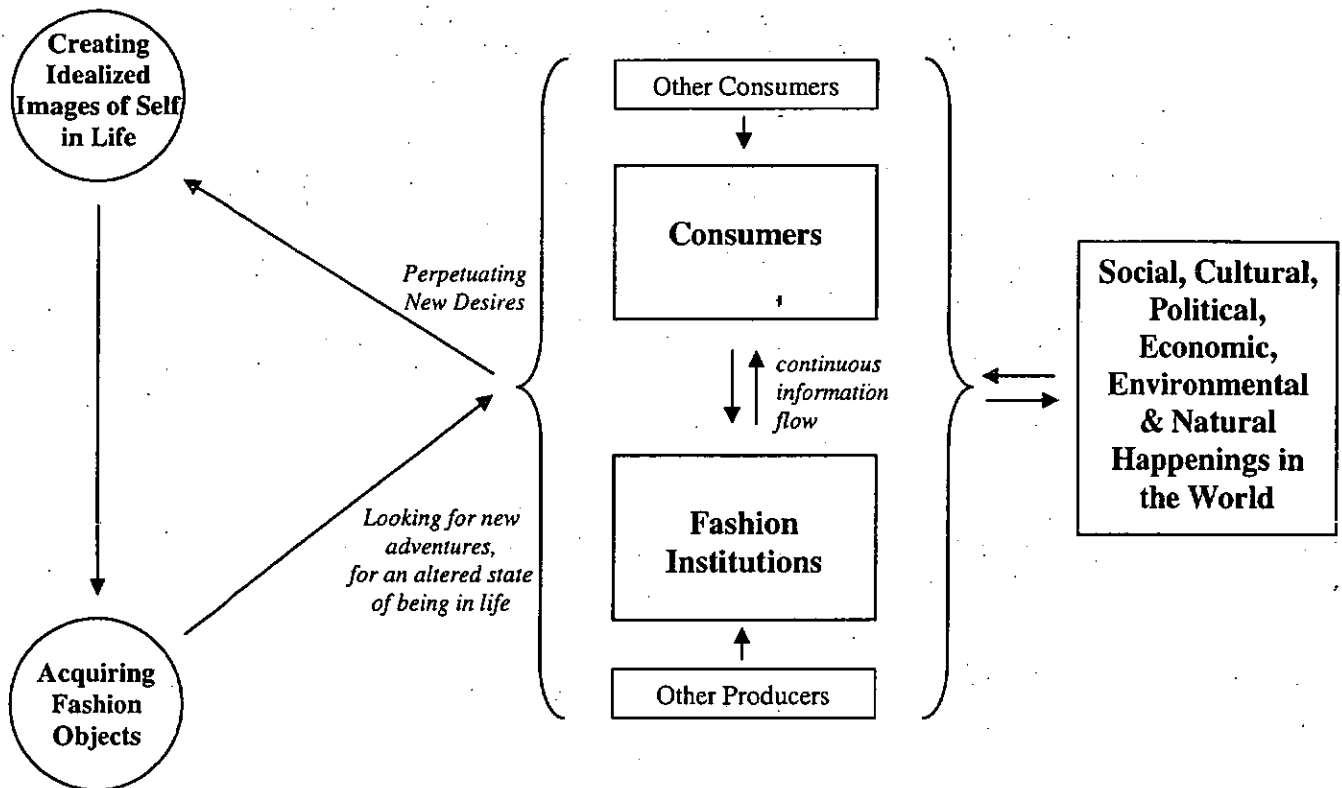


Figure 7 – The Interagency in Creation of Consumer Desires

(In Reference to the Endless Cycle of Desire)

Figure 7 above gives reference to this endless cycle of desire and the interagency between consumers and producers. Fashion institutions' managed exercise of change accommodates very well consumers' restless longing for an altered state of being, looking for new adventures in life.

***Beauty Myth as thin, tall, and young:***

Institutions like fashion advertising are inspirational sources for consumers' idealized images of self (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003; Ewen 1988; Goldman and Papson 1996; Murray 2002). For instance, they promote instructions for weight management and physical appearances, reinforcing these as essential for women's self esteem and social success (e.g. Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991). Accordingly, women are under the influence of these images, trying to fit in. However, since most women do not look like the advertised images, there have been strong criticisms of fashion as perpetuating a problem inducing beauty myth (e.g. Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991). In fact, for some like Anna, trying to loose weight to benefit from the fancy thin-oriented fashion design was not always a pleasant experience, causing reduced self esteem, and a feeling of not fitting in. Thus, the influential interagency process is not always without pain; it creates tensions, paradoxes, and frictions for trying to fit in, especially on the side of consumers. Ironically, these advertised images are exactly what fascinate consumers about the world of fashion, perpetuating their desires. For instance, consumers' discourses revealed that they have a reluctance towards fashion magazines and fashion shows since these advertised images are not representations of women from the real world; however, paradoxically, it is evident that they try to fit in with these

images as most participants were concerned about their weight and the younger look, and they were following the fashion trends also from these sources. On a practical level, fashion magazines or shows may not be a direct reference point for selecting products for oneself, but they are certainly inspirational for idealized images of self and informative about new fashion trends. Hence, a more common practice than reading fashion magazines or watching fashion shows has emerged as looking around and window shopping which are among the most inspirational sources stimulating consumer desires presumably because even if not intended for shopping, we still look around and observe our surrounding. Furthermore, once in the store, desires can be stimulated even more as consumers can feel, touch, and mix and match, in a state of fantasy.

Finally, this study also supports previous scholarly discussions (e.g. Lipovetsky 1987; McCracken 1988) as celebrities play an important role in fashion diffusion. Most participants had a celebrity in mind to whom they look up to for her beauty and talents, an idealized version of self they would have liked to become.

*Seduction:*

The system of fashion is also attached to seduction, emphasizing women's desire to feel and to look sexy. As the life course of women is delayed due to higher education and more involvement in the work place, fashion consumption is a way of fighting back against age since seduction is very much attached to the younger look. Again, this creates a burden on women for trying to attain this younger look. For instance, they involve in weight loss programs or plastic surgery.

Furthermore, consumers point to a fine line between looking feminine and overstating sexiness that may be interpreted as vulgar in society. This is also linked with their fear of attracting attention in a negative sense, and their desire for conformity with the socially accepted norms. They may desire to look sexier, but they are hesitant because of the norms. Therefore, others' judgments, within the larger socio-cultural context are also shaping this interagency, creating friction. Companies like D&G and Cavalli may emphasize the sexiness in their designs, but many women, although they may be willing, are not courageous enough to break the norms and expose their sexiness as these producers suggest. Mass consumers are more conservative with their styles with an inclination towards social prescription.

***Confidence and Power:***

Self esteem and success are also mediated by the appearance in modern societies (e.g. Davis 1992; McCracken 1988; Molloy 1975) as fashion institutions promote instructions for physical appearances, reinforcing these as essential for women's social success (e.g. Bordo 1993; Wolf 1991). Dressing up appropriately for the occasion makes consumer feel more confident facing others, which points back to the conformity with the social norms. This desire for feeling confident with one's dress came out more often during the discourse about the work atmosphere, especially for gaining the respect and confidence of others. This again puts a burden on consumers to try to fit in with these social norms for dressing up.

***Functions:***

Consumers preferably want to be fashionable without giving up their comfort (Dias 2003) of keeping warm or moving freely in their clothing, especially in daily life when they need to work and move in a rush. On the other hand, for some special occasions like night outs, they can also give up their comfort for more beauty and elegance, seeking the admiration of others. Producer discourse reveals that they pay attention to accommodate these more passionate desires at the same time enabling comfort through product design.

***Conformity versus Anti-conformity:***

A common consumer discourse was the desire for uniqueness, not wanting to be among other hundreds of similar looking people around. Consumers often made statements like "I like to make my own fashion" or "I have my own style." Paradoxically, the findings suggest that mass consumers, even the ones who are more fashion skeptical, are found to be noticeably conformist with the fashion system based on three different tensions.

The first is their fear of making a fashion statement that may not be fitting with the socially accepted norms, thus their anxiety of attracting the attention of others possibly in a negative sense (Wilk 1987), although they may have clashing desires like the desire to look sexier. In this case, overstating sexiness can be interpreted as vulgar in society, so they respect the norms.

The second is their mimetic desire (Girard 1977), observing, getting inspired by, and imitating others. Consumers constantly observe others in various social

surroundings like the streets, work atmosphere, social meetings, or even the dressing rooms in the stores. Others are among the most influential forces shaping consumer desires.

The third force pushing consumers towards conformity is the fashion institutions that reinforce the widespread availability of certain fashionable items more than others. Consumers stated that, at times, they were not able to find a specific clothing item in the market place because it was out of fashion.

### *Conclusion*

Already these different tensions mentioned above, pushing consumers towards conformity caused by their socially constructed fears of not fitting in, their mimetic desire, and the efforts of fashion institutions reinforcing certain styles and images, leave little room for consumers' individuality or resistance towards the fashion system, especially in mass consumption environments. Consumers' individual agency mostly lies in their ability to manage their purchasing power and their freedom to choose (e.g. du Gay 1996). However, today, the market is also organized to produce this experimental and symbolic freedom (e.g. Holt 2002; Murray 2002), like the case of Zara, which offers the opportunity to change often at affordable prices. For instance, mixing and matching from different market resources are consumers' efforts for trying to develop a sense of individual agency; it is like saying "I like to make my own fashion" for the desire of uniqueness and to feel more special in the social environment. However, they are still selecting from the market sources like everybody else.



The share of the social institutional forces is rather prevailing in this process of interagency shaping consumer desires within the fashion context. Fashion institutions are influential in promoting idealized images of self in life, instructional for constructing one's style, and informative of the new fashion trends, at the same time fueling the restless desire for change and reinforcing conformity with the availability of certain styles more than others. In addition, there are broader social forces at work on this interagency like the existence of others, their desires, their choices, and their judgments, celebrities from a cultural context, social events, or changing seasons; they can all have an impact in shaping desires.

On the other hand, there are different levels of this interagency; mass consumers are also fragmented as some are more resistant to change while others follow the new trends with much joy and excitement. However, this resistance is not about something radical; some people adopt fashion changes slower than others. Some consumers are more in control of their desire for change, which is mostly reflected in their shopping behavior. These are more fashion skeptical consumers often using utilitarian justifications for their consumption behavior. However, they are still acting at a level of desire rather than a need since boredom can stimulate their next shopping move.

Consumers' role as social interpreters (Thompson and Haytko 1997) is evident, but this does not make them sovereign individuals. Consumers' reflexive and interpretive actions often are not at the level of challenging collective identities or dominant consumption codes as some scholarly discussion have suggested (e.g. Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Ozanne and Murray 1995) since there are all these different

tensions pushing consumers towards conformity. Even the most fashion skeptical consumers are not rebellious to the point of being completely against the fashion system with the fear of taking the attention of others in a negative sense. Challenging dominant consumption codes may happen as an evolutionary act in longer time periods since change is not about something radical in mass consumption environments.

Furthermore, for some consumers, this interagency is a voluntary state:

Why should we say that we are victims of the system? I think this system is made for us. I cannot create fashion because I am not expert at it. So, the system is useful for me. It works for me; why should I look at it in a negative way? (Consumer FO: Gabriella 44)

Consumers do not always agree with every move fashion institutions make; however, they do not see them as enemies either, and they certainly do not consider themselves as victims. Many consumers enjoy the fashion system willingly, taking it as a guide, cheering their fantasies for idealized images of self in life.

Finally, this interagency process is not always painless; it brings tensions, paradoxes, and frictions like the struggles of women to try to fit in with the proposed beauty images, like wanting to look sexier but fearing the negative judgment of others, or like desiring to be unique but not to the level of complete isolation from others. This interagency is exactly what makes consumers social beings and their desires socially constructed.

### The Interagency in Creation of Fashion Trends

While looking at this interagency from the production angle, this study suggests that consumers may potentially have two circumstances where they can have a role in fashion creation. The first and more obvious one is that producers' success is measured with sales performance, and they constantly observe consumers. Not every new fashion is successful, diffusing to larger market segments, and producers cannot always predict what will sell. Thus, producers are not free in their creations as their interests are highly embedded with those of consumers'. This once more confirms the interagency; however, it does not necessarily give an active role to consumers in fashion creation. Producers offer many, and consumers accept some.

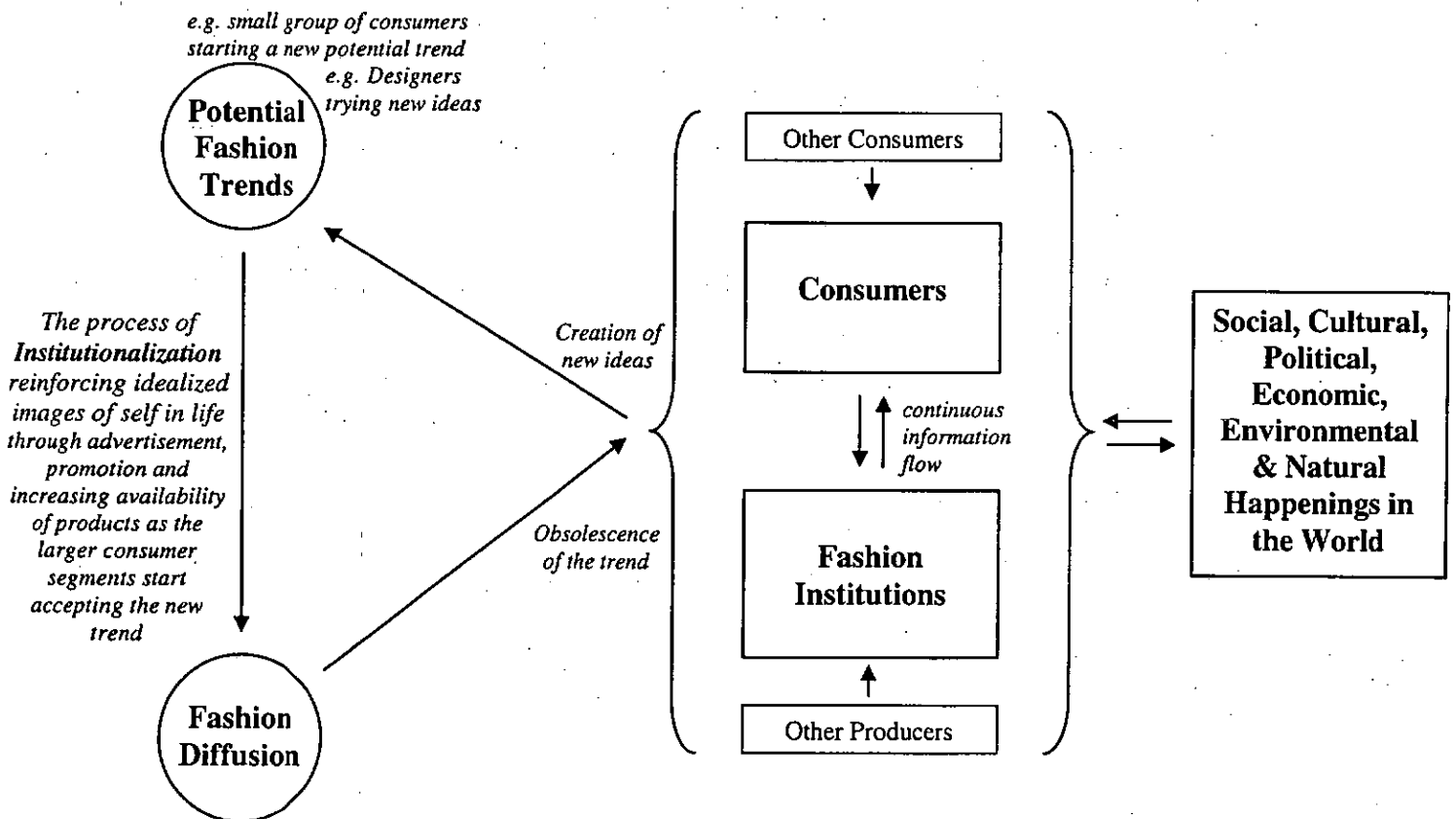


Figure 8 – The Interagency in Creation of Fashion Trends

(In Reference to the Cycle of Fashion)

On the other hand, as illustrated in Figure 8, some individuals who can have social influence often in their sub-culture surroundings can initiate a new potential fashion trend. However, these are often cool adolescents gaining the respect and admirations of their friends (e.g. Gladwell 1995; Kotlowitz 1999). Probably, a closer example to the mass consumer category studied here are some feminist groups who started adopting males' dress format, to assert their equal power at the work place (e.g. Wilson 1985), which probably still has an impact on women's dressing norms especially at work, but here it is evident that women also enjoy to show their feminine shapes and characteristics through fashionable clothing. Nevertheless, mass consumers often are not the ones who initiate the fashion trends like some activist or more radical consumer groupings. In this case, for working women, fairly busy in their family and work life, fashion represents a little escape from the daily burden of life, and change through fashionable clothing gives them new colors and excitements.

However, even in the case when a new fashion trend is initiated from the streets, there needs to be a process of institutionalization for fashion diffusion to happen. Trend searchers, journalists, or designers constantly observe social happenings and different consumption patterns, and they select some of the new ideas to be re-packaged for the larger market segments through fashion advertising and mass availability of certain fashionable products. Thus, trickle up diffusion of fashion does not happen in the reverse pattern of the classical trickle-down version (Simmel [1904] 1957), upper classes imitating the lower ones. It is mediated by fashion institutions, so a fashion trend such as vintage once initiated by low-income students' choice of second hand

clothing can now be observed in high fashion windows, also as a preference of different social groupings, including working women in this case.

In reference to big textile organizations in the world, Rinallo, Golfetto, and Gibbert (2005) illustrate in detail this highly institutionalized process from collective investment for trend forecasting to their announcement to fashion investors. Furthermore, Saviolo and Testa (2002) show this complex process of institutionalization within the apparel sector, investigating the structure and the competitive context of the fashion system from the management of creativity to the communication processes.

Although creativity is always sought after, designers and producers to a large extent also show conformity with the fashion trends of the moment. There is an inclination towards producing what sells most rather than experimenting radical creations that may involve the risk of not selling. In fact, as Grazia (High Fashion Retail Director) states only a very minor part of the collections are for the catwalk, while the major part is for mass consumption. The really important purchases are being made by the representatives of those firms which can produce vast quantities of any given design at a price which can be afforded, not by the rich elite, but the mass market (Bell 2003). Thus, also after the process of institutionalization, there is a period of uncertainty about whether a new fashion is accepted by the larger market segments, which points back to the evidence of the interagency, also in mass consumption environments. In fact, if the innovation is not adopted by the larger market segments, it is not likely to become a trend (Solomon, Bamossy, and Askegaard 2002). Thus, mass

consumers' greatest power lies in the fact that they just do not accept every new trend or styles that are radically different from what they are already wearing. Since the major part of the production in fashion industry calls for them, their share of this interagency is crucial both from a managerial perspective and from the consumer culture perspective, especially concerning the scholarly discussions about the construction of meaning within the fashion system. Innovations of new fashion trends may be initiated by producers or smaller consumer groupings like in a sub-culture setting, but the mass consumers act like a jury deciding if a particular innovation may eventually become a socially accepted norm. Thus, further consumer research should give more emphasis on mass consumption meanings and practices, which affect larger consumer segments.

In addition, the findings suggest that another circumstance preparing grounds for an active role of consumers in production is when a producer like a fashion designer is in direct contact with the final consumers, asking their desires, getting feedback about new creations. This is the most obvious form of interagency when the consumer in a way co-produces the new design with the producer.

Finally, the interagency is evident in fashion creation; however, it is not only limited to the efforts of consumers and producers; the interagency is within the larger context. As well as consumers' desires, designers' artistic inspirations are also socially constructed. Designers and producers constantly observe the social, cultural, or political happenings of the moment. For instance, a political event like the war in Iraq can bring back the military styles in fashion, affecting both consumers and producers.

Thus, future consumer research studying the interagency should also consider these influences from a broader social context.

### **Managerial Implications**

Both in theory and practice, any research conducted with consumers can produce relevant information for managers. Considering that a major part of production in fashion industry calls for mass consumers, developing a deeper understanding of their desires may directly impact product development, brand management, or communication strategies. Managers could consider the tensions, struggles and paradoxes created during this process of interagency and adopt their advertising strategies along these lines. For instance, since most women do not look like the advertised images, and they show reactions to fashion magazines and fashion shows, advertisers may develop new tools for making consumers feel more comfortable about these images.

Furthermore, managers could consider the broader social forces, shaping and controlling consumer desires like the desire to look sexier but at the same time having the fear of being interpreted as vulgar by others. They can also work on these norms, trying to overcome certain fears of consumers. Moreover, they can consider consumers' desire for uniqueness, developing tools for making them feel special. Also, the fact that many consumers insistently point at the better quality or fit of the high fashion brands, denying to expose their desire to exhibit the prestigious level these brands communicate in society, points at a psychological state of the consumer, which can be investigated by brand managers.

Finally, but not least, the findings suggest that some consumers, especially the ones who consider themselves not sufficiently skilled for dressing up in harmony, desire personal advisors, helping them to choose the best styles matching their body shape. Thus, companies may consider allocating personal advisers in certain stores. Such service can be given on an appointment basis with an extra charge to consumers, or it can be given free as a promotion of the store or the brand name to randomly selected consumers.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Limitations of this study mostly lie in its empirical setting and the methods used. First of all, the research is conducted in Milan, Italy, which is considered one of the fashion centers in the world. On one hand, this has been advantageous for being able to reach relevant fashion professionals and fashion sensitive consumers. On the other hand, to conduct such a study in another city of Italy or another country less absorbed with fashion may generate different results. Consumer desires are likely to be manifested differently in different cultures depending on socialization and cultural intermediaries such as advertising and marketing (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003).

One other limitation of this research is that it focused on fashion consumption of working women and not other consumer categories. One interesting future research may be to conduct this study also with male consumers from middle-class setting since men are increasingly consuming fashion products and cosmetics (e.g. Firat 1994). For instance, it may be interesting to investigate if men experience this restless desire for change as intensely as women or more, or less. If we follow the logic of some



scholarly perspectives (e.g. Fiske 1989) as women's participation in fashion may be their prime, if not the only, means of participating in the modern ideology of progress while men experience this feeling of progress more than women, having jobs that are usually more goal oriented, offering a sense of achievement; then can it be true that men may experience this desire for change in fashion clothing less intensely than women? As stated earlier, this study does not necessarily refute or prove Fiske's argument about women's fashion discourses; however, it suggests that this is not the only motive behind women's fashion consumption. The idea here is that men may experience differently some of the tensions created from the interplay of their fantasies and the social institutional forces, co-producing their desires. Furthermore, such study could combine different research techniques both qualitative and quantitative. For instance, some quantitative methods could be used, measuring consumer emotions or reactions towards different institutional forces such as advertising or media.

Finally, another interesting future research may involve the investigation of fashionable consumption patterns in other fields as any given consumption practice or conduct can become fashionable (e.g. Simmel [1904] 1957; Sproles 1974). The producer discourse in this study often emphasized this point as the apparel market is becoming more and more saturated; the wardrobes are getting full, and consumers are shifting their spending in other fashionable areas.

Fashion is important, but your style of life is also important; for example, today in Italy, a lot of girls are going to the gym. They are doing some Japanese exercise; it is special to have Sashu; very strange; they waste a lot of money for that... that is fashion; for example, mobile phones; they invest a lot of money for new design, new

color. Fashion now is life style... Today for example, in Italy, for young people, it is very important the small things for the house; the young girl goes to buy a special lamp. The money she used to spend in dresses maybe she spends it now for her room (Fashion Buyer: Gianni).

The professional discourse suggests that there is a shift of fashion consumption towards other sectors. If this is really what is happening also in larger market segments, than this is the victory of the fashion system. The study design here was limited to investigation of fashion in clothing; although some body related activities such as consumption of cosmetics, participation in weight lost programs, or involvement in plastic surgery came into the discourse. Nowadays, identifiable fashion trends are observed in other areas such as jewelry, cars, furniture, mobile phones, or travel destinations. It seems like fashion is becoming not solely about how one dresses, but about the entire concept of life style, yet this is not to suggest that women are giving up one of their most precious tools, the joy of dressing up, which gratifies their most passionate desires related to their idealized images of self in life. This is rather to suggest that nowadays dressing fashionably may not suffice for being in fashion. The notion of fashionability has expanded to other fields. Yet, as Davis (1992) suggests, no other field has organized itself so systematically on the managed exercise of change as apparel design. For instance, some consumers often change their mobile phones for a different color or design; some change their cars every few years; or some change their furniture frequently. However, are any of these changes as systematic as the change in clothing every season? Possibly, the clothing industry is still the master of fashion; and its institutionalized exercise of change is the reason why the word fashion is mostly

associated with apparel design. What are the chances of acquiring new mobile phones every six months or else in a systematic manner as a mass consumption practice? These are only little questions to stimulate further thoughts about the notion of fashion and the existence of an institutionalized fashion cycle in the apparel sector but not others. What other sectors could experience this fashion cycle not in a random but systematic manner? Some sectors in body related activities may be a guess like the promotion of winter and summer face creams. However, even a bigger speculation could be that fashion in clothing will continue to dominate the notion of fashion since clothing, also historically, has been and is the closest object to us, following us everywhere at all times after our body, mind, and soul, at least in the western world. Thus, we will always be concerned about our clothing, which influences our looks and appearance to others, unless western societies experience a radical change in the social norms or about being in life.

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## Appendix I

Trend book used during a projective technique with producers:

Zoom on Fashion Trends

Inspirations for seasons Spring / Summer 2006

**Technological Charm:** Evanescent appearance on highly tasteful structures.

Transparencies that enclose the new imaginary

Advanced production to enhance the shape

Unusual materials treated like fabrics and fabrics treated by technology

Soft density and stiffened lightness, veiled, pearled, silky, foggy, and charmed colors

**Live Surfaces:**

Nature surfaces as close by inspiration matter transformations through heat and light

Totally imperfect production to create new sense of touch

Ruffling, pleating, nuances, irregularities natural on the whole, surprisingly special in the details

Doughy colors mixed in their range

**Mixotic:**

Ancient wefts found a new in shape and production

World folklore filtered by one's own culture

Other women's shadows reflected in images of today's woman

Interlacing with precious hand care exotic taste in its most tribal interpretation

Color fusion justified by an environment

**Serial Tailoring:** Minimum changes radically change the product.

Industrial expression of handmade creativity, simplification of styles applied to a single base

Same model, completely different materials

Geometries sublimated in the care for details schematic and recognizable colors

**Private Protest Stories:**

Feminine protest, ironic, strong but sensitive instinctive very flashy graphics

Visual arts applicable to every surface manifestos of conceptual expressions worn air for a recognizable approach

Neutral hues scratched by full and fluorescent colors

**Woman Effect:**

Many women to make just one

Style to feel in the spotlight

Bring personality out with details

Apparently simple constructions

Different and even contrasting style assemblies

Colors crossed by lights

## Appendix II

### Highlighting Relevant Data in Each Interview

#### Total of 29 Interviews:

15 Fashion Consumers, 6 Fashion Designers, 8 Other Fashion Professionals

#### **FASHION CONSUMERS**

*(Listed in Alphabetical Order)*

##### 1) Anna

53 years old, married with one daughter of 24 years old

Interview date: 18.03.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her office in Milan.

She is working at the administrative department of a university

She has a degree in literature

My first impressions before starting the interview: Very quite, normal looking woman, not fat, not thin, she does not follow fashion very much as she says.

##### 1. Her feelings and Desires

- Comfort is the most important thing in clothing
- Practicality to wash and iron is also important
- Feeling "a posto"

If it is both comfortable and beautiful is great, but I don't sacrifice commodity to being in fashion. First of all, comfort is important. Also, I must feel myself, fitting me. For example, this can be the most beautiful dress in the world, but if I don't feel myself well in it, then I am not "a posto".

- She would like to be more elegant

(Looking at an ad in Vogue magazine) I like it because she is thin, maybe too much. I also find this clothing very elegant; this could be my style, if I was 30 years younger, x kilos less; I like it very much.

- She would like to be more sexy, but

...because I feel shy, and I don't think I have a nice décolleté. I don't like myself very much. I would have liked but I just don't do it; it is difficult that I carry dresses showing.

##### 2. Her Style

- Casual, comfortable
- She likes the textile that seem to be light
- The intimaes wear is important
- She does not like how young people dress up today



...especially, I don't like how the young people dress up today, the kind of dresses "poco curati", the kind of rotten jeans, or these young girls with the belly outside. If you are in the city I don't understand this, if you are at the sea side, this may happen. For each occasion, it must be the adequate clothing. If this is an informal occasion, you can dress up with not much care and less elegant, but in the office or at the university as a student, one must pay attention to the mode of clothing. By the way, I don't like because maybe I can't allow myself to dress up that way, maybe I am envious.

### 3. Her Behavior

- At the moment of purchase, she does not try on clothing

...I don't like trying on clothing in shops, apart shoes that are something easy to try on. I usually go to a shop; if I like something, I buy it without trying it on. Then, I arrive home, then it does not fit me, or to look at it is beautiful, but once worn I don't like it. Especially, in summer time, I sweat a lot, and I don't like trying clothing. In winter time, there are too many things to take off, and try on, so at the end, I don't like trying on clothing. I basically, look at clothing, see, feel my size, and buy it. Of course, sometimes sizes also vary among different models / brands of clothing. I kind of guess my size with eye judgment. I even have some pieces with their label on, I never put them before.

- She never throw away things

...If they are small size, I keep them because I am always hoping to loose weight; if they are big in size, I pass them to my mother who is a bit bigger than I am, or I look for somebody to give them away, or they just stay there in my wardrobe. I never throw away things, unless they are completely destroyed.

- She does not like shopping without actually buying something. If she ends up not buying, she is unhappy about it.

- She never has a specific idea in mind while shopping

- She does not like to take the attention of others, she does not want to be different (*see quotation below*)

- She is trying to look younger, more beautiful

...as the time (age) passes... this is a way of fighting back... so... one does not have lots of possibilities to recover, maybe trying to loose a bit of weight, making up.... (she is getting really emotional now, almost crying).

### 4. Influences on her Desires

- She likes to go to big stores

- The behavior of sales people is important

I don't like to be pressed looking at something. If you go to smaller stores, there is always a sale person who is trying to convince that a piece looks good on you even if it does not. This bothers me a lot. I like to be free. I look at things, touch them and feel them, I decide, I don't need somebody telling me if something looks good on me, when this may not be the truth. So, I prefer to go to big stores.

- Observing windows

- Money is an issue

In general no (she does not shop often), but if I am outside, wondering around, and I like something on the windows, I enter and look at them. But, very rarely, I go out with the idea of shopping, buying something specific. I go to Coin, I look around, if I see something I like, I just buy it. Also, I have tried before, if I go out for the purpose of buying something specific, I never find it. For example, if I need to buy something to go to a wedding, I just don't find anything. 99% of the time, it is like this. So, if I am around casually, I like something, I buy it. Also, I don't like to spend a lot on clothing, so if I like something, and it also costs little, wonderful, I buy it.

- She may end up buying something she saw on another person, but sometimes she does not look good in them

- She does not like fashion magazines

I think that these magazines are showing clothing that one cannot put on. I find these dresses really disconnected from daily life. Generally, I don't like fashion magazines; I don't read them. Sometimes, I receive them with news papers; even in the newspapers, the part about fashion, I jump. I always ask myself... where can you put such a dress? I don't find these ads, reflecting what I could be wearing, too much out of reality; normal people are not like these women; the dresses can be nice, but where can you put them, maybe you can have one occasion.

- Celebrities in TV programs are not an inspiration for her

I don't look very much at such TV shows, and if I do occasionally, I may like the way the actresses dress up, but I like only for looking, like looking at a panorama, but not as an inspiration to how I would like to dress up myself.

- She does not like fashion streets

- She does not look very often to fashion shows

Even if it happens that I look at them, I first think who would dress up such a way, like going to a carnival. How can you apply it to daily life? I look at them a bit laughing. It happens that you sometimes see some nice dresses, maybe Valentino sometimes, but again, I can never put such dresses. For example, it happens that I go sometimes to Via Monte Napoleone... the prices... I find them outrageous, absurd... but, even there, I never find anything interesting, I never like something to the point of saying, for such clothing I would spend a lot just to have it, but even if it cost the half price, I have never found something I like in that street... things (clothing) that are too strange... but also, I am the kind of person who does not like to be observed. I like to walk around being least observed as possible, so these dresses that are so extravagant are too risky for me to put on since they may take the attention. I don't like to take the attention not because I am dressed up too badly or not because I am dressed up too nicely. I put normal things, and you don't turn around to look at me, so if somebody puts such a dress (like the ones in Via Monte Napoleone), I would turn around and look, so I would like to avoid this happens to me. I have a low profile to avoid taking the attention, but this is my personality.

- She was having hard time to find the things she likes in the market

One reason I decided to loose more weight is to be able to find the things I like. For example, a shirt like this (showing her shirt), last year I could not put it on because first

of all I could manage to find the size, this one is a large. Loosing some more weight, I find more easily the things to put on. The colors of large (over) sizes are usually very sad, and they are a bit too grown up. I don't like to dress up so seriously, but without overtaking the limit of looking ridiculous. One should dress up at her age. I am not 20 years old anymore, so I cannot dress up like that. It is important to find a balance, the right combination for your age ...as the time passes... this is a way of fighting back... so... one does not have lots of possibilities to recover, maybe trying to loose a bit of weight, making up...

I have something to say. Fashion is too much oriented to thin people. Maybe I am a bit fixed minded here although I am quite normal as weight at the moment. You look at the shops and you find things for thin people, but half of population is not like that. This is a bit irritating because this makes you feel bad, not fitting in. I actually discovered a new shop, Conbipel; they seem to have normal sizes, not only for thin people, for example, this skirt, I bought it in Conbipel; they also have reasonable prices.

- Her daughter's opinions are important about the way she dresses up

5. What is she longing for now?

A night dress! A long dress, with all the "payette" (sparkling silver points)... It is like being in a fairy tale, a princess.

Also, dresses for spring time; she lost weight; last year's dresses do not fit her anymore.

2) **Barbara**

52 years old, married with one daughter

Interview date: 04.05.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her house in Milan.

She is a doctor specialized in microbiology, working in an hospital

She has a specialized degree in medicine – Microbiology

My first impressions before starting the interview: Nice looking women with elegant style, she likes and follows fashion as she says.

1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

Fashion represents the new to her, and she feels part of it. She likes to adapt new fashion trends to her own style, or vise-versa; she makes a synthesis of both as she says.

2. Her Feelings and Desires

- She likes décolleté with some modesty, but out of work
- Under all occasions, she likes to have a feminine touch  
Without too much visible emphasis, exaggeration, without being vulgar; a woman should emphasis her femininity. A woman should dress up like a woman.
- Quality is very important for her
- Material is important – easy to iron and wash

- Practicality is important – she can put her favorite dress in many occasions, day or night
- I have to feel “a posto”
- She likes to feel young
- She likes to be chic and elegant
- The age is an issue – as she mentions this couple of times; dress has to fit to the age

- Comfort is important

For sure we dress up with pants. Pants are part of our lives; they are comfortable, but I don't see women with pants, but we put them on. I think a woman should put skirts, and if she has to put pants; these have to have some feminine touch in them.

- She likes the change; the new, the change give her new excitements; this reflects into her daily motivation

People need to change; otherwise you could put a dress for twenty years, but change gives excitement, color, motivation to your life.

- At work: She dresses up more classical, formal, and plain styles.

### 3. Her Style

- Classical – elegant – chic – fashionable
- Plain with some fashionable touch

### 4. Her Behavior

- She likes to try new trends; if they fit to her taste, she makes them her style
- She does not always go shopping with a specific idea in mind; she may run into something that she likes and buy it.
- She can dispose of her clothing when they start not fitting to her (maybe she gained weight), or the style is really out of fashion. She gives them to others like family, friends, or poor people.
- She shops more or less every week
- She shops alone in general, sometimes with her daughter and friends

### 5. Influences on her Desires

#### *Looking at Vogue*

- She does not buy fashion magazines; she may look at them when they come on her way. She may like a dress, or even the representation of a dress, model, trend in the magazine, but this does not mean that will fit well to her. This may be because of her age, her body size. But, sometimes, she may also get inspiration for a style.
- She looks around, walks around window shopping; she enjoys window shopping
- She may like dresses on others; she may get inspiration for herself; however this does not mean that she will go buy the same dress.

- High fashion brands represent quality for her

Not necessarily that things have to be of brand names, but I like good things. Good does not always mean expensive, but I believe that for certain things, it is worth paying the high price because I use them longer. Rather than buying something cheap and not being able to use it; this is I think a much worse loss. I try to buy less but with higher quality from its use to its material.

- She frequents some shops more than the others because their product may have good fit for her.

- The store atmosphere is also very important;

- The behavior of the sales people

I remember something; a brand name that I liked a lot, I used to buy a lot; they changed the location of the store, and I don't go there anymore. I don't like it anymore because it is smaller, tight; I cannot find the things that I am looking for; I don't go there anymore. The space in the store is very important; how things are exposed. The behavior of the sales people is also very important. They have to make you feel comfortable. I hate when they follow your foot steps, being pushy; I can just leave the store at that moment. They have to be helpful to you without pushing you.

- She likes to watch Fashion TV, to follow trends from there, new designs, colors.

- She is not really interested to the dresses of celebrities

- Her daughter's and some of her friends' opinions may be important in her shopping decisions

#### 6. What is she longing for now?

She would like to buy some clothing in brown and burgundy colors because she has some accessories that fit to these colors and she heard that these colors will be in fashion.

### 3) Betty

41 years old female, divorced with one daughter

Interview date: 23.02.2005 duration: 1 hour.

Interview at her house

She has administrative duties in a university.

She had higher education in marketing.

My first impressions before starting the interview: Beautiful woman, thin and tall, also nicely dressed up, casual but elegant; she says that she follows fashion in the sense that she knows what is out there.

#### 1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

It (fashion) is an important part in every day life, more important to some others. More than anything, it is something positive I think because it can change; it can change how you feel, how you behave even towards other people, in both negative and positive senses. I think some people put too much importance on it, but it would be an awful place without fashion, without changing.

(Looking at an ad in Vogue magazine) I think it has its place... I think the world would be very boring if it was full of elegant dresses and suits, I think it is important to have different images, different styles, I would not personally wear it, but I don't have a problem with it.

- It is glamorous
- It is entertainment – with glamorous fashion show like in Rome, watching celebrities, models

## 2. Her Feelings and Desires

- It is fun (for her)
  - Practicality is important (she does not need to iron jeans)
  - Looking smart (also with jeans)
  - Comfort (jeans) – and she hates high heels because they are uncomfortable although they are elegant (*she is tall by the way*)
  - She loves black because it is slimming and because if everything in your wardrobe is black, anything will go with anything else.
  - She likes to be provocative (not at work, for night-outs)
  - She likes to feel sexy
- More than to look sexy, I enjoy feeling sexy. I often enjoy preparing to go out maybe for a dinner; having a nice long bath, making up. All that makes me feel sexy.

- Quality is important

I always look at the Armani clothes because I like the clean cut, not exaggerated. I would go buy an Armani suit, if I could afford it, but if I have to choose I would choose Armani; it will not age, you would wear it for a long time.

- She has to feel well in the dress
- She likes to feel unique although this may not be the case (as she admits by herself)
- She likes to change
- She likes the new – it makes you feel good, excited about wearing it
- At work: She used to wear business suits, but now she can put on more casual clothing

## 3. Her Style

- She loves jeans because you can look casual, but also smart with them
- She does not like big prints, big patterns, bright colors
- She does not like the clothes that don't feel well, also on others

I really hate the clothes that don't feel well, and I don't understand how people look at the mirror, and they think that it looks good while it is actually too small, too big, or whatever...

#### 4. Her Behavior

- She buys maybe two pairs of jeans a year, quite expensive, but she wears them almost everyday.

I think younger people follow fashion more closely. I, because of my income, because of my age, I buy a fashion clothing, maybe it costs a lot of money, but I know it will not be in and out within three months; whereas, my daughter would buy four cheap things, knowing that next season, she won't wear them anymore.

- She says she hates shopping.

- Her purchase decisions also depend on the mood she is in that day, as she says.

- Money is an issue

There are certain shops that are chain stores where I know that I don't have to try on the trousers because I know the cut. For example, Benetton, I could never ever wear their trousers because they don't fit me. I still like to go in there because I like the colors, to see what is in there. I usually go to stores where I know the trousers will fit me at a reasonable price; money is an issue here. If I had more money I would be shopping in totally different stores.

- She shops alone

I find it very difficult to go shopping with other people; for a start, I never end up buying anything. I don't shop sometimes for few months, and then I wake up suddenly, and think, let's look at what is around. I don't have to be shopping every Saturday or weekend. I go shopping for 2 reasons... one... I particularly need something... two... because that is just the mood... When you have something new in your wardrobe, it makes you feel good; it makes you feel excited about wearing it; excited about somebody commenting on it.

#### 5. Influences on her Desires

- She buys fashion magazines; she does not read them but looks at them

It is probably a wishful thing; it is almost like a pretend world; it is also about gathering information, what is in, what isn't in, not only clothing, but make-up, hair cut, shoes; part of it is... when you look through a magazine it is like wishing you were in that picture; you know she represents certain life style.

- She watches fashion shows in TV - although she does not watch TV very often, only news and documentaries

- Celebrities don't impress me she says - they are normal people like us.

- She can like things on others, but

I have a coat. I bought it because one day some friends came from London, and one of the girls was wearing this coat, and she looked so fabulous in it that I asked her to order one for me and bring the next time she comes over, and she did so, and I hated it on me! I never wore it, and still sitting in my wardrobe; ok that was an unusual situation when I did not actually buy it myself, and I had somebody else buy it for me, but I also think it depends on the mood you are in; you can go to a shop, try it on, like it, and then you don't see yourself in it anymore.

- She likes to wonder around in high fashion shops like Corso Como 10, but this is too expensive for her.

- Sales people behavior is important
- Other customers in the shop can influence (negatively)
- Shop atmosphere is important

Shops also depend on shop assistants. In London, you can go to a shop, you pick up, you can try, you can change. Here in Milan, in some shops, the moment you enter to a shop a person comes next to you and asks if you need some help; sometimes you just want to browse; there was one shop which had very nice things; the shop assistant told me that I could not touch anything. I never stepped in that shop again, and I never will. The atmosphere in the shop... the other people, customers are also important; it has an effect on you; if you go to a shop full of old ladies, you question if you are in the right place; also I hate department stores; I go very rarely; it feels like too much for the masses; when you go into a small shop, at least you can pretend that there are not going to be 50 other women wearing the same thing; it feels more fun, more original; probably it isn't but I feel better, more special.

- The opinion of her daughter does matter while selecting a fashion piece for herself. Nobody else matters.

- She likes the critic of others once she has bought the dress herself.
- Season gives the stimulus to shop

Giving that Spring approaches, I now become more aware of the shops again. I hate winter; it is so nice to see the spring colors, light colors. Spring is the time I shop the most because it is the beginning of a new year (in nature); you want something new in your wardrobe.

#### 6. What is she longing for now?

*See quotation above – season*

#### 4) Cecilia

25 years old, married

Interview date: 16.03.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her house in Milan.

She is working as an intern in a consulting company

She has a master degree in Industrial Engineering

My first impressions before starting the interview: Nice, quite girl, nothing really takes my attention in her way of dressing up, very casual but neat, she likes fashion as she says.

#### 1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

What I see the most on other people is fashion for me since I don't follow fashion shows or fashion magazines very much. Trend is what I see the most in the street.

#### 2. Her feelings and Desires

- To be comfortable
- She also likes to be chic (she loves her white Capri pants that are both comfortable and chic at the same time)



- Elegant in special occasions
- Suitable for the season
- A bit of décolleté in special occasions (to look sexy)

If the dress is nice I think it's good to show it a little. Not with ordinary clothing, but... It's not like unbuttoning a regular shirt far down low, but... I like some décolleté on a nice piece of clothing going to an elegant place. How do I feel? I feel very good and beautiful. As long as you keep it in that measure there is no problem.

- To be more beautiful
- More attractive
- At work: She dresses up a bit more serious

### 3. Her Style

- Very comfortable
- Very casual
- She likes to be chic, but not too chic
- Plain, clean cuts
- She does not like heavy, big patterns, bright colors
- Black is the color she chooses for being elegant

### 4. Her Behavior

- She shops at Sisley, Zara, but if she had more money she would shop at Armani
- In general, she does not go to shops with a particular idea in mind.
- She likes to follow fashion; if the trend is red pullover, she likes to buy that red pullover.

### 5. Influences on her Desires

- She follows fashion and trends by observing people in streets. For example, this year she has seen very often flat boots, and finally she bought one pair.
- She does a lot of window shopping, walking around
- She does not watch fashion shows, only randomly
- She enjoys looking and reading fashion magazines, but she does not buy them
- Space and harmony in the store is important, she likes big comfortable shops.
- She feels bothered from sales people who come up to her as soon as she enters the shop.

I like big shops, but not necessarily department stores, for example the Sisley shop in Duomo. It is big, there is lots of space, and everything is combined according to color harmony... I just like to shop in big comfortable stores. I don't like boutique shops where as soon as you enter somebody comes up to you. I like shopping and looking alone. In general, I don't go to shops with a particular idea in mind. Unless I have to shop for a special occasion such as wedding I may need assistance in the shop, but

generally I like to look, find, select alone, that is why I prefer big stores where I can find everything, and not many people get on my way.

- She may get influenced by the way celebrities dress up in TV shows; she used to like a model as an example for clothing style both during fashion shows and on her daily life.
- She also thinks of her boy friend's taste while shopping, also her mom.
- She thinks high fashion brand name make a difference with their quality

6. What is she longing for now?

She would like very much to buy the beige trench coat she has been seeing on others in the street.

5) Daniela

42 years old, married with three children

Interview date: 14.04.2005 duration: 45mn

Interview at her house in Milan.

She is giving courses at the Commune of Milan for adults

She has a degree in teaching

My first impressions before starting the interview: Nice looking woman, thin, tall, young casual style, she does not follow fashion as she says.

Note – She was really in rush and could spare me only 45mn; it was hard at the beginning to get to the relax mood for an interview. I felt like I had to move fast.

1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

I don't follow fashion; I did not like it not even when I was younger; I always wanted to go against fashion. Now, that I am older, I have a style, but I have it since many years; I am always in black. Sometimes if there is a color that I like I buy it, but in general I try not to follow fashion.

...because I have a style of my own that I like. For example, if the fashion is the low waist pants, I don't go around with really high waist pants, but I don't put low waist either; it is somewhere in the middle

2. Her feelings and Desires

- She likes to have a style on her own
- Comfort is important
- Black and grey colors and tight shirts make her look thinner – to look thinner is really a desire of her, she mentions it a lot – she is quite thin by the way compared to an average woman.
- Dolce Vita keep her sensitive throat warm
- She likes to be feminine – masculine looking pants with long nails, make up...etc.
- She can dress a bit provocative, out of work
- She likes to be elegant at special occasions
- She does not like to look like "signora"

*Especially, for the desire of looking younger; nobody says, "I want to look younger," but this comes out through the interviews.*

- She likes to feel free, light (like 70's) – Mony too
- At work; she is serious - but out of work she can put on more elaborated things.

You realize that when I teach, the major part of my students is male adults. I cannot show anything; I cannot be provocative. I have to be serious, but otherwise, I may like showing a bit, using transparent (parts) dresses; some little opening cuts, but I don't like breast décolleté since I have nothing to show; instead I like showing a bit the legs. That is why I like mini-skirts a lot, maybe with some shoes with low heels or boots.

### 3. Her Style

- "Ostero" – a bit like man, few accessories
- She loves "Dolce Vita" – turtle neck shirts
- She likes black, white, or grey – no colors
- She likes tight fitting – not loose.
- She likes Armani
- She does not like too sexy, showing, exaggerated – you have to be beautiful to show a bit
- But, she also liked ethnic, more colorful dresses while looking at Vogue; she says she may put them out of work

### 4. Her Behavior

- She thinks a lot before buying, she imagines herself, and she also tries
- She does not have much time for shopping

### 5. Influences on her Desires

- She does not like shopping very much; her husband convinces her most of the time to go shopping and influences her to choose – she likes to make her husband happy in this sense

- She does not read fashion magazine, but when she was look at Vogue, she started to like many designs; she kept liking Blue Marine ads, but she never bought one before.

No, I never had such piece, but probably just because I am not aware of it. You know why I keep buying Armani pants because I know those pants fit me, and I only look for them, so maybe I don't see the others, or don't even consider.

- She may like things on others – "Yes... maybe I like the way it suits the other person, but it is very difficult that I go buy it for myself..."

- She likes the editor of Vogue USA as style – she saw her in media; she is in her 50's, but she really likes her style.

### 6. What is she longing for now?

She would like to have a light color summer dress

## 6) Gabriella

44 years old, married with one daughter

Interview date: 02.05.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her cosmetic-beauty saloon

She has no university degree, only certificates on cosmetics

My first impressions before starting the interview: Nice looking woman, casual-elegant, she likes fashion, as she says.

### 1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

Fashion for me is something beautiful, something that gives color and changes to life, something that gives me idea and helps me to fix my own style... To be able to dress differently from one year ago, to see yourself differently in mirror... This is not something I am specialized in, so I am able to choose from a designer that I like, to get ideas for how I can dress, how I can make these little changes in my way of dressing up. For example, if I had flat shoes all last summer, and if the fashion is high heels for this summer; I can make this change in my self, to see a different self, to feel the new soul that the dress gives me.

### 2. Her feelings and Desires

- She likes the change
- Quality of the material is important
- Comfort
- Not taking too much attention
- She likes to have a feminine touch in her way of dressing up, in every

occasion

I don't really like to use too much décolleté or to take out my feminine shapes, but I would have liked because you can do it if you have it in your soul. There are women who can present this way of being in an appropriate, or in contrary in a very vulgar manner. If you have this in your soul, to show your feminine shapes, to look sexy, you may carry it nicely. Then, you can even take attention even if you don't show anything. I don't know it well because I don't have this soul. If I dress décolleté now, I also would take attention, but it is like telling I want to take your attention using my feminine shapes. I don't like this very much... It is about having a little feminine touch in your way of dressing up and behaving feminine. I just don't like to exaggerate this side, but I like to look chic and feminine, not vulgar.

- She likes to feel unique, different

I don't get influenced by a person I see for two minutes. I can get influenced by my friends if I like their style, although I like to influence more. I think it is nice to be followed by others, although I don't like it very much.

I like to be different. I like to have an idea of the season's fashion, and then I like to create my own fashion. I don't buy a complete set from the same store. I like to dress up my own style.

- She likes the lapin fur because it keeps her warm without sweating her
- Feeling "a posto"

3. Her Style

- Her style is not so extreme. She describes her style as classical-modern.
- Plain colors
- She likes plain chic like Chanel

I don't like too much décolleté. I don't like this wild look in woman. I don't like to take too much attention. Or, I don't like too casual, like hippie type. As I said before, I don't like the extremes. I am a bit more classical, not taking too much attention, something that is my own style, and I feel comfortable in it.

- She does not like too exaggerated, too brilliant, too colorful, too heavy. I get bored from some of them, after wearing them so much, especially for daily dresses, but for very special dresses, such as a night dress, this may not be case. Getting bored is more valid for daily wear.

I don't change radically in different occasions. You may have a style and just change a bit. I don't change too much. I may dress in all occasion feminine – not exaggerated, chic, and good quality.

4. Her Behavior

- She also does "Diderot effect" shopping
- For jeans she likes Diesel

For jeans, I really like Diesel; then there is a boutique next door, I really like their styles and cuts. But, what I buy does not have to be necessarily those brands, because if I find a clothing piece that carries the same cuts and style elsewhere I may also buy those. There are many companies producing jeans, but Diesel jeans has a very nice fit, no matter which style you buy from them. It fits well.

- Time is an issue

I don't like shopping with a friend, sometimes with my husband, he gives me nice ideas. but with friends, I like to be free in deciding. I shop fast, I don't stay too long in shops. I would go to a shop, if I like something, I buy it and get out... I don't like to give too much time to shopping, maybe also because of work, I don't have much time. I am not very much undecided while shopping. I know what I want in advance; sales people are not able to change my mind. They can help me to find something, but if I am decided they cannot change my mind. If I am there to buy a blouse; they cannot sell me pants.

5. Influences on her Desires

- Window shopping
- Fashion TV
- She buys and read fashion magazines

*Looking at an ad in Vogue*

When we think of fashion, it is really about extreme ends, fashion should use these ends, but I just don't choose these extreme ends. I would not choose this style, but then I may choose this brand because this ad takes the attention. It takes my attention because a company that is able to create such an extreme style can also produce normal styles, so I may say they know the business.

- Price is important
- The behavior of sales people is important
- The store atmosphere

The behavior of sales people is very important here. Some of them they don't pay attention to you at all, while some others are very pushy on you. Both situations bother me a lot. They should at least give some guidance without being so pushy. That boutique that I was talking about has really nice sales assistants; they also know my style now. The decoration is also important, the lightning, how the products are exhibited; you must find what you are looking for comfortably.

- She gets influenced by the way her favorite celebrities dress up... their personality plays an important role here, not only the way they are dressed up.

- Her husband opinions are important
- She may get influenced by her friends
- Trends influence her

For example, the pointed shoes have been in fashion. I did not like them because they make the foot look very long and big, but finally I ended up buying one, thinking it is fashion.

Why should we say that we are victims of the system? I think this system is made for us. I cannot create fashion because I am not expert at it. So, the system is useful for me. It works for me; why should I look at it in a negative way?

6. What is she longing for now?

At the moment, I really want a lot of things; for example, if I see such blouse (showing an ad), I would buy it. But, I have not found yet what I am looking for...

7) Luana

27 years old, single female

Interview date: 14.02.2005 duration: 1 hour 15mn.

Interview at her house in the center of Milan.

She is working in an art gallery (well known in Milan- in Brera zone) since 3 years.

She has a university degree in Literature with a concentration in "Art".

My first impressions before starting the interview: Very cheerful, cute girl, also she has a nice style of dressing up, casual but with care; she likes fashion as she says.

1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

Fashion is something that fascinates me! It is like approaching something that is really not your world; it is like a fairy tale, everything is beautiful, models, dresses, accessories.

- It is fascinating
- It is like a fairy tale
- It is like a dream
- Everything is beautiful, models, dresses...
- It is like approaching something that is not really your world

- It is expensive (referring to high fashion)
- You really don't have the occasion to use them

## 2. Her feelings and Desires

- Play
- Irony
- Fun
- She feels light

(While showing a red, brilliant, crazy looking favorite pants) I buy these things when I am in bad mood so, I need something "divertente" (fun), and "allegro" (light), then I buy these; these are important pieces of my wardrobe, but I put them few times.

- Feeling of security (self-confidence)
- She feels "a posto"
- To be beautiful
- Feminine
- She does not like anti-feminine styles
- Elegant
- She likes to feel unique, different – to distinguish herself from others

I don't like to be among the one of the hundred people around; we are all unique individuals with different personalities, and it is nice to make this aspect shown with little details on clothing.

- She is not tall, so she likes to put high heel shoes
- Black hide things
- Dress has to fit you
- Comfortable (at free time)
- At work: elegant, sometimes classical but with a special touch

I work alone, so the (art) gallery is very important and elegant; everything is nice around, so for the people who visit our gallery I dress nice. I have the feeling this gives them security about the profession. There is a difference between meeting a person smiling, well-dressed, secure of herself and meeting a person who is not happy with the work she is doing, reflecting it with the careless way of dressing up.

- She likes to change
- She likes to be sexy a bit

## 3. Her Style

- She thinks she is original, not with a precise style
- She mix things
- She likes particular things, not banal
- She loves shoes (she has dozens of pairs, all lined up neatly)

I like different things of various designers. I like for example night dresses of Gucci because they are taking out the femininity of women; I like the elegance of Armani,

clear, linear... shoes of Manolo Blani... classics of Prada... there are many things I like of different designers, and I like a lot vintage.

- She likes natural material that do not have much synthetic inside
- Black is elegant and hides a lot of things
- Not strong colors, clean cuts

#### 4. Her Behavior

- When she likes things, she just buys them – she is an instinct buyer (as she says). Price can sometimes stop her.
- The crazy pieces she likes in her wardrobe, she cannot always put them because she does not have many occasions for them.
- She does not like to throw away clothing as fashion changes because fashion is like a cycle, and things come back (as she states).
- She does not change everything, every season  
There are immortal things, such as a classical suit; there are also things of good taste that I will never change; they have special aspects, but yes, there are things I change every season.

#### 5. Influences on her Desires

- She may like dresses on others, but this does not mean she will look good in them
- She sometimes makes her own creations like dying her Levis jeans, giving special effects
- Each brand name has an image in her mind
- It is nice to look at celebrities, but

In normal life people don't dress that way... yes I may like few things.... But who knows how much they cost; it is good to look at sometimes.

- Fashion magazines do not reflect reality; she looks at them, also reads them to have an idea of fashion trends.

What I don't like is that some people look at a magazine, and go buy the same dress, even sometimes that is bad taste; the pictures you see in magazines are of models with perfect bodies; we are not like that, so we cannot just choose out of magazines. I don't like a woman in her 50's wearing a mini skirt because it is fashionable; it is bad taste, and it bothers me; dress has to fit to the person.

(Looking at a picture in Vogue) Africa... ethnic... It is nice but I would never be able to put the whole ensemble; maybe the necklace, but not the dresses... yes, yes maybe the skirt is nice, but on me this would look ridiculous... all these colors... nice... these are not for every day people; they are beautiful because you can have the idea for the season, but then you construct your own ensemble; you can have the zebra design, but not on the whole dress, maybe a little part of it... a little touch... but these things are not practical, they are nice on journals... nice to look at.

- Window shopping



- Following fashion trends

Now you will make fun of me... When it is the time for new collections, I buy a fashion magazine like Vogue, and learn about next season's trends, and sometimes, I make some notes, or keep those pictures for next season, and when the season arrives, I look for those new trends in shop windows.

- She goes to fashion streets, but

...but not Monte Napoleone. There may be other shops selling mix brand names, maybe with less variety, but I find these stores... also I feel a bit embarrassed in Monte Napoleone, a bit nervous. I am from Riccione in Emilio Romagna; also there, there are very nice shops; since I grew up there, people know me when I enter to a store; there is more friendship. Even if I don't buy anything, they show me fashion pieces; I do not feel the same comfort in a Gucci shop in Monte Napoleone. I prefer the shops in Brera... little shops with special things.

- The behavior of sales people and shop atmosphere is important

- She used to choose some dresses, considering the tastes of her boy friend, but now less.

Couple of years ago, I used to select my clothing considering the tastes of my boy friend; nowadays, I understood that I have to like it first. It is actually half a way; first I have to like and feel "a posto" with it then I also pay attention that others like it on me; it is half a way.

6. What is she longing for now?

Shoes... I am addicted, so I will always buy, but now, I really would like to have a night dress, for spring. I need to change... new season...

8) Maria

37 years old, female, married

Interview date: 15.03.2005 duration: 1 hour and 10 mn.

Interview at her house in the center of Milan.

She is an assistant professor in a university

She had PhD in Business Administration.

My first impressions before starting the interview: "Petite" size girl, very modest clothing, elegant but classical with darker colors; she says she is not a big fashion fan.

1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

I think of... my initial thought is the catwalk! the crazy clothes, crazy hats, and things that maybe nobody will ever wear, but they are very daring.

2. Her feelings and Desires

- She likes Camper shoes because they are funny and a bit different.
- She dresses up because she enjoys
- She may buy the new because of boredom from the old
- She would like to be different from her own conservative way of dressing up – she would like to be more daring

- She like to feel different (from others) – she enjoys the gaze of others (to her particular boots)

- Dress has to fit
- Comfort is important
- She does not like to see on others clothing above their ages – grown up
- She likes the idea of looking sexy, but

I was never sure about this. I think it depends on why you are doing it. I don't like the idea for example, if you go to a business meeting and you dress up very provocative, I don't like that; you are doing it for other reasons, maybe you want a promotion. I don't like using body for other means. You dress sexy because you enjoy it, you do it for yourself; other people will look at you and that makes you feel good; then why not?

- At work: She puts suits, but with a special touch if she can

### 3. Her Style

- She thinks she is very conservative, not daring – although she would like to be the opposite

- She is more classical
- She likes Camper shoes
- She does not like to put high heel shoes

Because they are uncomfortable, also I think it will attract more attention to the fact that I am short. People will think that I am upset because I am short and wearing high heels, but I am not upset so...

### 4. Her Behavior

- She says she would behave differently if she were more brave and had more money

- She is a very prudent / difficult buyer

I go shopping sometimes with my sister or my husband, or on my own, but when I go on my own, I ever buy a thing when I see it for the first time. I look at something; I think I like it, but then I go back to make sure...

- For sometime when she was in London (for 8 years), she bought the same things all the time because it was simple – always black and grey; in Milan it is a bit different, she pays a bit more attention.

- She says she only buys when she needs something – and she says she already knows what she wants

Normally, because I feel that I need something; I haven't got many things in my wardrobe. I have many more summer things; my summer wardrobe is colorful, it has many skirts. In winter, I feel very cold, so in winter my objective is to keep warm and keep comfortable. But in summer, I do have more impulse buying, more colorful. Maybe I have four pair of winter shoes, but I have more summer shoes. I think it varies on the season.

How do I realize (I need something) because I look at my wardrobe and I think I don't have certain types of trousers, or some trousers I wear more than the others, or maybe I don't like them so much. Maybe something is old and I had it for a long time; I think it

is more a utilitarian reason rather than... no but you could argue that I don't need anything so why do I buy it. I just feel that I need it, maybe boredom too.

- She does not enjoy shopping
- \* She may add few new things to her wardrobe every season, but she does not like throwing away clothing

#### 5. Influences on her Desires

- She likes to watch fashion shows although she thinks she is completely the opposite – not daring.

- Once, to buy a dress and boots, she got inspiration from 1960's, Barbara Streisand way of dressing – as she says

- Friends while shopping may influence negatively – made her buy something she does not feel so well about – not her taste

- Sales people should not come and ask you all the time
- Space in the shop is important – she does not like messy atmosphere
- She may like things on others

There is a friend of mine, and she always dresses... she has a lot of money, she buys like D&G, she has tight leather pants, high boots... things that maybe even if I had the money to spend I would not buy, but I like to see on other people, but I wouldn't dare... again I think it is a bit the daring...

- Her husband makes her buy clothing sometimes
- She hates ads where “selling clothes by selling bodies” – women naked, pretending having pleasure
- She does not buy fashion magazines, but sometimes they come free in news paper and she may look at them, but she does read them.

Often, I think... Yea... nice, nice, nice, I will never wear these things, that is why I don't buy the magazines, and one thing I never do is going into a shop and buying something I have seen in magazine. I never do that.

- She likes going around fashion streets – window shopping there, although she never bought anything

- Seasons are important to stimulate desires
- She would like to have a personal adviser for dressing-up in a one stop shop where she can buy the complete set

- Celebrities do not influence much the way she is dressed up  
...when I see somebody, I look at them, I see how they are dressed, but for me that is not the most important thing. I don't really give too much weight to it.

Before going to London, I was much more aware of what I was wearing, but I think because I was more aware of other people's thoughts, how they judge the way I dress, and now I don't really care. I mean I want to look nice, I want to feel comfortable, but if people think that I don't dress nicely it bothers me less, so that has changed and living in London where people really don't care helped me realize that fashion is not an issue for me... a change through time!

6. What is she longing for now?

One thing that has been always in my dreams is going to a shop that has everything from shoes, to bags, hats, watches... everything... you know these personal advisers, people that help. Often I see a dress, I really like it, I would like to buy it, but then I ask myself what shoes am I going to wear with it? or I have an idea, but then I have to go look for them. I just can't be bothered, so my dream is to have one stop shop, to have somebody who can advise you and help you to choose because I would imagine that such a shop would have so many choices; that is the kind of place I get confused too.

9) Miki

26 years old, single

Interview date: 19.04.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her house in Milan.

She is an assistant in real estate shop

She has higher education as a stylist, and she had computer courses

My first impressions before starting the interview: Sweet, cute girl, casual but with a style – colorful, she likes fashion as she says.

1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

Fashion is very important. I don't follow fashion. Let's say, I make my own fashion... When a new fashion comes up every year, it is not actually new. It is taken from previous years (60's...), it comes back renovated. It is a cycle. A person of 2005 can dress up like the person of 60's, so it is important. I make my own fashion, but of course when I see things around, I am influenced.

2. Her feelings and Desires

I like Jean Paul Gaultier very much. It (his products) is strange, extravagant. If I could, I would dress up his way, but walking around with such extravagance is not easy; especially in Milan, they critic a lot. All the strange styles, they notice immediately.

- Feeling of fun
- She likes to take attention
- She likes elegance
- Comfort is important especially at work

For night out, I change completely. Yes, I put high heels. I like to show myself and take the attention. Instead, at work, I still like elegance, but more sportive, and comfortable. We go around showing houses, climbing stairs, so I have comfortable shoes.

- She likes to look sexy but with some kind of modesty

3. Her Style

- Sportive, casual
- She has her own style she says
- She likes warm colors for spring/summer
- Dress has to fit, size is an issue

I like Zara! also Benetton because their jackets fit me (the only place). I am a petite person, so it is difficult to find my size, but Benetton has stuff for girls of 16 years old. They have my size. Maybe at Zara, I don't always find my size, but there are a lot of stuff, and I like it.

- When she likes something a lot, she buys two pieces of the same, so if one gets spoiled she uses the next one.

#### 4. Her Behavior

- She shops in cheap stores and open market, also Zara
- She is a impulse buyer
- Every season, she buys something new, she has a big wardrobe. The things that don't fit at home, she takes them to her parents' house.

#### 5. Influences on her Desires

- She loves to look at fashion TV
- She looks at fashion magazines
- Window shopping
- Jean Paul Gautier's design is a great influence

Via Torino (middle class), I like to go to Pimko (very cheap, a bit crazy, trendy young store). I like to go around. I also go to the market. Looking at the windows, if I like something, I enter to the shop immediately and I buy because then I don't like saying: Oh! I liked that but I cannot find it anymore, it is finished. In the afternoons after work, I go around also because I am curious to know what is around.

- History – She likes 1700' very much, the style of people then
- She cares about her boy friend's and her mom's opinions
- She admires Eros Ramazotti's ex-wife (Michel Hunziger) as a celebrity.

She likes everything about her, her beauty, her sympathetic behavior, her high spirit, and the way she dresses up.

#### 6. What is she longing for now?

There is not a fix dream, she just would go around and buy everything she likes; she would shop in D&G, Moschino... She would like to dress up like 1700, but she cannot in Milan.

### **10) Monica**

27 years old, single female

Interview date: 16.03.2005 duration: 1 hour 15 mn

Interview at her house in Milan.

She is working in a bank

She has a master degree in Economics

My first impressions before starting the interview: Thin, tall, attractive girl, with business suit during interview, fashion is not a concern in her life as she says.

## 1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

I don't know. I think that I'm more negative than positive ... because lets say more than %50 of windows are full of colors but without any style, without anything different... pieces of dresses of clothing that can be useful wherever, and than sometimes I think that it's also stupid when there is some fashion for example this kind of skirt is... in Vogue so everybody wears this kind of skirt, I mean for me it's stupid because I think fashion is something that you have to adopt to yourself it's not that you have to adopt to the fashion.

## 2. Her feelings and Desires

- She gets entertained thinking what she will wear at work the next day
- Her mood changes everyday for dressing up; today she may like the grey suit; tomorrow the mini skirt; there is not a favorite dress

- Comfort is important
- Practicality is important (to wash / iron)
- She likes to change because she gets bored
- Elegant at special occasions and work
- Freedom in movement
- She likes to look sexy – seduction

Some women want to show to men. I want to show myself to myself because if I like myself with mini-skirt, I will wear that skirt. For example, if I have beautiful legs I want to see my legs, but it's not that I want to show them to men. And then I think that if a woman is beautiful, she can show the beautiful thing that she has. For example, I know that I have small breasts so I am not going to put some dress that has large... how to call it... you know what I mean (décolleté) because, I'll be ridiculous, so I'll put things that maybe... not that they hide but they make me look good. Also, if you show and don't show at the same time for example if you have a skirt... how to say... little cut, it's much better than having a very short skirt, because if you show everything than there is nothing to discover.

- At work: 5 days a week, she wears business suits; skirt is usually mini because she likes to show her legs that are beautiful as she thinks. She likes to be elegant at work

## 3. Her Style

- Elegant at work
- Casual – jeans / skirts in daily life
- Color harmony is important

## 4. Her Behavior

- Money is an issue (very much) – she does not like to pay high prices for high fashion brands while she can find same quality in no name brands; she does not like to spend too much money for clothing.
- She only shops when she needs something

Ninety-nine percent of the time, I have the exact idea about what I need. For example, I need a suit with light color, but I have only black so I think spring is coming, summer is coming, and I need more joyful stuff, so I start to look in these things. Rarely, I could count examples where I would see something and I buy it. But I buy what I look for. If I go to buy shoes I only look for shoes; I don't look at other things.

5. Influences on her Desires

- She does not buy fashion magazines, but she looks at them if she runs into one by coincidence. Most of the pictures we see in fashion magazines are not for daily life, they are extreme, maybe for carnival.

- She is negative about brands that abuse ethics such as Nike – exploitation of child labor; Benetton using child labor in Africa.

- She may like things on others

You know when I see somebody who is dressing up the way that I like I just enjoy it. I mean because I think that everybody has his/her own style, and if it stays good on him or on her it does not mean that it will stay good on me because maybe the dress is very beautiful, but if my personality is different then I will be silly with this dress even if it's beautiful because if I don't feel like wearing it; but what happens usually is not about exactly the dress but maybe if I see somebody, some idea about what I want to buy comes to my mind but not the same thing. Or it shows me the line, the style of the pants or the shoes for example, I don't know. I say... I want something like that.

- Seasonal changes create new desires

- She watches fashion TV sometimes, just to relax and look at beautiful women, rather than watching an horror movie.

- Celebrities are not an influence for her.

I remember that the only person I wrote about was my grandmother because... What I wrote is that I want to be such a strong character as she is, but in society I don't have such an idol. Actually, I can not understand all women or also men that go after actors or famous people. They cry out, they love them, or whatever. How can you love somebody that you don't know, and you've never talked to at all?

- She cares about the opinions about boy friends while shopping

I go also with girls (to shopping), but first of all most of my friends are boys, second if you go with girls they go to all the shops. Even if you need shoes, they enter in the shops for dresses, for skirts, for everything, and you are loosing three times more time than what you need. Men are also better in choosing what is best for you; they look from a men's point of you.

6. What is she longing for now?

I would like to buy light colored shoes. I feel like wearing light colors. I can feel the season.

*In a fantasy,*

I would go to a shop where they have any kind of styles, so I can get everything I want because I don't like to go in 200 shops... I would buy more dresses (for work) to change.

**11) Nadia**

38 years old, married with one daughter

Interview date: 16.04.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her house in Milan.

She owns a real estate agency

She has a high school degree

My first impressions before starting the interview: Nice, a bit aggressive looking woman, she seems very fashionable; she likes fashion as she says.

1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

In general, fashion is beautiful, but also a bit "kitch" (vulgar, exaggerated, bad taste), you know some dresses are un-wearable... (like in fashion shows)... they don't know what to invent more, and they invent things that do not fit the form of the body. They are nice to look at, but it is impossible to put them on, but Versace and D&G are still wearable... yes fashion is beautiful but up to a certain point.

2. Her feelings and Desires

- She likes to look a bit aggressive
- She likes to feel comfortable
- Dress has to fit – "a posto"
- Quality is important
- She likes to dress up her own way
- She likes the new – change; she keeps buying non-stop
- Women dress up provocative to a certain extent – not exaggerated, otherwise it becomes vulgar

• She likes to be sexy – she puts mini-skirts all the time (long, nice legs), but not vulgar

- Brands show your status

(D&G) it is a symbol of fashion, and even if it is not the best piece, it makes you feel better, so if somebody looks at you, they see a beautiful piece that costs high prices, it means a certain level. This is normal, no? but you must search for the right pieces, for example, I like Cavalli, but it is sometimes exaggerated; the pants with many designs and colors, same for the jacket; it becomes too much; then you go to Viale Zara (the street where the prostitutes hang around at night) with this dress of 20000 colors may be suitable, or suitable for Rio festival, they really produce some strange dresses.

- At work: She is very formal, with suits

3. Her Style

- She says she is fashionable; she likes fashion
- She likes crazy things – a bit aggressive
- She likes Moschino, D&G
- She is very much open-minded with style as she says, she may like a large variety from classical to crazy



4. Her Behavior

- She goes both to high fashion stores and open markets (two extreme ends)
- She shops a lot as she says – she goes every week to open market; she searches for original stuff in open market

*Showing some Nike shoes*

Look they are original... original... you don't always find these stocks at the market; you have to follow the market; sometimes you really have very good stuff. I always go.

- She goes to high fashion stores during sales  
I go to Monte Napoleone and via della Spiga during sales (the most famous fashion streets in Italy). I go to Versace, D&G, and Moschino; I also buy for Alexia (her daughter) although Moschino closed their kids' line. 50% discount still costs a lot, but maybe you get really beautiful pieces. I may like a leather jacket at Versace, I wait for sales, and I get it. I don't pay 100% price; this is something you get and you have it in your wardrobe for many years. I don't spend this big money on a piece very fashionable, that will pass quickly, but I rather spend it on a black leather jacket that goes always well in your wardrobe or a suite.
- She does not like to throw away things; she has a big wardrobe

5. Influences on her Desires

- Looking around  
Usually looking around... I sometimes see certain fashion around, and I also feel like buying it, but not because the others are putting them on, but because I see them around and I start liking it myself. For instance, I never liked the pointed shoes before; I always looked for the ones with more round edge, and I could not find them. Finally, I ended up liking these pointed shoes, and bought them.
- She does not read fashion magazines so often  
I go a bit with the world, you take steps forward, just like the pointed shoes I did not like to begin with, but then they turn out to be my favorites, like a song; the first time you listen, you may not like it. If you keep listening 20 times more, then you get used to it, and you may even like it.  
...also you don't find the pieces you may desire certain times, maybe old fashion, so they push you to like the new ones, so you like them by force.
- Shopping high fashion brands in fashion streets– waiting for sales
- Brand is important – a famous brand represents quality and prestige to her – also with a famous brand, you can allow yourself to dress a bit more casual like the rotten D&G jeans
- Shopping at open market all the time
- She may like a dress on another person in the street, and she may even go ask to that person where she bought the dress, so she can buy it too
- She sometimes watches Fashion TV

6. What is she longing for now?

A red leather jacket! – Versace

12) Roberta

40 years old, married with one son of 7

Interview date: 10.04.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her house in Milan.

She is the editor of an architecture magazine

She has a degree in business

My first impressions before starting the interview: Very casually dressed up, almost like American style, not caring, she does not follow fashion as she says.

1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

Fashion is something fun for her

2. Her feelings and Desires

- Comfort is number one
- Mood changes
- Seduction with modesty
- She likes being elegant at special occasions
- Dress has to fit well, "a posto"
- At work: She is not as casual, but she does not wear business suits, jackets because she thinks, it is too elegant, not natural, artificially constructed. She puts black jeans and plain colors on top.

3. Her Style

- She says she stayed back in 1985-1990 style; she could not adapt to new fashion with pointed shoes, now babettes are returning
- Very casual, sportive
- Almost always with pants
- She does not like too much patterns, accessories
- Clean cuts, not much colors – black, brown, beige, grey
- She likes Armani style only if she could afford
- Although she is very casual and plain in her way of dressing up she does not feel "signora", more grown up styles. *Desire to be young.*

4. Her Behavior

- She would like to follow fashion more, have more time to choose fashionable pieces
- She is not an impulse buyer, she thinks a lot before  
I meditate first. I think first. Maybe I see things that I like but I really have to think, maybe I go back to that shop later. When shopping, I am an incredibly boring person. I am difficult.

First of all, I must feel the need for it. I don't buy things just for the pleasure of having one more thing. Maybe I need something and I start searching for it. I make very long expeditions. I search for everything... price, quality, style... for example, I was searching for a skirt, long, red with buttons, I have never found it, so I never bought because I was looking for it in a period when red and long skirts were not in fashion; now, I see a bit around.

I would like to buy something that is not binding, but if I already have seven pants... sufficient. I would not think of buying more.

#### 5. Influences on her Desires

- She looks at fashion magazines that come free with news papers  
I look at the magazines (Io Donna) that are attached to Corriera della Sera (one of the major daily news paper in Italy). I look at what is in, this season. I am not very skilled in dressing myself up, I don't have a nice eye, and so I look and try to learn.

- She may like things on others, but this does not mean she will look good in them  
...very rarely it happens... I like the way certain dresses fit to others, but very rarely I think it for myself. Of course, I say, this is nice.

- She likes window shopping – but she does not really have time for it
- Sometimes what people desire is not in the market, they just cannot find the piece

- Money is an issue  
I just saw an advertising of a Trussardi shirt, beautiful; of course I don't go buy a Trussardi piece (because it is very expensive as she declares later) but this could have been something I would put on.

- She likes department stores because she can compare alternatives
- She does not watch TV because she does not support all the stupidity in many TV shows.
- He may wear skirts sometimes because his little son desires that; normally she never puts skirts.

#### 6. What is she longing for now?

...a skirt and a shirt of Penny Black that I have seen in Io Donna. I just saw it, I like it. Although it is a bit out of my style, I still like it... (She would like to buy it).

### 13) Sofia

41 years old, divorced with one son of 6 years old

Interview date: 09.04.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her house in Milan.

She is working in a design institute

She has a degree in fine arts

My first impressions before starting the interview: Nice, talkative woman, she looks like she pays attention to fashion trends; she likes fashion as she says.

1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

I think that there are two big (phases?), one is very personal and one is very common... when you go around to buy something, you look at others and get influenced. First of all, it is an expression of myself.

2. Her feelings and Desires

- She likes to change
- She likes to add something little different/new each time she dresses up
- Size is an issue – dress has to fit right
- Seduction with some modesty

I don't like for example very short skirts. I think they are vulgar, but maybe a normal skirt with a little piece showing is more sensual and interesting. I like that nice women feel themselves good in their skin, but to show too much is not useful; you may have the contrary effect.

- She really hates very sexy looking, she calls this vulgar
- She likes to be sophisticated and elegant in special occasions
- She has to feel comfortable

3. Her Style

I like to follow fashion in a way, not too much. I am not too visible; my way of dressing is not so extreme. I like to dress up not much elegant but simple and clean in a way.

- She likes colors
- Casual in daily life, also for work
- She likes retro (old, 50's) very much
- She likes vintage
- She does not like brands like Versace, Cavalli because they are too extreme and showing, big animal patterns, Gucci too sexy.

4. Her Behavior

- Money is an issue – she does not pay high prices for clothing
- She does not change her style very much depending on the occasions
- She likes to buy something new every season, but she does not follow fashion strictly
  - If she had no money limits, she would change all her wardrobe, buying a lot of things; giving the poor people the others.

5. Influences on her Desires

- She reads and looks at fashion magazines, also to have an idea of trends, and to see which ones fit to her taste

*While looking at an ad in Vogue*

Some details... the way it is worn. It is suggesting me a way of putting the jacket. Maybe I cannot put Prada jacket because it is too expensive, but I can buy something similar and use it in similar way with similar accessories. It gives some suggestions.

I don't buy fashion magazines to construct my own style, but I look at them and say... I like this, I don't like this; maybe I am influenced. For example, if I have to buy a dress... I don't know... for a wedding; I don't look at the magazine, I go around in the shops and try to find what I need.

- To present regular bodies in ads rather than models thin models makes a difference.

I have a good feeling about it. Maybe, I will not buy the lingerie so aggressive, but I like it because it is more similar to my size, my body size, so I identify myself with her. For example, if I have to buy the dress for this wedding. To what can I refer myself in this magazine? ...with these young and thin women. I cannot enter to such dresses. That is why I don't look to advertising in magazines to choose my own style, but for example, this is a nice woman, thin woman; she has forms and she is not so different from a normal look. Also for lingerie, I have a size; when I go to a shop, it is very difficult for me to choose lingerie that fits me, so when I see this kind of lingerie worn by woman near to my body form, I say... Oh! What is the name of this company? and I go look for it.

- She is tired of ads using naked bodies
  - Window shopping
  - She may get influenced from the style of the people in the street, but she does not go buy the same dress.
    - She likes Zara because they change windows every two weeks and they have reasonable prices.
    - She does not like to get disturbed by sales people in shops; she likes to be free observing
    - She gets bored watching fashion shows in TV because it is always the same she says
    - Going around and looking at people, she gets inspirations
    - She does not go to high fashion streets because she cannot afford shopping there
    - Celebrities is nice to look at, but women in TV programs are always the same, very aggressive, very sexy
    - Changes in seasons create desires
- Spring! I feel the season changing, alive, so when the season starts, I would like to buy something, dresses, different, and new.

6. What is she longing for now?

...I am looking... I would like to have a colorful blouse, like with flowers, colors. Even if shops are full of these, I don't find what I am looking for... Something a bit retro, vintage, flowers, colorful.

**14) Susanna**

30 years old, married with one son

Interview date: 05.05.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her house in Milan.

She is working in an interior decoration agency

She is graduated from French literature

My first impressions before the interview: Very nice looking, beautiful girl, thin, tall, stylish; she likes fashion as she says.

**1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her**

When we say fashion the first things that come to mind are those high fashion brands like Jean Paul Gaultier, Chanel, and the catwalks, but for me fashion means something else; fashion means what looks good on you... on me.

**2. Her Feelings and Desires**

- Comfort is important
- She likes to be chic, but also comfortable at the same time
- She likes to look feminine and a bit sexy – not vulgar
- She likes to have a bit of décolleté (for chest especially) – out of work,

especially at night

- She has to feel “a posto”

For example, there are things that I tried and liked in the shop, but when I came home I don't like them anymore. Especially colorful dresses, I don't think I look good in them; I don't feel well. Once I bought a green dress, daily dress, I really liked it. I thought I could put it very often... very practical dress, not too showing, not too covered... but, this didn't happen that way; when I wore it at home, looking at the mirror couple of times, I felt like taking it off. That dress just stays in my wardrobe. Or, for example, I never put light colors at night.

- She can change radically from day to night; she likes this visible change – to be noticed – she likes to be liked
- She likes cotton, instead of synthetics because cotton is more healthy
- Quality and durability of the product is important
- If there were no money limits, she would have liked to be more chic – more care to her self... make-up... etc.

It is like cooking, you can prepare a meal, but if you don't present it in a nice way, it is just a food that goes to your stomach; but if you present it in a nice way, it satisfies both your sight and your stomach; this is a bit like that. For me, to see myself well cared, chic makes me feel nice. I believe that a person when she wakes up in the morning should change from her night gowns and put something chic on. This is a kind of respect to your self, to your husband, to others, and you feel more secure about your self; you are ready to receive or confront any person.

- At work: She dresses up formal, with business suits (but not always); she also puts dresses and skirts that are not too décolleté.

The way you dress up at work has to fit and complement the concept of the job you are doing. For example, I am working in an ultra-modern interior decoration agency for

homes; in such a job atmosphere, to be too casual in front of your clients is not the right thing to do, and it does not give security. You have to look serious, not too much accessories, modern.

When you have a job that requires you to have social relations, your appearance is very important. You at least have to look clean and tidy. This has an effect on the performance of the business relationship you have. To deal with a person who is nice and beautiful... if not beautiful... at least chic and cared, reflects some kind of seriousness. The appearance is really important. You cannot warm up to a person you just met, immediately. You have to have a dialogue with them; your appearance also complements this process. At first sight, when you meet a person, it is important to have nice feelings. Receiving a client with careless way of dressing up definitely has negative effects on business.

### 3. Her Style

- Causal
- She does not like colorful dresses – she prefers colors like black, white, beige, not bright colors
- She likes jeans because they can be chic and casual at the same time
- At night, she likes high heels – to be chic and sparkling

### 4. Her Behavior

- She likes to try the new trends, but adapting them to her own style
- She does not like to shop very much – too long hours – she decides fast, she has often time limits, but she shops often because of her work especially. She shops faster when she is alone, and she likes to shop alone.
- She buys something new more or less every season.

### 5. Influences on her Desires

- She goes around window shopping
- She looks at the seasonal catalogues of the stores she likes the styles
- She has certain shops that she goes more often, knowing that their products fit her
- She never watches Fashion TV
- She does not like mess and crowd in the store; you should find the things you are looking for easily and quickly
- She likes to be let free – not bothered too much by sales assistants
- She likes stores like Zara and Mango for daily wear, and once she enters to the shop, she also ends up buying other stuff than intended.

These are more for daily wears... very practical both to use and shop. Zara, having many stores around gives you also the chance to shop in different cities; you don't have to be limited to one shop location. They also have some nice night dresses sometimes. Their prices are very reasonable, especially when you shop so often.

- She also likes the style of Gucci

I like them not because they are high fashion brands but there are some brands in the world that demonstrated themselves such as Gucci, Chanel, Versace... next to their extreme creations, they also have products for you to have in your wardrobe for a long time, like a business suit that I was talking about, or a jacket, a bag. The quality is very important, the durability of the material, not the kinds you buy for one season and then you dispose it. Zara, Mango is more for quick disposal, for one or two seasons.

- She may get inspiration from the styles of others, but this does not mean that she looks for the same thing

- She likes Gwyneth Pathrow as a celebrity  
The movie where Gwyneth Pathrow played "Great Expectations", she had a very beautiful green dress, I really liked it a lot, and I bought something similar, maybe not green.

- She considers the tastes of her husband while shopping, but she does not deviate too much from her own style

#### 6. What is she longing for now?

She likes a style of t-shirt, called swimmer's style, she buys very often those and she would like to buy more also now, and some under wears.

### 15) Teresa

37 years old, married

Interview date: 17.04.2005 duration: 1 hour

Interview at her office in Milan.

She works at a furniture shop

She has no university degree

My first impressions before starting the interview: Very hot looking, tempered woman, hyper active, she has a nice style; she loves fashion as she says.

She was extremely frank and open during interview

#### 1. The Meaning of Fashion for Her

I am "La Patita" (Crazy!). I love to look around, go around in shops. I would love to have everything, but I cannot obviously. I like to change (clothing) everyday. I always buy diverse things from the ones I already own. When I enter to a shop, I need to buy the complete set because I don't have time or will to search for the matching pieces. But, I am a "patita" of fashion. I love fashion. I love fashion shows; I would love to be like those models.

#### 2. Her feelings and Desires

(My aim is) To be aggressive! I must be secure, and my security comes very much from the way I am. You must first feel secure yourself to be able to give security to others. I must be sincere... if the others like me I feel more secure. So for me, the most fundamental thing is the security... power. If one morning, I don't like the way I am dressed up, everything goes bad that day because I don't manage to express and pass that security.



- Aggressive, secure, powerful
- She would like to be like the models in fashion shows
- She would like to have everything
- She likes to change everyday
- She likes to take attention of others
- Mini-skirt makes her feel secure

I am not a very beautiful woman like in the center of attention, but it is clear that with a mini-skirt, you attract attention. I feel secure because I realize that I am liked by others. First of all, I like myself like that, so others also like me, so I feel secure.

- She likes to look sexy, but within a modest limit, not vulgar
- She likes décolleté on others

I have a friend who uses chest décolleté often; she is proud of her breasts, so she makes them seen. I love that! If one day I see such piece with chest décolleté that I think it would look good on me; I would not think twice and put it on. I love it, but I would not put it at work; outside, night time.

- At work:

In work life that is still mainly the world of males, you run the risk of... if you want to do business, why do you go around naked... Even when I am with mini-skirt, I maybe put a jacket, with some modesty; you must balance the seriousness a bit.

- She likes the look of a manager,

The seriousness and the look of man is fantastic. I would feel a lot like manager, but I cannot permit myself to be dressed like this because I am fat. In my opinion, to be able to dress up like a man, you need to have a body like Julia Roberts, tall and thin. I am not such way. I am 1.57 tall and 56 kg. You need to be tall as 1.75 and weight like 52 kg. This would be my perfect look, with a white shirt, one button opened extra, would be my look.

### *Her dream without any money limits*

I would go for doing shopping like Pretty Woman in Boulevard... how does it called... (Rodeo Drive); I would go to Monte Napoleone to every shop, get dressed "da barbona" (like a clochard), and I would say: I want this... this... that... this... Oh! What a nice dream! I love shopping!

### 3. Her Style

- Casual
- She likes pants
- Mini-skirts with low heels

I have a style no matter if I work or I go out for night, I see myself; maybe I change to mini skirt, but the general style is the same.

- sexy (the low waist, with elaboration), but she thinks she is too short and fat for that look.
- She likes Moschino (because it is very particular), Versace

4. Her Behavior

- She shops in fashion streets, high fashion brands; she waits for sales

Since I was a child, when I entered to a shop, they used to dress me up from head to toe; I am not capable of mix and match, so I was getting out with feeling secure about being dressed well. When I go around, some times I manage to find some nice pieces and feel secure, but not being able to dress up myself properly, if I enter to a shop (she is referring to a high fashion brand shop) and they dress me up from head to toe I feel better and more secure of being dressed well.

- If she goes out for shopping, she really has to buy something
- She hates the open markets because they are too chaotic, also she does not believe that the products are original there, so she would not feel secure about buying them.

5. Influences on her Desires

- Looking around, looking at others

For example, once my husband gave me as a gift a pair of Hogan with yellow in it; so I was looking for pullover with yellow that would go very well with my Hogans. I finally entered to a shop to ask for this and I ended up buying such a pullover, but also a mini-skirt, some pants and more, so I often search for pieces if I need them not because I have seen them on others. I shop this way, looking for one piece and ending up buying any pieces or I just go around shopping. If I go back home and if I have not purchased anything, I am really sad.

- Window shopping
  - Watching fashion shows, wanting to be like models
  - Going to fashion streets
  - She does not buy fashion magazines nowadays (earlier more), but when they come on her way, she likes to look at them.
    - She admires Julia Roberts as a celebrity; she likes her personality.
    - Her husband's opinions are great influence while shopping
- If my husband does not like something, he may even throw it away. So, after mine, the opinion of my husband is important. So, I pay very much attention while shopping because I know very well his taste. He also buys a lot for me. Most of the things I have are gifts from him.

6. What is she longing for now?

...a pair of pants that is blue. Because blue is very much spring color for me, because I don't have such color pants, because I have a blue pair of Hogan, and I have a blue jacket, so I need them, so this would go well with many pieces that I have.

**FASHION DESIGNERS**  
(Listed in Alphabetical Order)

1) **Alessandro**

43 years old, single male

Interview date: 19.04.2005 duration: 40 min.

Interview in his home-studio located in center of Milan, very nice place.

20 years of experience as a fashion designer, also working with famous designers. Now, his is a consultant for fashion design for companies with product range from medium to high price level); more than all, he does fashion design for women - classical, elegant, wedding, ceremony, night dresses.

He went to an Art School in Milan – Belli Arti.

1. His inspirations to create and design

- Observation of people in the streets
- Observation of windows
- To have a global vision of what is happening in the world – not only happenings directly attached to the product, but also attached to the culture, politics, etc.

- Research
- Books of art, design, fashion, cinema, everything
- He also uses trend-books mainly to confirm his own ideas
- Looking at the sales of previous season (combining it with new trends)
- Asking consumers what they like or don't like
- Historical heritage of creativity in Italy: To make difference from China

(Chinese will buy this know-how) – the culture of Italy, 2000 years of history.

2. Fashion is changing

- Products of medium price range is disappearing
- Quality is important
- Today, individual makes fashion

a) The case of Zara, H&M:

At this moment, market has changed. Products of medium price have almost disappeared with the launch of brands like Zara, H&M. They have lowered the prices; than there is the other extreme with haute couture and prêt-a-porter of luxury. So, there are these two big categories, and the middle range is more and more diminishing. A working woman who needs a night suit maybe to use it only once, do not spend these high numbers (money) anymore, but goes to Zara, buy the complete set, use it, and dispose it.

The middle income people, they either go to the lower end, buying cheaper products or to the upper end, buying maybe one piece, but for long term use.

b) Chinese Invasion - Quality is very important:

Right now, brands are not so important in Italy, but more "le firme", companies who are working on the quality and non-repetitiveness of the product with all these Chinese who copy everything, so finished products are much more refined, produced by good quality textile (fabric), made well... if you look at a Versace dress 10 years ago, it was

not well-made, sometimes with terrible textile; the name was saving everything; now, the products are perfect, cut and sewed in a perfect manner, with good quality materials; they take your attention to the quality.”

Also to make a difference from China we must emphasize the know-how – the culture of Italy, 2000 years of history (Chinese will buy this know-how).

c) Today, the individual makes the fashion:

Like I was saying earlier, some years ago the brand name was setting the rules. You could dress Versace from head to toe, and you could feel confident, but today the individual makes the fashion... I like that jacket... I like these pants... putting things together... these shoes, that bag... so, every individual has taken control of his/her self; she decides herself what to put on, having less confidence to just one name or designer; she may still have some sympathy for certain brand names, because it fits her, she feels better inside, but she is not anymore solely attached to that name, but she decides how to dress up; maybe she goes to the market, buys a used fashion piece, puts them with certain jacket and shoes.

d) Fashion has moved to other areas:

We are coming from a period when people have purchased a lot, so the wardrobes are full... so now they buy when they feel secure. Even a bride some years ago was spending maybe 15000 euro for a wedding dress, now she spends 2500, so they prefer to spend that money for the house or for a trip... so fashion... (gesture here – not going well)... also with imports... not only to Italy but all over the world... China is invading... *He is also talking about the economic crisis in Italy here.*

3. Perspective of the designer about what (mainly working) women desire:

- Many of them want to be more beautiful.
- There is not a product of “signora” anymore:

There is not a product of “signora” (older lady) anymore. Some years ago women of 50, 60 years old had a certain way of dressing up, certain style; today the styles have rejuvenated. A woman of 50 years old today, if she could, she would dress up like hips.

Fashion gives you the opportunity to change... dressing up (acting) differently in different occasions. It is a game; they identify themselves with these different selves.

Whatever they are missing inside they try to recuperate it outside – through shopping.

- Fashion gives you the opportunity to change: Dressing up (acting) differently in different occasions.

It is a game... they identify themselves with these different selves.

4. Shaping consumer desires

- Social happenings of the moment

Trends and fashion are attached to the social happenings of the moment... In a moment of crisis, you look for products that give you security... maybe you don't use it and throw it away, but a durable object.

Main themes of trends are always the same: The color and the style changes.

When they make trends, they try to touch all sociological indications... natural, technological, sportive, romantic-classical, aggressive... etc.

- Artistic creation
- Caring for consumers
- Advertising
- Dressing up celebrities

There is not anymore solidarity work, I go to shops to ask my clients what they like, what they don't like... what they think of my designs... It is never just the fashion designer...

“You need marketing to be able to sell.”

You have to increase the appetite of your consumers with an image attached to your ideal consumer, with advertising, dressing up celebrities... On TV, everybody is young and beautiful... They (consumers) make themselves formulated by advertised images.

- The individual makes fashion  
...I like that jacket... I like these pants... putting things together (from different brands and sources)... these shoes, that bag... so, every individual has taken control of her self...

- Visibility of Prestige Brands  
“If one is dressed up in Armani, she is recognized in streets.”  
“On TV, everybody is young and beautiful”

## 2) Fabiola

37 years old, single female.

Interview date: 01.04.2005 duration: 50 min.

Interview in her studio-atelier located in the center of Milan.

She is in fashion business since 14 years. At the moment, she has her own studio, preparing collections for medium size companies. She has a few young designers helping her in her studio.

(She says that to prepare a collection does not only mean producing designs, but also choosing the colors, materials, designs... everything, then controlling the prototypes. She supervises the whole process from design to prototype, making adjustments when necessary). At the moment (April 2005), she is working on spring/summer 2006 collections. It takes approximately 6 months to prepare a collection, then the collection is presented in September fashion shows.

She also produces a well respected trend-book for leather and fur.

She is graduated from “Istituto Europeo di Design.”

1. Her inspirations to create and design

Everything can influence she says.

- Observing street fashion
- Frequenting the right places
- Knowledge on actuality like a music group, films, etc.
- Trend-books to get some ideas
- Other designers – big names such as D&G, Cavalli...

It is needed some sensitivity, but not even... yes it is needed some patience and some talent, but if one is used to work in "anticipo" (in advance), also starts feeling things in "anticipo", so once one takes the rhythm, everything becomes quite normal.

Everything can influence... certainly street fashion is the most interesting, also in a city like Milan, this is very important. I am very attentive to the fashion of the street. Of course in the streets, there is everything, so it is important to frequent the right places like the right restaurants, discothèques, parties, work environment; all kind of occasions can create a stimulus, then also some knowledge on actuality like a music group, a film in movie theatres... everything.

A few years ago because of the war of Iraq... that is an absurdity if you think... all were against the war, but we were all dressed up like military style; this is really inexplicable, to be against the war and to dress like that.

2. Shaping consumer desires

- Communication power: media, advertising
- Celebrities
- World events like wars
- Playing with an idea (story)
- Word-of-mouth
- The power of prestige brands
- Transmitting sensations from the product

Media for sure will condition fashion because maybe Madonna dresses up in a certain way, or for example, D&G dresses up Simona Ventura because she is very much loved by the public, so certainly she will influence the public taste a bit. For example, Cavalli who dresses up normally a woman who is quite showy; women who dress up Cavalli almost look like prostitutes sometimes; it is like playing with an idea, but it works like this.

*She also gets her inspirations to prepare her collections from these big names...*

They (Big brand names such as D&G, Cavalli) will influence the tastes with all their power of advertising, dressing up singers, TV stars. They will certainly influence the tastes; on the other hand this does not mean that they put the dogma. They will be successful only if they are able to interpret the tastes of the moment... then, you see their products in every fashion magazine... of course, they have an influence.

3. Current Challenges

- Everything is accelerated now

• Everything is more commercial – “Success comes if the collection sells.”

- There is crisis within the sector
- The tastes have become globalize

a. The case of Zara and the Presence of Chinese:

The whole system has changed. I am in this business since 14 years; this may sound a long and short time at the same time; since I have started everything has changed. Everything is more accelerated now because there are phenomena like Zara that accelerates things. They are also burning ideas... some ideas that are more commercial and easy... so I think... At this moment there is an incredible crisis in the fashion sector with all the things happening in the world and the emergence of Chinese market... all of these have accelerated the crisis within the system of fashion, so some traditional firms who cannot adapt to this rhythm have problems. Zara is really a phenomenon with their capacity of changing windows every 3 weeks, to anticipate things. They don't do commercials; it is all about word of mouth. You don't see them in the journals, but Zara sells a lot. ...Benetton has also always had reasonable prices, but didn't have such success at the level of Zara because they do not have the product of Zara.... Zara analyses the products of D&G, Gucci, Prada, and launches the product to the market within one month; this is an incredible speed.

*Her clients are staying behind Zara to catch to produce the new trends. She is worried. On top of this, people have less purchasing power. Selling is becoming more difficult*

b. Economic crisis:

There is a strong re-dimensioning, in the fashion show performed last February; in general, everything is being re-dimensioned. Everybody is looking to produce something easier, less poetic, less conceptual, what a pity! just because of the crisis, because they want to sell more. Everybody is suffering a bit.

c. The tastes have become globalize: For example, Cavalli or D&G, producing with a touch of Indian inspiration.

d. What to do?

- You must act fast

... the competition is really becoming tougher and tougher... so at this moment, everything being so accelerated, if one has an idea, let's organize fast and let's put it in shops...

- You must show your personality as a designer; produce something richer ...so you must show your personality even if you are not a famous name... Cavalli, D&G, Zara, they are already doing something, so you must add something that is yours, so everything is becoming more stimulating because you must work on an idea, interpret it better, you must succeed to adapt it... so you go deeper about an idea... do something nobody did before, something more intelligent, or something that looks better when worn... so it gives lots of sensations.

also, I feel a re-dimensioning because of Chinese products that are at a lower level; therefore to fight with Chinese product, you have to produce something richer...

- You must specialize

Before a designer used to produce men's fashion, women's fashion, young fashion, old fashion... all at the same time. Now, you must specialize and know your target very well.

- Quality is very important – the little details of elaboration
- The image of the designer is very important (also within the fashion world among fashion professionals): For example, after Tom Ford left, Gucci's image went down, although their collections are even better now. People used to like Tom Ford, himself. Another example... after Versace died, his sister did some nice things, but nobody likes her in the business, so the brand is also losing image.

4. Ethics (and the dark side) of Fashion (and the internal struggle of the designer):

At this moment, there is a big crisis; fashion really struggles... in the sense... yes certainly, fashion is an important phenomenon in society, but sometimes too much importance is given to it. The image is very important, the communication you pass... how you are dressed up... how you fix your hair... just your appearance can say a lot of things about you, but this is a mirror image... maybe then, you open your mouth and the whole image is destroyed, but still appearance in our society is very important. What I like about fashion... it is also important to understand the function of dress... it is important the sensations it gives you... so you dress in a certain way... at some point, I was thinking... but there are people dying in the world, and I think of the form of a shirt neck... this creates in you a bit of anxiety, but at the same time, dressing up is like eating; it is not that you will go around naked; then, to create a beautiful collection, to give satisfaction to people and to work for it is important; it also gives me satisfaction. After all, clothing is a necessity.

5. Perspective of the designer about what (mainly working) women desire:

- The image is important.  
The image is very important, the communication you pass; how you are dressed up; how you fix your hair. Just your appearance can say a lot of things about you, but this is a mirror image, maybe then, you open your mouth and the whole image is destroyed; but still appearance in our society is very important.
- Women want to feel even younger; everything has rejuvenated.
- They want to be admired.
- They want to seduce.

A lot of things have changed, maybe some years ago, a young girl of 25 years old was looking for settling down, creating a family, while now a 25 years old is still studying, does not exactly know what she wants in life. Everything seems a bit delayed... maybe first child... you think of it after 30... even 35... of course you have to think well, then it may become too late. Women are different than men when they start passing the age of 40; maybe they want to be a bit more observed compared with a young girl; then it is obvious that a woman wants to be admired, courted; so you see all these plastic surgery just for becoming younger. Really, this phenomenon is becoming crazy; then we all look like the same. A man after 40 years old... maybe already has a secure position (job), and knows what to do in life... such man can still be interesting (wanted), so a man of 40 can go out with women in their 20's and even live together, but such situation for a woman in her early forties is more difficult and less known, so the system of fashion now is highly attached to seduction... remember Cavalli



phenomenon... woman who wants to be sexy, provocative... Cavalli and D&G emphasized a lot this phenomenon; instead Prada who emphasized minimalism, with a woman who is more covered was selling less lately; so it has been important to emphasize seduction in the collections.

### 3) Mauro

31 years old, single male

Interview date: 23.02.2005 duration: 1 hour 15 min.

Interview in his house, located in the center of Milan.

He designed two years for Prada, another 1.5 years for Gill Sanders, also for Miu Miu, and now designing for a company of Trussardi group. His aim is having his own fashion line with his name.

He is graduated from Marangoni (a fashion design institute in Milan).

#### 1. Ethics of Fashion:

- Fashion is "futile" (superficial),...  
...because after all, they are only dresses... considering all what is happening in the world that is already very drastic, harsh... I don't like the people (in the industry) who take it too seriously to sell.
- Nowadays, you make dresses to sell
- Fashion is not something fundamental

#### 2. His inspirations to create and design

- Music stars like Madonna, Cindy Loper
- Movie stars like Marilyn Monroe
- American soap opera like Dallas, Dynasty
- Barbi Girl, very happy, smiling
- Some saints in Christianity, some homo-sexual saints with a spirit of Jean D'Arc, but masculine – he took inspirations, designing his t-shirts
- Artist who are famous in history such as Leonardo da Vinci, Micheangelo
- A period in time (80's)
- Books, especially about fashion and movies
- One of the greatest costume designer in Hollywood
- While designing for other designer (Trussardi):
  - Looking at the previous fashion shows
  - Pictures, photos
  - Magazines
- Walking around, looking around
- Traveling
- Meeting new people
- Being Sicilian

When I was in Sicily, I was not going out very often, but I was looking at TV all the time. I was looking at these soap operas... and people... like in Dallas... in any

moment of their lives... tragic, comic... these women have always make up, with perfectly combed blond hair, very nice dresses... these things always made me laughed. People were asking me "why are you looking at these things?" I also know that these things don't mean anything, but they make you forget your own things, and they take you into another reality, dimension... that is fake... this is the world of Barbi... they have family problems, money problems, but they are always beautifully made-up. When I was watching these things, my moral was going up, so I wanted to produce things that entertain people, so my fashion was very much fun.

### 3. Current challenges

- There is a big crisis in fashion sector:
- "they don't trust people (talents)." Even the biggest brand names have financial problems:

- The case of Zara and H&M:

Recently two new shops have opened up in Milan... Zara and H&M... there is no fashion, they have everything, all the fashion is squeezed inside Zara and H&M shops, with incredibly low prices, low qualities too, but now people want to spend less... and they just want to have nice things, nothing rich.

- Quality is important
- You need to retire and give space to younger people, new talents: Versace, Bridget Bardot, Audrey Hepburn did that.

### 4. Shaping consumer desires

...you can never be sure that what you produce will be a success...

How can you know what is really the right thing? You can know it if you have a target... everything is designed for different personalities... so, now it is difficult to put your ideas in a dress, and make it fit to somebody else.

- A fashion designer must entertain people
- Image of the designer does matter

### 5. Perspective of the designer about what (mainly working) women desire:

*I really could not get the answer of this question because he is not concerned about the mass desires or what sells; he is more focused on the artistic side of design, something new and out of normality, something that fulfills his own fantasies.*

- They (consumers) want to have nice things at lower prices like in Zara

With clothing, you can give yourself many personalities; it is fun.

### 6. Artistic Creation versus Sales:

I don't see myself producing a jacket for the office, why should I do that? There are plenty of people doing that, and they even know better than me to do that. I offer you what I know the best to do; and if you like it I am even happier... also, if I fail, I learn something, and I improve myself. You can never be sure that what you produce will be a success... it depends what you prefer... you want to have the financial guarantee and

produce the regular stuff or you want to risk a bit and do something special... but, we would not have impressionism, expressionism, or modern painting if everybody was producing things to sell... what would we be now... nothing.

7. He hates the trend-books:

...at my first job, the lady asked me to go buy these trend books, exactly this one that you are showing me now. It gave me a mortal boredom... useless... why should I go read this book... yes, information is good, but if you work in this business, you already feel and have an idea of what is coming, an idea of yours... the things coming out of journal, everybody sees... if I want to give this little touch more... who will give me this? (inspiration)... you don't find it in this journal... these books... they help more if you want to do something commercial, but if you want to do something else, new, fresh; then you have these feeling of saying... what the hell with these books! Everybody does it. If I wanted to do what everybody else does, I would not choose such a creative work for my self.

8. Future Research:

- The feelings of the designer:
  - The designer is having fun himself playing with dresses, trying which piece goes well with what
  - He does not like the ambiance of the fashion world (professionals): He finds them very ambitious financially, fake relations, greed

• As a creative person; it is difficult to work for another creative person:  
 When I was working for Gill Sanders... you need to have a name in your CV, so I was working there... at the beginning, I started to work, thinking about my CV, so if you want to come to a good level, you cannot just design whatever you like... after all, it was a nice experience, but the product was not attracting me too much... it was not the typology of woman that I like to dress... it is true that, the woman of Gill Sanders is intellectual, cultural, etc, but Gill Sanders also emphasizes minimalism, and I am not minimalist, being Sicilian... I just cannot be minimalist... I like black, but I cannot like black always. Gill Sanders always had these 8 colors in their catalogue, Black-red, black-blue, black-brown... and I did not like this very much, so after 1.5 years, I decided to quit, and I decided to make my own fashion show. The purpose of that show was not to sell; the aim was to produce everything that I was not allowed for 1.5 years... I put in this show everything I liked... it is like making a 'minestrone' soup.

*Attn: Here, he also emphasizes his roots for designing in a certain way (being Sicilian).*

...I needed to show something that is mine... very feminine... I was not really criticizing their designs, but I had to be limited and follow what they want... after 1.5 years I could not resist anymore.

...who ever has a studio already has an idea in mind, like when I did my fashion show, I had my ideas in mind... and it is difficult to communicate these ideas to another person... you must have a lot of patience, but a lot of people who work in this business don't have patience... they don't trust you, they only want what they have in their mind, they are very invidious for their own ideas... they don't give you space to express your ideas... so all these things, little by little push me to produce my own line... like my little t-shirts, that I will slowly start carrying to shops, fairs...

- He is more close to the "Sartoria" concept of fashion rather than making mass productions.

I would be much happier having a little atelier, rather than having 1000 shops, having special people coming to my atelier, and making special dresses for them... that is what I like... to go back maybe 60 years earlier... there is a division between the people who wants to create fashion and who wants to sell.

#### 4) Melina

44 years old, divorced female with a son and a daughter  
Interview date: 13.02.2005 duration: 1 hour and 20 min.  
Interview in her atelier located in the center of Milan.

She started sewing when she was 7 with her grandmother; then, for 14 years, she worked with "Antonio Fusco" – a well know designer – sewing in his atelier. The last 17 years (since 1987), she has been working in her own tailor shop, presenting her own designs to her customers, beside producing custom-made dresses – she works very close to individual consumers.

No previous design education or in fact any university education.

#### 1. Perspective of the designer about what (mainly working) women desire:

Here fashion is different (in this tailor shop). In the sense that, I propose... Fashion is more a necessity. (People go to a tailor for special needs.)

- Women in her mid ages want to hide some of their characteristics
- Every job has its own requirements for dressing up
- They all want to look more beautiful
- They want to look "a posto" (feeling well about themselves)

What they (women) want is to look more beautiful; they want to feel well, more beautiful. They want to hide things, and it is my responsibility to make them look better. This is not always easy; sometimes the defects are heavy; sometimes when you have these narrow shoulders or very big boobs; there is a limit to what I can do; then I feel bad, but it is not my fault. I try not to offend them; I must adapt the dress to the body. We are all different. I do my best. They really all want to look more beautiful. Once they are satisfied, they go away happy. They hug me, kiss me like if I gave them a big gift, and this is a great satisfaction for me.

- They need practicality.
- They need to look elegant without being uncomfortable.
- They want to feel unique

You know why they come here (to this tailor/designer shop); for instance, there is only two of this jacket. So they will never risk getting out of here and finding an identical jacket to theirs'. Do you understand? It is not exclusive here but it is limited. Good for the women who do not like having everything like the others.

Just the fact of red instead of orange or adding a special belt makes you feel different.

Some women are never satisfied; the moment they have one dress, they already start thinking about the next one.

The lady in the law firm does not like to present herself twice with the same dress. Sometimes you just change the color, but you are the same after all. Her wardrobe never has peace. It is not like saying 'now I have what I need for at least a while'... important dinners, parties... this is also another category of person here; they are the difficult ones; you keep changing dress, but something inside is missing; these people are not easy to satisfy. They wake up in the morning and they are already sad to start the day. They come here and they talk... their doctor diet...they talk about everything... it is like being a psychologist... pieces from their lives... in one sense it is also good for knowing them better.

## 2. Shaping consumer desires

- The suggestions of the (tailor) designer

I first listen, then I suggest... then, they (consumers) usually listen to me and change their ideas. There are plenty of things to suggest, models, colors, styles... usually at the end, they find something they like.

- Magazines

They (consumers) may also bring a design they like (taken from a magazine); they sometimes come with an idea because they like a certain color or style. For example, they may like Armani designs; and then they find out that this may not be so good for them, they usually change their minds, and this is very much fun for me, I like it in the sense that I like to reason with them, sometimes we talk for hours about what is best for them, every details, colors, length, what they can put on top, or they tell me what else they have in their wardrobe. The whole discussion becomes about telling all kind of feelings and thoughts, and I must find a solution.

- The back studio of the tailor amazes them the most; they wonder what is going on inside.

- People are more attentive now; they search, they reason more.

• *Consumers do not always know what they want and seek for suggestions from experts.* For example... "I have a textile piece that has been sitting for 15 years... I don't know to whom to take it..." a consumer expresses.

- Melina also has a negative comment about trend-books and fashions shows (as influencing people):

Imagine yourself looking at a fashion show... how do you feel? Normal people don't get inspiration from that. I don't consider myself normal because I am still inside the business but... them ... there is nothing for them in a fashion show... it is fantastic... would you go around the streets with such a dress? (showing a picture from a trend book, just like the ones from a high fashion fashion show)... nice for art... the people of daily life they need practicality; they live, they run, they get out of the car; this is the real life... Some customers even complain about the fashion shows, about the exaggeration; they even feel offended sometimes, saying that they could never be able

to put such a dress... because the models are too thin always; most of the people do not look like models.

### 3. Her inspirations to design

- Magazines
- Movie
- TV shows
- Walking around in the streets, looking at the way people are dressed up.
- Modifications of existing designs of other designers.
- Making use of the excess fabric – she created beautiful winter scarves from the precious textile that was left over, these scarves became very fashionable during Christmas
- Through years of practical experience you start creating.

### 5) Pierluigi

42 years old, single male

Interview date: 18.04.2005 duration: 35 min.

Interview in his studio-atelier located in the center of Milan.

(I had very limited time with him).

He has about 20 years of experience as a fashion designer. He designed for companies like Pierre Cardin, Roberto Cavalli, Krizia, S.Ferragamo, G.Ferre, Verri, La Perla, Joop! This year (2005), he has launched his own collection under his own name.

He is graduated from Academy of Costume and Fashion in Rome.

### 1. Current challenges

- Economic crisis
- Fear of no-sales
- Little quality around

#### a. Worry for all the economic happenings in the world:

I think we are in a period of transformation, which an economic crisis has brought, a dramatic problem of licensing in the sector with people who are not selling, confused negotiators not knowing what to propose... These economic situations causes companies to take steps back, less creativity, less research, more fear, and then throwing away to the market always the same product with the fear of not selling.

#### b. What to do:

- Quality
- New brands

I feel very little quality around. What I want to communicate is the quality... a return to a different rapport with the product... not something to be put on with rush, but a product of a reflection, a project of something that has been reflected on for the client... where the design justifies the research and as a result, the price... I don't want to give superficiality, non-quality, a product of non-reflection.

### 2. Where does he get his inspirations to create and design?

- Belongs to his blood – *a feeling in his own*

- Artistic inspirations
- A feeling
- A color
- A dream
- Traveling
- Observing people
- Most importantly – materials:

The foundation of my creations is materials... materials stimulate me to create and experiment to produce new products.

### 3. Shaping consumer desires

- The talent of the designer to create and offer something different
- The talent of the designer to feel the moment – consumers
- Marketing

I don't think creativity can only be what you create your self... although I belong to the generation of people who like to force their limits to their best to create something new... we are in a period when creativity is mentioned very little because everything is attached to the rules of marketing... so I pay attention... my creativity can get married with products of easy acquisition... I present my self to a target quite high not really for price but more then all, for cultural level to which I refer myself... the capacity of reading a product compared to others... I always say my creativity must apply also a perfume of exigency of clients that I feel at a particular moment.

### 4. Perspective of the designer about what (mainly working) women desire:

Certainly the desires of women change with time and they are certainly attached to the evolution of the type of life they pursue... they work, they run, they move, they live a life of rush... and the taste varies of course.

Women buy something that stimulates their fantasies; so through these objects they desire... pants, a shirt... an object of clothing ... for constructing a new image of self to represent.

## 6) Vanessa

33 years old, single female, originally not Italian

Interview date:01.04.2005 duration 45 min.

Interview in a bookstore on her last day at work with a famous designer.

After 5years of designing for famous brands, she now wants to work free lance as a consultant to fashion companies. She worked 3 years for D&G and 2 years in Moschino as a designer for their beach wear line. Earlier than that, she worked in her country, designing beach wear and child wear.

She studied fashion design in her country (within the faculty of Architecture).

### 1. Future research – Being a designer for a famous designer:

Dolce and Gabbana, they have an idea in mind, maybe as a result of their traveling... or after all, they are creative people... for example, they have this idea of making a fashion show with inspiration from 50's... or they have another theme in mind, then we

make a research of textiles, images connected to these ideas, and then they choose among these materials and images, and put together the ones they like. They mainly do coordination of work, and the rest the assistants do, but the main ideas come from them. For example for their beach wear line that I worked for, they were making very rough sketches about their ideas and then we produce a design out of them, also with emphasis to technical details... but, they are always present; they know very well what they want, then they only look at the final product (prototype) to see if it is sewed right, the colors match; then, make adjustments and changes if necessary.

#### Inspirations:

D & G woman is very sexy and Mediterranean, very strong as a personality, a beautiful woman and showy. You know a woman who dresses up D&G wants to show, more than all very sexy... so they are keeping these major points firm in their collections, then they can play with colors, with various inspirations. Dolce says that when one wakes up in the morning and dresses up for the day she must say: I feel like "una figa" (really sexy – slang) like feeling on top, ready to invade the world; otherwise she shouldn't get out of the house until she feels that way; she should change the dresses. Dolce likes beautiful women so he makes them show their beauty with their way of dressing up.

#### 2. Her inspirations to create and design

- Traveling
- Internet
- Books & magazines
- Trend-books
- International Fairs

... so you load yourself with all this information... ideas are being created in your mind... and you make a meaning out of them.

#### 3. Shaping consumer desires

- The creative talent of the designer
- Advertising to increase the visibility of the brand

If a product is successful, it is certainly dependent of the talent of the designer, but also the power of advertising. When they make the collection, they do not know to start with that this bag will be the highly demanded bag of the season, but after making a big advertising campaign, they know that among that huge collection they have created certain objects that will be in demand more, so the role of the magazines also are very important here.

Moschino does not do advertising on intimae wear, instead D&G is always present because they want to sell; it is an effort you make in vane because nobody sees it. I really was not getting the fruits of my work because nobody sees it.

#### 4. Ethics of Fashion:

- Unreasonably high prices of big brand names
- Being a fashion victim



- Feeling of security about self
- Fashion is an artificial thing

What I like about fashion is the capacity of changing. In a shop like Zara, there is a new collection every two weeks.

I am not a fashion victim! I take it as a joke, knowing what is behind the big names, and then maybe buying a shirt from the market... since I know the trend of the season I can find no name fashion pieces reflecting that trend; it bothers me a bit the high prices of these famous brands; the really big gap of prices.

... I also mean for example... when people have to buy a certain bag otherwise they will feel an outlier, out of the skim... this I don't like...

When I was 18-20 years old, I was following fashion a lot more; maybe at that age you don't have a strong personality. For example, if you have to look in a certain way being perfect everyday like in D&G, then I don't have too much fun... I was saying... when you are 18-20 years old; it helps you to dress in a certain way to have a personality... I think a woman in her 30's or 40's already has a style; she knows well what is best for her, which colors, which cut; they also feel more secure about themselves; you can use a bag for five years, wear the same suits.

... after all, fashion is an artificial thing... maybe one day it will lose importance... you will not be judged with what you wear...

##### 5. Future Research:

- Difficulty of the designer to develop a mutual understanding with the creative director (or master designer): The case of a famous high fashion brand – the master designer is dead since 10 years; the current creative director does not understand much about design, she is more sales oriented.

- To produce your own brand requires a big investment and connections:

You need a big name to sell, starting the road with an unknown name, I cannot afford all the advertising expenses; I want to start producing little collections, meeting the right people, and understanding the business.

**OTHER FASHION PROFESSIONALS**  
*(Listed in Alphabetical Order)*

1) **Alessandra**

41 years old, divorced female

Interview date: 20.02.2005 duration: 35 min.

Interview in her office

She started her carrier as a textile designer about 20 years ago, specialized in colors and trends. She is now working in Milan office of one of the biggest trend agency in the world. Her duty is to communicate the trends to clients, including the designers of famous brands such as Armani, Prada, Moschino, etc.

She has a degree in textile design.

1. Trends:

*Alessandra says that trends and fashion translate all social, artistic, political happenings and events, reflecting the mood of the period in time. She says that "for example, for SS 2006, looking at this period that is dark and blue (referring to terrorist attacks, the war in Iraq, etc.), maybe people in the world would like something more energetic and colorful, nicer than what they feel now."*

(Fashion) trends are set with an observation of real life; artistic, social, cultural, political waves. Trend searchers translate what they feel around in words and images and these are used by designers' creative and technical people to develop products.

2. Fashion is shifting to other sectors:

*Such as cosmetics, jewelry, cars, high-tech products such as mobile phones, etc.*

3. How did fashion evolved the last few decades:

80's was very rich period – economically. It was easy to work and to sell, and trends were very determined, clear like 'the red is the color, and the skirt is the fashion.' After 90's when the world started changing with economical problems, political problems... we were not so rich like the 80's, and people started to change. Fashion also became very diverse. For example, if you buy a skirt now; it is possible that it is short, long, red, or blue. There is not a strict trend. This is a very big change. Of course, this gives a lot of opportunities to designers to design, but at the same time there is a little confusion about what to produce, that is why trend books are very important to them, so a confused designer understands better what to do because if I were a designer I could do everything, but I don't sell it... why?... do you understand?

4. Chinese threat

5. Economic Crisis in Italy

2) **Claudio**

49 years old, divorced male, with two sons

Interview date: 04.04.2005 duration: 50 min.

Interview in a cafeteria

He is in communication business, mainly producing videos for companies, including videoing fashion shows.

He says: "When you are living an event, you can feel the emotions, but when it is presented in a video, the same emotions may not be felt, so I must produce this video in such a way that the emotions are transmitted as well."

He has a degree in communications.

1. The difference between the event and the video:

*Once Claudio had a conflict with a fashion designer.*

When you are in a fashion show, you are sited. They turn off the lights and a very special music starts... very suggestive; this can be a tribal music; you feel the atmosphere. You are sited next to other people, you feel the perfume; there is emotion, adrenaline; they turn off the lights, the models start coming out, just in front of you. In video these do not happen, even if you produce an enormous video, you are just not there, you are watching it from somewhere else, maybe at the same time, you are speaking with friends, laughing, talking on mobile phone, maybe you are thinking to something else, maybe you are hungry, you are in rush, you need to go to toilet... so you have to construct something special in video. You must construct special images in video that have their own functions. This is where we could not agree with this young designer. I was saying... the music you have chosen for the fashion show is really nice for the show, but they are not OK for the video... so he wanted to decide everything, but this did not work. A video is based on many elements of which you must find an equilibrium; the images, the story, the interpretation, and more than all, the music, and of course the ambience, but the music in a video is almost more important than the images, you see a nice image at the same time you hear a nice music, and immediately you become emotional.

2. To transfer the emotions of an event into a video:

*The following few points also enlighten how the desires are shaped.*

Here, many factors are involved. First of all it is important your culture, your sensibility, your education, the places you frequent, the books you read, the movies you watch, your cultural sensibility; then you pay attention to whom you are preparing this video; who the spectator is. If it is for TV, it is something else, if it is for an hospital it is something else. You must know to which public you are referring the video. This could be a large public or just 5 people. When the number is small, it is easier to understand spectators' expectations (knowing their age, background a bit). You cannot address a young and an old person the same way... then you start having ideas.

3. The Music is very important, transferring emotions:

... the music is very important. There are memories of a summer time, a day you had with your boy friend... that specific music, you remember it... maybe a birthday celebration... I like to fish for the music of 5, 10, 15 years ago because you have certainly heard them at least one time, and if I am lucky that music reminds you something, and if this music reminds you something, you also remember me of the product that I am presenting to you. I also use sometimes, the songs that are just out there, new, but they never function like the music of few years ago. Music is very important.

4. Too much information makes you dizzy:
- Doing something against trends  
 "If there is a trend for a rhythmic music, I go exactly the opposite, I choose slow songs. Because with all the messages that arrive to you, you become drunk, but one that is outside the trend, you remember it; maybe you did not like it, but you remember it, and it works."
  - Simplicity:  
 ...simplicity enters to minds like a knife in the butter; you are taken immediately without any confusion... few words... little information... because too much information makes you dizzy. After 30 minutes you watch a video, you remember only half of it, an hour later you remember less, the day after you remember only a few minutes of it. When I attach to the images some special arrangement of music, you will always remember it, this is why the music is important to me.
5. What are the desires of working women?
- They are interested in things that gratify them.
  - They want to feel unique.
  - They always want to be more beautiful.
  - They like being noticed by others.
  - The ones using famous brand names want to fulfill an image.
6. Consumption is filling up the emotional gap we feel in our daily lives:  
 They (women) have money; they can live alone, they can say yes and no, often no; they travel. If they have emotional relations that do not satisfy them, they decide to dump it. Ten – fifteen years ago this was not possible. Depending on the cultural level, education; southern Italy is different than north. They (from south of Italy) are not the consumers; consumers for companies have always been the ones in big cities; the ones that have money; the ones who are also living frustrating lives. You must wake up early, take your car, go to work, maybe a job that you don't like, maybe you work with colleagues who are not so sympathetic, then you come home at the end of the day, you may have a bad relationship with your partner, so what gratifies you? Go out and do shopping! You buy clothing! Whatever you like (Video Producer: Claudio).
7. People who has this necessity to dress up with famous brand names to show-off are missing something inside.

### 3) Francesca

33 years old, single female

Interview date: 14.04.2005 duration: 1 hour and 15 min.

Interview in her office

She is responsible of Public Relations and Press Office in a famous high fashion brand. This means to manage the brand in Italy and abroad – France, Germany, England, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Russia (very important she says), also America. In all these countries, she follows journalist, giving them information about collections and activities in the company; also organizes fashion shows... etc.

She is in fashion business since 10 years; always in communication.

She has a degree in business.

### 1. Shaping consumer desires

It is important to increase popularity of the brand, using the right channels of communication... There are so many details involved for achieving this popularity. For example, in fashion shows, we choose the best hair dresser (the most famous in the world), for make-up, similarly, the best people to make the hats, so the level of my company, each operation, each person (HR), everything have to be at a high level... the people who work for you... let's say, if you are working for African market, you try to find the person with best experience, consultants with great experience. There are one million synergies. It is too easy to say for example, I go to the right place, so it is OK, it works. For example, our store in Paris, located in the best spot (Champs-Élysée), next to a Gucci store; the shop is two floors, elegant, beautiful, but it does not work. Every French... no... Parisian because the reality is Paris... just buy famous brands, so it does not work, while in Germany, we sell one million shoes, even if we are in a small town, but also, I must confess we don't have a big communication budget for France. We go there, we talk to Madame Elle, we got some editorial, but it depends. There are so many variables... so many... it is not only the designer... it is not only the selling point... it is a mix of everything and if everything is well calibrated... probably it works... also during (economical) crisis, even the best the most famous companies have problems. You can never say, I am there so it will sell. Everything must be done in a perfect, at a very high level, and even if you do the best work, it is never sure that it works. You never know in fashion... maybe it is famous Gucci bags... it also depends of the age of the company... also, the price strategy... Ok I have these shoes, I sell them for five euros, maybe you don't succeed; maybe your price is too low, you loose the "allure" of the object; it is very complicated; we can stay here talking 36 hours.

- Articles in the magazines
- Product photos in magazine recommended by journalists (editorial)

*Journalists present editorial pages in magazines with images of models, dressed up with different brand names... they decide... it is important to be selected (your products) in editorials.*

- Advertising in magazines
- TV ads
- Dressing up celebrities (they dressed up a celebrity in last San Remo Festival), choosing young, beautiful, fresh, intelligent women.
- Communication at the shops is important
- Location of the shops to take the attention of consumers
- Windows
- Keeping the same high quality image in all communication channels
- The image of the designer is important.

We are serving the luxury market. We are advertising in magazines like Vogue, Elle, Marie Claire... These are the magazines that get printed all over the world, America, Germany, England, France... What do we want to transmit (to consumers)... we are trying to keep a certain (high) level in everything we do, with our product quality, paying attention to all raw material bought (leather...). Also, we want to present a style, but not "a life style" like everybody likes to talk about... they say, we are giving a philosophy... it is not realistic... just because you put a Ralph Lauren jacket does not

mean that you will now go horse back riding and buy art books...etc... I just find all of these a bit exaggerated; after all we do also want to communicate a "look", an idea of elegance, even when presenting something sportive or ethnic. I interpret fashion in my (company) way of elegance. I want to communicate my idea of elegance. The idea of giving a life style is almost offensive... "I come to give you a style of life"... everybody has his/her own personality. I offer you a selection, hoping that you will choose my products.

- Trying to launch the product as a necessity.

For example, Prada created something (functional, practical) to attach to bags, then this became a necessity through communication of many years and word of mouth diffusion.

- Behind a famous brand name such as Versace, there is a magic touch of the stylist.

2. Inspirations come from many moments of real life... "then you transfer this to your products produced with higher quality materials. For example, a stylist can take the Indian sandals, from India, where the lowest class wear them, transform it, and sell it for 1000 euro in high fashion windows."

3. Suppliers are important shaping the product:

The little pieces that form the product, raw materials such as fabric, buttons, zips, etc., those pieces are already given, you know what to expect.

4. There is a big crisis in the sector: You cannot stop buying food, but you can stop buying clothing and shoes.

5. Quality is important: We want to communicate quality to consumers... nowadays, quality is no more guaranteed by the brands.

6. How did fashion changed?

In consideration that there has been a very big crisis in the sector, at the moment the priority is the quality. We have a product at a certain level of (high) quality, because it is not enough anymore the "brand". During 80's, there was an economic richness; luxury was important, name was enough. There was this desire of showing off. Now, consumers are much more attentive. They still want to be fashionable, but also pay attention the characteristics of the product. To go back... you always have to think of the fashion of luxury or the general fashion. For example, buying at Zara or H&M, you can follow fashion at good price; then there is the fashion of luxury.

Like I was telling before, in 80's there was this desire of showing of (luxury) while in 90's, there was more understatement. I think the biggest difference between 80's and 90's is the minimalism with Prada, with CK, with Armani. In the future, we may still have some minimalism, but now, it is moving towards a maximalism like with Cavalli, a little baroque, rich, full of details, accessorial accessories, also, in 80's there were many colors, heaviness; things do come in cycles; then we had these linear lines, white, black colors during 90's, then, its has been a shift for ethnic trends, something really specific. At the moment, a lot of different worlds are living together; you can still see the style of 90's with black pants, black jackets; maybe in a few years time, it will be easier to see and say what is happening now. It seems like people are trying to separate themselves form the general trends, with a spirit of more freedom, so the stylists are

deciding to give more richness or simplicity to their collections. They seem to be going their own way, while in 80's and 90's trends were more identifiable. The stylists now are doing what they are desiring for.

*There are no more strict trends; individual makes the fashion, designers are showing their personal styles.*

*Maybe more simple products sell more, but for communication they present more fashionable, new products.*

7. The middle class is disappearing: Famous brands will produce for very rich, for very few people, and then there will be the other extreme with Zara, H&M, low prices.

8. Clients mix and match.

9. Consumer desires (women)

- They want to be sexy
- They want to be more beautiful
- They want to be younger
- They look for practicality combined with elegance
- Commodity, elegance and a touch of sensuality
- They want to be better than who she really is.
- They want to feel well – “a posto”
- They like to change
- They want to feel secure

In a world full of insecurities, the desire of accomplishing the impossibilities, it is also about feeling secure, feeling similar. If you approach somebody that you don't know, but in your style you feel more secure... these big trends also serve as a point of reference. This is a bit more psychological. There are all these political, economical insecurities, uncertainties. There is also problem of time; maybe students can spend 10 hours searching around the right things to buy, but a top manager does not have that time, and goes to Gucci, buy 10 things in a few minutes and feel well about herself (Press Office Manager: Francesca).

- You can be fashionable in every occasion from work, to gym, to night-outs. Women really enjoy dressing up.

10. The case of Zara:

The success of these big companies like Zara is that they give the chance to buy a lot and to change a lot.

#### 4) Gianni

57 years old, married male with two sons

Interview date: 19.02.2005 · duration: 1 hour

Interview took place in Istituto Europeo di Design, where he is teaching part time.

He is a fashion buyer since 33 years. He was a fashion buyer for Rinascente (one of the biggest department store chain in Italy) for 12 years. Then, he started working free lance as a consultant to fashion companies, deciding on the colors, materials, and styles of the collection (forecasting what will sell). He also has a great knowledge and information about what is going on and how things work in fashion business, also concerning several well-known brands.

His mom was a tailor for upper class (as he uses this term): Since then, he was interested in fashion business.

He had a business degree at the university.

1. Forecasting what will sell:

- Experience in the business is important
- Visiting international fairs

Gianni explains that textile organizations' research on trends is the most important, leading fashion trends. Organizations (textile fairs) like Moda-In in Milan and Premier Vision in Paris control 90% of the textile supply in the world. In their last meeting in October 2004, they presented trend inspirations for Spring/Summer 2006. They presented 3 groups of colors with 3 different life styles, and then 4 interpretations (by stylists) for each group, but more or less the starting idea is the same for all (4 interpretations). All designs are in 3 main directions.

Note: To be able to present the trends for SS 2006 in Oct.2004, they start searching one year in advance (2003).

(Trend search is about) to have look at what is going on the streets; a trend setter can also be an event, a cultural event, or Madonna when she had some dark dresses. Tattoo started on the street; piercing started on the street.

Also, if you are a buyer, you know that there are some places, some streets in town as trend setters. I go to Milan, to Florence, but also to London for instance. I go to America if my current project is beach wear; I go to L.A. or to Miami because, on the sea, it is easier to find some people. If my aim is different maybe I go to NY, because NY is the center of the world; it is also good for vintage; I go to Tokyo; it is also good for vintage... I talk about students, models, or simple young people that like fashion and want to be different than their fathers and mothers. They have no money so they buy vintage. Also, journalists are important; many trend setters are journalists because they have to find a new story everyday so; every time they see something they write about it; they select novelties... For instance, Diesel has 40 people that are sent all around the world. These are young designers, young journalists... one is in Brazil, one is in NY, etc... and they report to Diesel. For instance... young people are listening to this music, they are drinking this kind of beer... and this is the style of people, and Diesel is able to connect all this information from all around the world because they must do only one collection, and decide the new style.

- Traveling to fashion centers in the world like NY, Paris, London etc.
- Observing streets
- Listening to music, going to parties
- Observing what kind of life style you have

Dolce (D&G) is able to understand before the other; he has observations of thousand of people with thousands of ideas. He is able to understand which idea is good and will be accepted by the upper class.



2. Fashion diffusion:

As in the quotations above, Gianni thinks nowadays, fashion starts in the streets, and the information from real life is interpreted by big designers and presented first to upper-class (that are the ones who can afford these brand name products), then slowly moves to middle and lower classes.

3. Shaping consumer desires:

- Looking at windows
- Watching celebrities
- TV shows
- World events – political events (like the university movement before 80's)

Today everybody has everything, so I have to discover a little thing... a desire that is not satisfied... if you don't find this special thing... today you are nothing.

4. Desires of women

Consumers, especially women are not like a computer. Today, every company that has strategic marketing does not sell because it is not mathematical what they (women) want; it is more psychological.

- Today, you don't buy an object, you buy an emotion.

5. The meaning of fashion today:

We had rich people... we are not rich now but, in Italy we had a big period when fashion was very important. In 90's, you could buy Versace, you were buying label; today women have very low loyalty. They can buy Versace, but they can also buy D&G, or they can go to the open market. The same consumer is able to connect one piece bought in the open market, very cheap and a D&G product, and the next year she can change her idea because fashion today is one of the expressions of life style; it is not so important. Fashion is important, but your style of life is also important; for example, today in Italy, a lot of girls are going to gym. They are doing some Japanese exercise; it is special to have Sashu; very strange; they waste a lot of money for that... that is fashion; for example, mobile phones; they invest a lot of money for new design, new color. Fashion now is life style... Today for example, in Italy, for young people, it is very important the small things for the house; the young girl goes to buy a special lamp. The money she used to spend in dresses maybe she spends it now for her room.

*He also says in 90's fashion consumer behavior was more predictable. They were brand loyal people, or anti-label people, or cheap line. As a producer you could choose for which target group to produce. Nowadays, it is hard to make this distinction.*

...in 90's leadership was in the hands of the industry... also label. If Versace told you to take this dress, you were obliged to say 'Yes.' Today there is a big offer from every where, from China, from Turkey... from stylists... and less request, in respect to 90's now because you in your house you have everything. You buy new trousers not

because you need but if this trouser gives you a new emotion, and now the power is in the hands of the consumer, and the consumers are very different.

4. All people in the supply chain have the same information about the consumer:  
For example, Dolce & Gabana, they don't do a collection every 6 months, but every month... also 'La filiera' is very important. 'La filiera' is all the people (organizations) involved in producing a product; for instance, production factory, dying factory for jeans, stylist, buyer, retail shop. All these people must have the same information about consumer. Dolce is very good because he is able to involve people; for example a dyer can take a decision in respect to the idea – general concept of the collection.
5. Future of fashion:  
I think the people who are doing fashion have to look at new people... in Turkey, in China... because we have this phenomenon here since 80 years; it is not so important anymore in Italy, in Europe. If I am a Fashion consultant or I have a fashion factory, I would like to develop my clients in Turkey for instance, where economy will develop because here in Italy, there will be no more development in fashion. I think there will be development of life style. In a style of life, I can buy fashion or other objects.

### 5) Grazia

33 years old, married female

Interview date: 11.04.2005 duration: 35 min.

Interview in a cafeteria

She is in fashion business since 10 years. She is the retail director of a very famous high fashion brand since 3 years, responsible for all stores that company owns

She was very hesitant to give info...

She has an MBA.

1. Company watches the trends and consumers:  
It is important to catch the trends and develop something related to that in your collection. Our point is to catch the moment of what consumers want and try to really make the wish become true.
2. Trying to understand consumers:  
It is very difficult; every morning you try to figure that out. First of all, I think you need to understand what you have, what your consumer is shouting, and what you have to offer. You have to understand how you can make your weak points stronger. For example, each brand has its own identity. For example, if there is a moment when black and white is the trend and you are a colorful company, like my company, it will be very difficult, but you have to adapt your products to the trends of the moment.
3. It is important to watch the real life.
4. Feedback from the market to orient fashion designers:
  - Feedback from the catwalk
  - Feedback from the retail stores

We give a lot of feedback to our designers. We inform them about how the collection was bought by the customers. One is the catwalk and the other one is your findings on the stores. You have to customize a bit the collection because many things that you see

on the catwalk are not things you can wear. You have to put them down to earth. I am responsible of the 'buying' (choosing / deciding the collections) for the stores. 90% of the stores are daily wear and the other 10% is the collection and catwalk.

5. Consumer Desires

- They want to be trendy
- They want quality, especially in high fashion
- They want to be unique
- They need practicality, something they can wear from 7am in the morning to 12pm in the evening.
- People do mix and match from different brands.

6. Shaping consumer desires

- Consumers are looking at magazines
- Products should be perfect (quality and trend wise), the product that is not perfect should not be in the store.

• They offer choices to consumers  
(daily wear, evening wear, special occasions)

- Communication and advertising is very important
- Opening new stores, increasing visibility.
- Using celebrities
- Organizing big events
- Fashion shows

*They spend a lot of money on marketing.*

7. There is something unique in every brand: *ex. This company (style) is colorful. If the trend is Ethnic, they apply it colorful.*

6) Luisa

60 years old, divorced with one daughter

Interview date: 12.04.2005 duration: 40 min – interrupted many times

Interview in her house

She worked with G. Franco Ferre, Gianni Versace, Ralph Lauren, Aldo Gucci, Armani and many more, mainly in their marketing and public relations activities. The last years of her career, she became the fashion school director of Istituto Europeo di Design. She is retired since two years.

She has a degree in business.

1. There are fads; it is no longer fashion:

There are fads, very quick trends that last very short time. For example, blue jeans at this moment; do you realize that every woman now wears blue jeans, as a fashion item, not as a casual item. In TV, everybody wears blue jeans. Everybody now on the street, not only the teens, but women in their 40, 50, 60 years old like me are again wearing blue jeans. This is a fad. It is no longer fashion; there is not one big trend. There are some fads. This is really the change about fashion.

2. Every designer has its own style:  
...they are not doing fashion; they are supporting their own style.
3. Change in fashion – Individual makes the fashion:  
The fashion of the 80's which was luxurious, big etc, and the minimalism of the 90's Prada; now this is in a way finished; there is not a precise style. Everybody chooses along his or her desire.  
It is all about fads.
4. Black is finally gone; fashion is the color.
5. You can follow fashion from Zara, H&M stores.
6. Everything is now global: ex. Japanese fashion.
7. To follow consumer desires is impossible because individual makes fashion today: So, nowadays, designers propose their own style, so consumers can choose from the style they like.
8. Once the styles were changing (ex: skirts longer or shorter), now the colors are changing.
9. Accessories are important.
10. Consumer Desires
  - They want practicality
  - They want reasonable prices
  - When you buy a dress, you buy an emotion

(You can buy one emotion in Dior or 5 emotions in Zara for the same price)

  - They want quality
  - They like to change
11. People make the trends: There are consumers like me who research for what they like.

### 7) Manuela

55 years old, female, married with two sons  
Interview date: 15.04.2005 duration: 35 min.  
Interview in her house

She has been Product Manager in companies such as Romeo Gilli, Helmut Lang, and Costume Nationale. Her job was to coordinate all what is happening from sketches up to the catwalk. She also worked in a marketing and communication agency, taking care of textile fibers and developing market for it. She also did some teaching about textile material from yarns to garments.

Now, she is working for an Indian company who wants to develop its market in Europe; they are producing shirt fabric.

She has a degree in business.

1. People involved in fashion business are the first fashion victims: They are the most important fashion consumers because they are the first to buy, to show, and to go around.

2. The challenge of Eastern Asia: Keeps you moving and invest more in know-how.

3. Fashion is changing

80's was a period of show-off; I think now everything is a bit more balanced... I think because of communications... in 80's only few companies could do communications; nowadays, everybody does communications. Through internet, information flows from NY, Hong Kong, everywhere. For example, an innovative textile created by a designer is immediately known by other producers. I think we must emphasize the creativity and differentiation.

4. The market is global: You cannot do one collection for Italy, one collection for the US, one collection for Russia; you have to think more global.

5. The case of Zara: You can go once to Versace but 10 times to Zara for the same prices, but buy more emotions.

6. What are the desires of working women?

They want ideas; they don't want anymore garments. You are not buying garments anymore, you are buying the philosophy of the garment. You have plenty of garments, plenty of jeans; you want to buy the philosophy that garment implies. Last year 50% of Italians in Milan have bought ecological products that help the environment, Africa, very poor countries, etc. Especially in food sector, more and more the products are made with respect to environment, people, etc. I think this is a trend. I think if 50% of Milanese people bought such products, the philosophy of 3rd millennium would be to be more respectful for people, for environment, and this kind of things. I think garments will also move to this direction.

Price is very important.

7. Everyone is dressing up like they want.

8. Romeo Gilli was talking about inspirations from Incas, to design and create.

### 8) Rita

32 years old, single female

Interview date: 05.05.2005 duration: 55 min.

Interview in her office

She is the store manager of a famous fashion shop (like Zara).

She has a two years university degree in business.

(At the beginning, she was very hesitant to give info. Just like the high fashion retail director)

1. The most important thing is to be able to keep the consumer in the shop for a long time: The longer she stays, the more she shops.

- Visual merchandising is important – windows, to be able to attract the consumer to enter the shop.

- Interior decoration is very important – the angle of sight, putting colorful, eccentric products to dead angles, the lay-out of furniture

- The behavior of sales people –

People want to be free, comfortable, and they want the attention of sales people, but balanced. They don't want to be pushed around nor completely left alone. They want

to receive attention when they ask for help. When sales person asks: "Can I help" too immediately, too often, most of the people don't like it. They first want to look and warm up to the environment, to the shop. They want to observe. They ask for help later... also the sales people should be nice, smiling, helpful.

- Letting consumers touch the merchandise as much as they like  
The most important thing is to touch and to go around with the product in her hand and feel like the proprietary of the product... letting them free... this is very important.
- Give the customers the freedom for trying as much as they like.

## 2. Consumer Desires

People are more self-confident now. They know what they want, their size, what looks good on them.

They (consumers) want to consume fast; some change every two weeks; they loose interest to what they already have; they like to change.

- They can buy fashion at reasonable prices
- Some want to dress up like celebrities even if that does not fit them.

They think by dressing up like them, they can be like them.

- Lack of self-confidence
- They want to be more elegant.
- They want to be more beautiful.
- They want to look sexy and feminine (some even at work)
- They want to be different

I think human being has a problem as wanting to be different. Of course everybody is different, act different, but they all end up being similar. We all end up doing the same thing; we all use similar textile, colors, designs, we only try to make something little different. We all are the same after all, the consumer, the producer, maybe a little textile, color, cut change but after all everything is the same. We always want to be different that is why we consume a lot.

## 3. Shaping consumer desires

- Producing products that are sexy and feminine
- They are influenced by other women

When I take a walk in the shop, I see people looking at other people's hands to understand what they are buying. The dresses that are tried on in dressing rooms are also very important. The largest part of sales is executed in dressing rooms. In dressing rooms, they always look at each other... what does she wear? What does she buy? Does she look nice with it?

...also, what I dress... the dresses I put on receive the most sales.

Windows are important, the story on the windows to take their attention. Every decorative piece on the window has a meaning... the timing is also very important, the pieces you choose from a collection (to put on windows) really depend on the timing of seasons, events such as the New Year.

4. She observes clients, trying to understand and putting her self in their place.
5. While shopping they feel themselves:

I think this store is the place where they feel the best, and the place where they are acting as who they are. All other places, they are not themselves (referring to other social places such as work etc.) While shopping they are themselves... this is something personal. In normal life, many times, we act as we are supposed to. You could be a nice person but you may have to act tougher; you may be tempered but you act nice... of course this is not a generalization... but here, a person is who she is; if she is too much picky, she shops picky; if she is self-confident, she shops self-confident; if she is an unhappy person, she does not like anything. The moment she enters from the door, she becomes herself; this is the general behavior; I think they find comfort here while shopping, free from duties as a wife, mother, employee, whatever. This is time they spare for themselves, and they feel better afterwards. They don't find comfort elsewhere that is why they shop so much. Being yourself makes you relaxed. Our aim is to keep her longer in the shop.