

## A Qualitative Assessment of Feminism in U.S. Women's Fashion of the 1970s

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### Abstract

*The purposes of this study were to examine the fashion adopted by young women in the United States in the 1970s and to explore how the dynamic shifts toward feminist values influenced those fashion trends. Fifteen American women who were college students in the 1970s were interviewed for the study. Throughout the decade, casual and comfortable styles became more prevalent; for example, pants became widely accepted for formal occasions as well as informal occasions due to an overall emphasis on practicality. The feminist and civil rights movements along with more liberal attitudes toward religion were among the more dominant cultural values that influenced the respondents' choices in clothing styles. Feminist presentation was diverse - extreme or eclectic - and constantly renegotiating itself. This study helped us better understand the dynamics involved between fashion and value changes as well as the influence of feminism on the 1970s fashion in the United States.*

*Key words : cultural values, feminism, the 1970s, the United States, young women's fashion*

### I. Introduction

Cultural value systems are guiding principles by which humans make choices and decisions.<sup>1)</sup> However, values are not static and undergo modification during socialization processes within a culture;<sup>2)</sup> subsequently, changes in values also affect changes in fashion.

The 1970s saw rapid changes and upheavals

among social values in the United States; these were primarily fueled by the anti-war, civil rights, feminist, and gay liberation movements. The energy crisis, increasing unemployment and inflation, and ecology were major economic concerns, while the sports and health club boom coupled with increasing interests in nutrition and diet permeated notions of leisure and recreation.<sup>3)</sup> Among all of these social changes, the women's movement was the most prominent.<sup>4)</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1990), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> R. Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> J. Herald, *Fashions of a Decade: The 1970s*, (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1992), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Wandersee notes that the feminist movement prompted changes in women's sexual and family roles, and as their education and economic opportunities increased, their image in the media changed.<sup>5</sup> Society in general was moving away from the perception that quality of life depended on materialism, industrialism, and human domination of nature,<sup>6</sup> and there was a newfound appreciation for individual freedom. At the same time, a nostalgic interest in traditional cultures of the developing world became widespread as TV and film promoted a variety of retro styles.<sup>7</sup>

This study examined young women's fashion and values in the United States in the 1970s. Its purposes were first, to document the fashion adopted by young women in the United States in the 1970s, or more specifically, to give an example of real life Americans' selection of fashion in the 1970s; second, to examine young women's values in the decade, namely what the selection meant to them; and third, to explore the dynamics of how feminism affected fashion as a major cultural theme of the decade. This study helps us to better understand the impact of cultural values on fashion.

## II. Review of Literature

<sup>5</sup> W. D. Wandersee, *On the Move: American Women in the 1970s* (Boston: G. K. Hall Co., 1988), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> R. Odell, *Environmental Awakening: The New Revolution to Protect Earth* (Cambridge, Mass: Ballinger, 1980), p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> J. Herald, 1992, *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Merriam-Webster Inc., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, (Springfield, Mass: Merriam-Webster Inc., 2002), p. 428.

<sup>9</sup> J. Flax, "Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory", in L. J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> S. Harding, "Feminism, science, and the anti-Enlightenment critique", in L. J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> S. O. Michelman and S. B. Kaiser, "Feminist issues in textiles and clothing research: Working through/with the contradictions", *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 18(3), (2000), p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> G. S. O'Neal, "Am I a feminist? Reflections on feminism in teaching and research", *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 18(3) (2000), p. 195-198.

<sup>13</sup> S. B. Kaiser, "Gender relations, clothing, and appearance: Discovering a common ground with feminist thought", in S. B. Kaiser & M. L. Damhorst (Eds.), *Critical Linkage in Textiles and Clothing Subject matter: Theory, Method and Practice (Special Publication 4)* (Monument, CO: International Textile and Apparel Association, 1991). p. 210-222.

C. De Stefano, "Dilemma of difference: Feminism, modernity, and postmodernism", in L. J. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Feminism is the conceptual framework by which the data from this study is analyzed.

### I. Feminism

Feminism is "the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes."<sup>8</sup> This theory analyzes how gender relations are constructed and explained.<sup>9</sup> Feminists challenged cultural notions of femininity as they had been constructed in a male-dominated society,<sup>10</sup> with the ultimate goal of transforming gender imbalances so that women could equally fulfill their potential as a human beings.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary feminists also incorporate other concepts such as race, class, and sexuality into their criticism. According to O'Neal, feminism is "about destroying boundaries that keep people from each other, and correcting the power imbalances in society through forms of resistance and opposition regardless of factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, and religion."<sup>12</sup>

Feminism has various perspectives and underpinnings. Kaiser classifies and explains different philosophical thoughts based on Stefano's identification of rationalism, anti-rationalism, and post-rationalism.<sup>13</sup> According to Kaiser, the aim of

rationalist feminism is to collapse gender differences with the goal of entering male culture, criticizing the premise that women are less rational than men and have been excluded from male social world. The philosophy behind anti-rationalism is to set women free by incorporating female culture into mainstream, preserving femininity rather than women's becoming more like men.<sup>14</sup> The goal of post-rationalist feminism is to refute the oppositional categories that define gender relations and place value on personal differences.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1970s, feminists critiqued fashion for its traditional emphasis on femininity and its role of reinforcing the sexual objectification of women.<sup>16</sup> Some feminists intentionally rejected or expressed indifference to conventional fashion and selected more comfortable, more practical, and less feminine styles of dress.<sup>17</sup> These women promoted the natural look with long straight hair, no makeup, and often no brassiere while simultaneously adopting some styles from working class male culture such as blue jeans and work shirts. In some extreme cases, women discarded their brassieres as a symbol to protest male domination. However, feminists' self presentation was not only diverse and complex but constantly being renegotiated.<sup>18</sup> In her study "A visual analysis of feminist dress," Kunkel found that feminists may either reject or conform to traditional feminine standards or present them simultaneously in context specific ways.<sup>19</sup>

### III. Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach. The 1970 through 1979 issues of the American fashion magazine *Mademoiselle* were examined as a representation of young American women's fashion magazines. It was the most representative of college women's styles because college women were a target readership. Then, a set of stimuli was compiled to use during interviews. The stimulus set was shown after a respondent answered all the questions related to styles that they actually wore in the 1970s before answering value questions. The set was intended to remind the respondents if they had forgotten to mention any styles they wore at that time. Preliminary interviews were conducted, from which an interview schedule and the final stimulus set were developed. The main interview schedule consisted of two broad themes of fashion styles and cultural values and appearance with background questions. Each theme was then divided into sub-themes, and thirty-four questions were ultimately developed.

A convenience sample of fifteen women who attended college in the 1970s was selected and in-depth interviews were conducted averaging one hour in length. The women were asked to exhibit photographs or actual clothing items from the 1970s, and each interview was audio taped. Each interview was transcribed, and the primary researcher verified its accuracy.

The constant comparative method and open coding<sup>20</sup> were adopted for the study. According to Strauss and Corbin,<sup>21</sup> the constant com-

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216. This categorization was made in the 1990s; therefore, the interpretation of feminism was not exactly the same as that in the 1970s.

<sup>16</sup> S. O. Michelman and S. B. Kaiser, 2000, *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>17</sup> S. O. Michelman and S. B. Kaiser, 2000, *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> C. Kunkel, "A visual analysis of feminist dress", In M. L. Danhorst, K. A. Miller, & S. O. Michelman (Eds.), *The meanings of dress*, (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> C. Kunkel, 1999, *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>20</sup> According to A. Strauss, & J. Corbin, open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" in their book *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64

parative method promotes the yielding of patterns and themes in analyzing data. Broad themes were initially identified and refined; then, new themes were identified throughout the analysis. The coded transcripts were first compared across respondents, then within each respondent in order to identify both cultural and individual themes. In order to verify the accuracy and reliability of the coding, one additional coder besides the primary researcher reviewed five transcripts. Discrepancies between the coders were negotiated and incorporated into the coding of the rest transcripts.

Background information of the respondents is provided in (Table 1); the analysis refers to respondents by their designated number.

#### IV. Findings in Interview Analysis

##### 1. Fashion Styles

###### 1) Adopted Styles

###### (1) Campus Wear

Female college students in the 1970s tended to adopt very casual and comfortable styles on campus. One woman (A2), who went to college from 1969-1973, recalled that at her college in the 1950s and 1960s female students were required to wear skirts for class and that the early 1970s were a transitional period towards more casual and informal styles. Most students (ten) considered practicality a priority for campus wear:

On campus I wore efficient student clothing. I wore jeans, sweaters, boots, or sneakers or tennis shoes. When I was on campus, my goal was to keep warm and dry, and I really never thought much about trying to be fashionable ... I remember my college advisor told me on the day I graduated that it was the first time he'd ever seen my legs. (A9)

During this period, pants began to overshadow skirts. Fourteen women said that they primarily wore blue jeans, which became the unofficial uniform of college students throughout the decade. The symbolic significance of jeans has gone through a great evolution since their initial development for laborers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Wearing jeans during the 1970s was associated with "women's desire to achieve equality with men" and "women's enhanced status" although their appeal was largely due to comfort, versatility, affordability, and durability. This wide adoption of jeans and their symbolic significance along with pants' gradual replacement of skirts for women emphasized feminism's influence on women's fashion in the decade.

The variety of jeans' styles evolved throughout the decade. In the early 1970s, hip hugger bell-bottoms (Fig. 1), leftover hippie styles of the late 1960s, were worn with wide belts, turtlenecks or sweaters (four women). The popularity of bell-bottoms continued into the middle of the 1970s and they were often accompanied by men's work shirts or tie-dyed t-shirts. Baggy jeans also gained popularity with short crop tops. Straight leg jeans, denim bib overalls, and practical corduroy pants became popular later in the decade. During this period, jeans were adopted by designers as high fashion. This is an indication of bottom-up diffusion<sup>22)</sup> as jeans moved from the subculture dress code to the widely accepted American uniform. Designer jeans were made to fit and stretch to the body in new polyester/denim blends; they no longer possessed the cheap, long lasting, uniform characteristics of style.<sup>23)</sup>

Personalizing jeans was also popular among young women. One woman (A1) recalled buying jeans in second hand shops and making slits on both sides and sewing different materials in them and around the hems. As Solomon pointed out, "jeans embodied a paradox of

<sup>22</sup> S. Kaiser, 1990, *Ibid.*, p. 230

<sup>23</sup> S. Kaiser, 1990, *Ibid.*, p. 196.

〈Table 1〉 Background Information of Respondents

	Occupation	Home Town	College	Major	College Years	ES	FI	LF
A1	Teacher/community college	Bradford, IL	U of Illinois, IL	Psychology	67~71	l	l	n
A2	Adult teacher/extension	Alden, IA	Iowa State U, IA	Family environment	69~73	lm	a/h	n
A3	Lawyer/ law firm	Merriman & Gorden, NB	U of Nebraska, NB & Drake, IA	Social science	70~73	m	a/l	n
A4	Specialist/recruitment for college	Amana Colonies, IA	Iowa State U, IA	Textiles & clothing	70~73	m	a	n
A5	Professional/health insurance co.	Cleveland, OH	Grinnell College, IA	Education, psychology	70~74	m	l	y
A6	Director/ honor program	Atlantic, IA	Iowa State U, IA	History	70~74	u	h	n
A7	Professor/ creative writing	Bronx & Long Island, NY	Iowa State U, IA	English	71~73	u	a	n
A8	Professor/ESL	Quincy, IL	U of Illinois, IL	Linguistics	71~74	l	h	n
A9	Professor/journalism	Des Moines, IA	Iowa State U, IA	Journalism	71~74	m	a	n
A10	Director/women and politics	Fremont, NB	Kearney State U, NB	Journalism	71~75	m	h	n
A11	Administration at a university	Southern MN	Makato U, MN Iowa State U, IA	Business education	71~76	m	a	n
A12	Professor/ESL	Near Detroit, MI	Michigan State U, MI	Linguistics	73~77	m	a	n
A13	English teacher/ high school	Stacyville, IA	Iowa State U, IA	English education	74~79	m	a	n
A14	Academic advisor	Geneva, IA	U of Northern Iowa, IA	Clothing	77~81	m	h	n
A15	Professor/ESL	Palo Alto, CA	Cornell U, NY	Biology, English	78~82	m	l	n

\* ES: Family's Economic Status during college ⇒ u: upper middle, m: middle, lm: lower middle, l: low; FI: Fashion Interest during college ⇒ h: highly interested, a: average, l: lower than average; LF: Living with Family during college ⇒ y: yes, n: no; U: University.

individuality and conformity;<sup>24)</sup> conformity still existed in the hippie look within groups that rejected mainstream fashion, but jeans were used as a means of expressing individuality and distinction by personalizing them.

Besides jeans, more formal pants styles were

also popular in the classroom. Bell-bottom style pants were often worn with tunic tops and large jackets. Pantsuits with big plaids (Fig. 2) were also very popular. There was a tendency for college women to wear jeans more frequently as freshmen and sophomores than in their later

<sup>24</sup> M. Solomon, "The role of products as social stimuli: A symbolic interactionism perspective", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10 (1983), p. 319-329.



<Fig. 1> Hip-Hugger Jeans (1972).



<Fig. 2> Pant Suits with Big Plaids (1973).

college years.

### (2) Dating Wear

Eight respondents took special care when selecting styles for dating while seven wore the same clothes on dates as they did for other activities. Only two of the eight women tried to look feminine on dates while the other five just wore nicer or less casual clothes. Pants were

more acceptable to women on dates though they usually wore nicer pants or pantsuits. Individuals are encouraged to manage their appearance to meet social expectations, and dating for many women most likely requires a self-presentation that embodies their notions of femininity.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, not only was there an increasing acceptance of women wearing pants on dates, but the fact that only two of the fifteen respondents tried to look feminine on dates illustrates how they subscribed to less traditional gender roles. Femininity is a fluid rather than a fixed notion as there are shifts in cultural values and attitudes. The increasing adoption of pants by women probably redefined images of femininity of the decade.

The women who tried to look more feminine on dates wore skirts and feminine (romantic) blouses of fluid or sheer fabrics or patterns (flowers, etc.). Their ideas of gender roles were more traditional, and they made more of an attempt to meet men's expectations:

Actually, dating was probably the one time you would see me wearing skirts. You know most guys like girls in skirts, and so I would wear skirts on dates ... I wore miniskirts. I will tell you, in '71, '72, '73, '74, honey, I wore short skirts ... 18" long, and it stopped ... In the mid-1970s, you began to find people playing with skirt lengths ... Like this outfit (Fig. 3) ... that is a plaid outfit with short shorts or sometimes called hot pants with a matching vest and over that a skirt that came up to the mid calf length, middle of the calf. It was called a midi. Yes. So in the early 70s, you had maxi skirts, which were floor lengths, midi, which was the middle of the calf, and mini was as high above the knee as you dared to go, and I wore all 3 lengths at the same time... (A9)

This woman identified herself as a feminist and supported her positions during her interview

<sup>25</sup> N. A. Rudd and S. J. Lennon, "Body image and appearance-management behavior in college women", *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 18(3) (2000), pp. 152-162.



〈Fig. 3〉 Hot Pants with a Midi Vest (1971).

when answering certain questions. For example, her ideal styles suggested a resistance to traditional feminine norms. It was often found that feminists presented their images as traditionally feminine on some occasions, which is consistent with the finding of Kunkel's study – – "Feminists negotiate the cultural ideals of femininity and a feminist consciousness in context-specific ways."<sup>26</sup>

### (3) Formal Wear

Clothing worn for formal occasions included short (9 women) or long one-piece (1) or two-piece dresses (2) or pantsuits (7). Women made more careful choices in design for formal occasions than for campus wear, often based on their own body's shape. Pants were increasingly chosen by women for not only informal but also formal occasions; this reflected the social and economic liberation of women in the decade.

### (4) Accessories

Wide acceptance of casual and comfortable clothes on campuses in the 1970s carried over to shoes, bags, and other accessories. Comfortable shoes were widely accepted among college



〈Fig. 4〉 One-Piece Dress for Formal Occasion (1974).



〈Fig. 5〉 Long Dresses for Formal Occasion (1973).

students. Many women described their favorite styles as "simple" and "traditional". Of the fifteen respondents, the footwear most often referred to were sandals (eight), tennis shoes (seven), loafers (five), boots (four), pumps (four), high heels worn with more formal attire (four), clogs (three), shoes with platform soles

<sup>26</sup> C. Kunkel, *Ibid.* p. 188.

(two), earth shoes (two), and hush puppies (two).

Six women carried backpacks and five women carried book bags with straps. Three women carried books in their arm or hand without book bags, which was in style at that time. "Simple", "minimal", and "modest" were the most common descriptions of the jewelry they owned. Beads and macramé were also big fads. Along with feminism, ethnic identity became more prominent, and clothing such as hand-made crafted items spread widely. Seven women answered that they did not wear hats at all, suggesting that hats were not a big fashion item in the 1970s. Scarves were in fashion and worn in many different ways. In general, most respondents wore either no makeup or makeup that was very "light" and "natural".

## 2) Ideal Styles

The interviewed women were asked to describe their ideal style or name a person who exhibited that style. The ideal among five of the women was something comfortable, varying from pants suits to pants with a sweater or jacket to jeans and t-shirts. Three women identified their ideal as a "tailored style" represented by Audrey Hepburn (A9), "powerful but feminine look without ruffles and lace" by Givency (A9); "romantic styles" in the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (A11); or "simple styles" exhibited by Jackie Kennedy Onassis (A3). The woman (A9) whose ideal styles were "tailored" or "powerful but feminine without ruffles and lace" was a self-identified feminist. She seemed to hold a post-rationalist feminist position in that her ideal style blurred the lines between a masculine and feminine look, avoiding overly feminine styles. The terms "ruffles and lace" symbolizes traditionally defined femininity while "powerful" or "tailored look" suggests a masculine look. Respondents used words such as "simple," "neat," "classic," "impeccable," "comfortable," "powerful," "ta-

ilored look," "feminine," "arty," "funky," or "bohemian" to define their ideal styles.

## 3) Style Conformity to Peer Group

Even though some women considered themselves nonconformists, most women (nine) conformed to their peer group styles stressing the cohesiveness of adolescent groups, especially among females. In American culture, individualism is as deeply rooted as capitalism and democracy, and individuality has been touted as a means of freedom and creativity. However, female college students tended to follow group norms, and conformity was very important.

## 2. Values and Appearance

### 1) Young Women's Values in the 1970s

The values held by the respondents in the 1970s are listed in (Table 2).

Most young women in the sample held feminist values during the 1970s. Liberal and permissive attitudes -- having fun and doing whatever felt good -- prevailed among college students pursuing a sense of freedom. Paradoxically, youths were politically active throughout the decade and growing more independent with new rights and responsibilities. The United States in the 1970s was well into a post-industrial<sup>27</sup>

(Table 2) Young Women's Values in the U.S. in the 1970s

Value Dimension	Frequency
Equality for women as well as racial and religious minorities (or feminism)	7
Liberal and permissive attitude (or Freedom/free love)	3
Anti-Vietnam war	3
Anti-materialism	2
Anti-establishment	2
Good family and education	2
Religion	1

<sup>27</sup> "pertaining to or characteristic of an era following industrialization: The economy of the post industrial society is based on the provision of services rather than on the manufacture of goods." *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, (New York: Random House, 2001), p. 1511.



stage and anti-materialism was valued greatly. A woman (A6) described it vividly:

It doesn't make any difference what you wear, but who you are. In the '70s, you looked at the person, not what the things the person had. You didn't look at, you moved away from, having a nice car or nice clothes; those didn't define the person as much as getting to know them ... We tended to throw out old things, old things we've been holding on to. One of them was accumulation of wealth...

The modern feminist movement in the U. S. can be traced to a series of efforts in the 1960s, such as the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, the issuing of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966.<sup>28</sup> These movements continued in the 1970s. One woman (A10) recalled:

In the 1970s, the women's movement was well underway in the United States with several major pieces of legislation passed to improve women's lives. For example, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was amended in 1972 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender; the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1974 created a series of programs to promote educational equity; and Title IX of the 1972 Higher Education Amendments to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited gender discrimination in higher education, including sports.<sup>29</sup>

## 2) Values Conveyed through Appearance

Most women believed that appearance conveyed values, and feminism was one of the stronger messages portrayed in women's fashion in the 1970s. One woman (A7) recalled:

I considered myself a feminist in the early

70s-progressive (liberal) and academic; this was reflected in my dress. I wore jeans, comfortable shoes, sandals, even work boots. I had a couple of macrame belts that I bought at craft fairs. I wore loose, flowing tops. I had a number of long dresses, some with empire waists, but wore them with sandals on informal occasions. I also wore mini dresses that were so short that they came to my upper thigh. I bought clothes at rummage sales. This reflected what I thought was an identification with non-materialistic culture. I didn't wear a bra... I would have scorned what might have been seen as a 'sorority girl' look--that is, an attempt to put oneself very together with coifed hair and matching 'outfits'. I never had a diamond ring--that would have reflected 'establishment' culture. Actually, the look that I affected was not as 'natural' as it may have appeared. I still shopped, took care of my appearance, wanted the 'right' kind of clothes: clothes that reflected feminist/hippie/non-materialistic values.

This respondent would fall into the rationalist feminist classification. She promoted a comfortable and artless look by adopting some styles from working-class male culture--jeans and work boots. She also countered the objectification of the female body with no bra, which was practiced by some rationalist feminists and often depicted in the media. Freedom, anti-materialism, and anti-establishmentarianism were embodied in the second-hand clothing or hippie look that stressed the importance of comfort and freedom and emphasized that clothing was not a status symbol.

While there were rationalist feminists who intentionally dressed unfeminine and refused to follow fashion, one woman (A3), who went to a law school from 1973~75, held a post-rationalist feminist position:

This precise question became an issue in

<sup>28</sup> E. Morgan, *The Descent of Woman* (New York: Stein & Day, 1972).

<sup>29</sup> The statements above are very organized because she answered value questions by e-mail. Her occupation as a director of women and politics program at a university probably affected her answer as well.

law school. There were seven of us in a class of over 150. As graduation neared, most of the women took one of two courses: a) dressing in business suits structured very much like a man's, which I believed was tacit admission that one had to be male to be perceived as a successful lawyer, or b) ultra-feminine, sexy, low-cut clothing designed to emphasize her gender. I made a conscious decision to do neither. My clothing was undoubtedly conservative, but it was soft and very atypical of that worn by my male co-workers, in color, shape, fabric, and texture. I never dressed radically or to make a political statement. Perhaps boring is an appropriate term. I tried to convey a confidence in my ability to practice law and function in my environment while acknowledging and being proud of those aspects of me that were undoubtedly different than those of most of my co-workers.

As the respondent described, there were two extreme methods women used to gain power or cope with male dominance: either mimic men or flaunt beauty as a weapon. However, she transcended the controversy and blurred the distinctions by neither giving up her femininity nor using it as a means to gain power. She seemed to possess a genuine confidence in her ability as a woman and a holistic philosophy coupled with a tolerance for ambiguity and an appreciation for diversity. This issue came to be at the center of the "dress for success" discussion that increasingly attracted middle-class women throughout the latter part of the decade.

Four respondents believed that their dress was more a reflection of their independence and self-assurance than simply following fashion trends: "I am centered, self-assured, and make my own choices about appearance rather than being driven by what is considered in.", "Then you'll work to look different to say 'who I am.' And, in order to know who I am, I need not look like you."

**<Table 3> Images Tried to Construct through Appearance**

Impression	Value
"feminist," "looking like I don't care how I look/indifferent to fashion and focusing on studying only," "looking not like the sorority girls"	Feminism
"confident," "competent," "professional," "smart," "comfortable," "practical"	Feminism/ Individualism
"cosmopolitan," "cultured," "well-traveled," "bohemian"	Individualism/ Liberal attitude
"liberal (hippie)"	Liberal attitude/ Anti-materialism
"clean," "neat," "artistic (having good design sense)"	Neutral/ Good education
"feminine," "sexy," "fashionable," "attractive," "pretty," "sweet"	Traditional ideas on gender role

### 3) Impression Management through Appearance

Twelve women said they intentionally tried to make a certain impression through their appearance while three answered that this was not a concern. The images that the respondents tried to construct through their appearance, either consciously or unconsciously, are grouped into different categories of values in <Table 3>. The words in the left column are direct quotations that represent the image the respondents tried to manage while the values in the right column are those that they mentioned as young women's values in the section 1) Young Women's Values in the 1970s. The category "Feminism/Individualism" was created because the responses for the category can be interpreted either as feminism or individualism. The categories "Individualism/Liberal attitude," "Liberal attitude/Anti-materialism," and "Neutral/ Good education" were the same cases.

### 4) Political Message Conveyance through Dress

Eight women stated that they conveyed some

kind of political messages through dress such as peace symbols or antiwar t-shirts. Other political messages included slogans such as "Liberal/anti-establishment" and "I am not Republican."

## V. Conclusions

Most of the respondents indicated that "feminism" / "equality for women as well as racial and religious minorities" were primary values throughout the 1970s. They also placed a strong emphasis on "individualism," "pursuit of freedom," and "liberal and permissive attitudes or free love." Anti-materialism was also important to them, coinciding with the post-industrialism occurring in the United States in the decade.<sup>30</sup>

This study found significant evidence that values influenced women's fashion during this decade. The prevalence of casual and comfortable styles with an emphasis on practicality was rooted in the women's movement; this spilled over to the acceptance of women to present themselves as more masculine. It was important to project either a sense of smartness or indifference in personal appearance, and this also reflected women's liberation issues. The images of "confident," "competent," and "professional" that American women wanted to construct reflected the nation's individualistic and masculine culture that feminism borrowed from and contributed to. Some respondents also emphasized anti-materialism and practicality by shopping at thrift stores and Army surplus stores.

In short, all aspects of culture are closely related to each other and fashion reflects those values. In the United States, feminism was a dominant value in the 1970s that affected women's styles, attitudes, and behavior. Feminist presentation was diverse – extreme or eclectic – and constantly being renegotiated.

This study of fashion adopted by young women in the United States in the 1970s has two major implications to the area of textiles

and clothing. First, the examination of fashion that was actually adopted by young women for different occasions in the U.S. in the 1970s has extended our historical knowledge on the 1970s fashion. Second, the examination of values held by young women with a focus on feminism and the exploration of the connections between the values and fashion offers an understanding of the dynamics in value changes and fashion, and provides deeper insights into the cultural aspects of fashion.

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