The London Experience: A Study in the Persuasiveness of Dress

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the research question, does living in a more fashion-forward culture divergent from one’s own for an extended period of time cause that individual to emulate the style of dress of the divergent, more avant-garde culture? More specifically, this thesis embodies a review of literature that delves into two topical areas, sociology of dress and the history of London as a fashion capital to decipher if these areas under review can explain the transformation observed.

The primary research design was the use of descriptive research in the form of a self-administered, convenience, non-probability survey. The respondents were female students between the ages of 18 and 21 years old studying abroad in London, England for the spring semester at the London College of Fashion.

Through analysis of the research conducted, it was found that 56.9% of those surveyed changed their style of dress after studying abroad in London for three to four months, while 43.1% didn’t change at all. The data collected and analyzed indicates that 86.2% of those surveyed perceived their style of dress to be more avant-garde or British at the completion of their semester abroad.

Conclusively, the majority of subjects who answered the research questions changed their style of dress. Scrutiny of the data also determined that the number of subjects who changed their style of dress compared to those whose did not equated to 13.7% more subjects proving that being in an avant-garde culture different from America has a considerable impact on style of dress.

Based on the research and the review of literature conducted by the author there are numerous theoretical reasons for the subjects’ drastic change in style of dress. One reason involves the role, the environment and in turn conformity plays in an individual’s style of dress and self perception. Another delves into the idea of self-monitoring in relation to ones’ self-confidence. Alternatively, the significance and rigidity of social class historically and its effect on dress in America compared to that of Great Britain could have contributed to the shift in style of dress. Lastly, the fashionable image and the history of London and New York as fashion capitals could have strongly impacted the dress and self-perception of the students surveyed. However, all of these plausible reasons require further research and added detail to the survey conducted to prove if they, in fact contributed to the drastic transformation in dress under discussion.
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Introduction

Fashion exists as a transitory commodity. Fashion and, in turn, style of dress is influenced by the environment and culture in which it exists (Breward et.al, 2002). Consequently, an individual’s style of dress can change to emulate the style of dress of a culture divergent from their own because “clothes have the chameleon ability to create character, status, and mood” (Breward et. al, 2002, p. 22). Breward (2002), in conjunction with Kaiser (1997), argues that clothes, style of dress, and fashion are reflections of one’s personality. They typify the nature of a person, allowing that individual to express herself or himself in a way words simply can not. It is this ability that allows the individual to express who she or he truly is or play the role of the person she or he longs to be. Furthermore, does being immersed in a forward-thinking fashion culture divergent from one’s own, cause a transformation in dress? After surveying 51 college students studying abroad in London, England, it is the goal of this thesis to understand and discover theoretical reasons to explain why a transformation in style of dress could or would occur.

The author further intends to decipher that if a change in style of dress does in fact occur, why do these individuals liberate this more fashion-forward, avant-garde aspect of their personality in London, yet stifle this aspect of who they are while in America? Is it the environment that encourages such change? Is it the inspiration or the aspiration of London fashion that ignites this divergent style of dress? Or rather is it the willingness to accept the eccentricity of fashion and the extremity of style prevalent in London? More specifically, is this transformation a result of the lack of conformity and the
embracement of individuality in English culture compared to American culture that makes this change not only acceptable but, so appealing?

They say that imitation is the highest form of flattery but, in this case, is emulation a conscious decision or a subconscious reflex resulting from a four-month submersion in every visual form of British fashion, from publications and store windows to the highly fashionable natives strolling around every street corner? The analysis of the attached survey (Figure 1) and following review of literature endeavors to answer the above questions, most importantly, does being in a more avant-garde fashion culture and environment for approximately four months cause an individual’s style of dress to become more fashion-forward?

Background Analysis

The following review of literature aims to determine reasons why a person’s style of dress could change after being in London, England for an extended period of time. It is the goal of the review of literature to delve into the sociology of dress, the power of the fashionable image, and the historical and contemporary influences of London and New York as fashion capitals. Furthermore, the literature under review is used to decipher theoretical reasons for a transformation in style of dress, when exposed to the wildly stylish and often highly creative fashion industry and culture of London, England.

The Definition of Dress

Sociologist, Susan B. Kaiser defines dress as “the act of altering or adding to appearance, includes a process of planning, thinking about, or assessing the social consequences of one’s appearance” (1997, p. 5). However according to Aileen Ribeiro in The Englishness of English Dress (2002), dress
is interpreted as “habitual, even passive, as distinct from ‘fashion,’ as a more
determinist concept invoking innovation and choice” (Breward, p. 16). Dress is
conceptualized by world-renown author and researcher, Christopher Breward
(2002) as being conducive to the “…social norms that exist in every culture,
yet altered by the individualistic nature of the wearer” (p. 25).

*Style of Dress: An Indicator or Perception of Self*

Style of dress via the acquisition and display of clothing serves as an
identifier and source of individuality for the wearer that when analyzed with a
historical lens has had a more profound effect on the culture of societies than
the innovation of mass production and the economic gains from its
consumption (Breward, 2003, p. 161). Following post-industrialization and
urbanization, with the progression towards anonymity and alienation, style of
dress took on a communicative role and “emerged as an important tool, both
guaranteeing a sense of belonging and as an aid to identification” (Breward,
2003, p. 217). In agreement with Breward, Barnard (2002) defines style of
dress as a juxtaposition of fashion with societal conformity and self-identity.
More specifically, Barnard (2002) conceptualizes style of dress as the way in
which “individuals can differentiate themselves as individuals and declare
some form of uniqueness” (p. 61).

Style of dress and in turn the perception of one’s appearance is the
sociological nature of individuals to fit into a social group. More pointedly, in
direct correlation with this need to fit in, “the adoption of what is fashionable
and stylish at a given time or the rejection thereof may be expressed in the
membership of a group or the affirmation of a personal stance” (Azuma &
Fernie, 2003). On a deeper level, style of dress communicates identities and
categorizes communities (Kaiser, 1997). Furthermore, Kaiser (1997) and Barnard (2002) both theorize that style of dress can define communities so that a particular style of dress is a signifier of one’s membership.

Furthermore, Kaiser (1997) said it best: “it is not simply what we wear that displays who we are….it is how we wear it–and in what contexts – that conveys the most meaning” (p. 545). Yet, according to Azuma and Fernie (2003), “the way one dresses can frame oneself both in social and psychic terms.” In agreement with Azuma, Fernie, and Kaiser, Barnard (2002) builds on sociologist, Georg Simmel’s theory that fashion can not exist without two social mandates, uniformity and isolation. Barnard (2002) further utilizes Simmel’s theory when arguing that all societal phenomena, including fashion, exist because of the inner struggle to belong, while at the same time be an individual. Without the conflict of the two, fashion and in turn society can not exist.

*Appearance Perception and Management*

Coinciding with both Breward and Barnard, Kaiser (1997) relates personal style to the idea of self-perception and the maintenance of one’s appearance. *Appearance management* is defined as all the decisions made involving one’s appearance, from purchasing to wearing clothing items (Kaiser, 1997). It involves the maintenance of one’s distinctive look as affected by social and personal implications (Kaiser, 1997). Appearance perception is the “process of observing and making evaluations or drawing inferences based on how people look” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 7). *Appearance perception* can be influenced in numerous capacities: in face-to-face encounters, imagery presented by the media, clothes displayed in store windows, and street fashion
(Kaiser, 1997). Furthermore, in congruence with Kaiser, Barnard (2002) theorizes that fashion and clothing engage in a dialogue that, when combined with the individuals’ self-perception, indicate outwardly the identity, personality, and mood of the person.

*The Role of Environment*

Interestingly, Kaiser (1997) explains that an individual’s response to appearance perception can take various forms contingent on the environment. The setting, in which the individual finds themselves, in this case London, England, plays an important role in the sociology of clothing and as an ultimate determinant of style of dress. The individual can have an automatic, unconscious response to the stimuli, the style of dress around them or they can have a uniquely developed response, in which contemplation and social interactions play into style of dress (Kaiser, 1997). The impact of the environment or setting on the style of dress of an individual is further observed by Azuma and Fernie (2003) in their study of the fashion-forward retail landscape in Hong Kong, *(Fashion in the Globalized World and the Role of Virtual Networks in Intrinsic Fashion Design)*, which notes that the “social and political background of a given place still has a considerable impact on the way one dresses.” Kaiser (1997) in turn emphasizes that settings are socially derived and play a role in the dictations of style of dress.

*The Impact of Society and Social Relationships*

Kaiser theorizes that clothing decisions co-exist with the sociological mindset of the individual in relation to the societal situations that dictate a particular style of dress. Furthermore, clothing and appearance are tied to individual experiences and social relationships (Kaiser, 1997, p. 60). Not only
are individuals influenced by the dress of those around them, but style of dress is further affected by the generation of praise or criticism. This has a more significant impact if the style of dress exemplified within the setting is deemed fashionable by the individual. Raising the question, what is the determinant of “fashionable” style of dress? How does the individual define what is fashionable in the given setting? As discussed later and according to many researchers; Kaiser, Severa, Cawthrone, and the curators of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, since the publication of Le Mecure Galanat in 1672, Les Modes in 1843, Harper’s Bazaar in 1867, Vogue in 1909 and even newspapers in the early 20th century, fashion publications have always been “…the primary method of spreading news of fashion trends from Paris, the seat of fashion…”(Kaiser, 1997). Further exemplifying, the chief role fashion publications play in defining fashionable dress in regional and international settings. Fashionable dress of a particular region is also dictated by the style of dress sold in popular shops, observed in store windows, and worn by the natives of that area as observed on the street.

Self-Monitoring: The Concept of High vs. Low Self-Monitors

High self-monitors, as defined by Kaiser (1997), tend to spend a lot of time monitoring their appearance, ensuring their appearance coincides with societal mandates. Sensitive to interpersonal cues and conscious of the opinions of others, and in turn management of their appearance, high self-monitors are “social chameleons who can fashion public images tailored to the dictates of a wide variety of situations” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 203). According to Kaiser (1997), a study conducted by Leslie Davis and Sharron Lennon in 1985 discovered that females were more likely than not to be explain by fashion
behavior. Also, the study determined that female college students were high self-monitors, exhibiting higher levels of conformity, individuality, and fashion leadership (Kaiser, 1997). In another study by Davis, Lennon, and Fairhurst (1988) high self-monitors responded more favorably to image-oriented advertisements and were willing to pay more for products (Kaiser, 1997). Low self-monitors aren’t as concerned with their appearance; their style choices, unlike high self-monitors, are not dictated by the style of dress of those around them, do not exhibit fashion leadership, and they often prefer ads that emphasize quality (Kaiser, 1997).

Furthermore, Kaiser (1997) theorizes that given the importance high self-monitors place on appearance, they have a higher propensity to adopt the prevalent style of dress. This adoption or as referred to by Kaiser (1997) as a sense of conformity, to one’s surroundings and to a defined social group is directly correlated to the level of ambiguity assigned to style of dress. More specifically, through her analysis, Kaiser (1997) explains that “an avant-garde or fashion-forward (futuristic) clothing style is ambiguous in the extent to which it will gain acceptance” (p. 359). Furthermore, according to Kaiser (1997) the adoption or conformity to a particular style of dress is more likely, the more ambiguous or avant-garde the style of dress. It is further interpreted that the more ambiguous the fashionable dress or the more futuristic, the greater the adoption because individuals are simultaneously curious and enticed by the unique clothing choices made in their environment, more so than the style of dress that mimics the latest fashion trends (Kaiser, 1997). At the heart of this theory is the seductive nature of fashion, in which, through the
adoption of a more avant-garde style of dress an individual can become a bolder, powerful, more adventurous, fashion forward person (Crane, 2000).

This adoption or according to Kaiser (1997), conformity is also tied to the level of self-consciousness of the individual. As aforementioned, Kaiser (1997) defines high self-monitors as being consistently aware of the image their clothing choices project to the public. It can then be inferred that high self-monitors are extremely self-conscious, which according to Kaiser, stipulates that they are also more likely to conform to “judgments of future fashionability than to judgments of present fashionability” (p. 360).

*The Made Phenomenon*

Conformity or the adoption of the prevalent societal dress is linked to the need to be socially accepted (Kaiser, 1997). Those who conform, in particular with regard to appearance, are seeking group recognition and acceptance (Kaiser, 1997). Analyzing American history while simultaneously using Kaiser’s theory on conformity of dress, it can be inferred that outward appearance is necessary for societal acceptance. For example, in the mid-to-late 19th century, the majority of immigrants deviated from their native garb and adopted a more American style of dress, in turn suggesting a more American identity that aided their assimilation into society (Crane, 2000).

Historically, those who did not deviate from what was deemed acceptable by American societal standards were shunned and seen as outcasts. This has been experienced by Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, some European immigrants, gay males, and even individuals whose style of dress lacked American conservatism, notably the punk and gothic styles of dress.
The Culture of Fashion

Culture is a “set of shared artifacts and basic understandings” that is transmitted, learned, shared, and transformed (Kaiser, 1997, p. 352). More specifically, culture is the complexity and consistency of social interactions that occur given the dynamic nature of individuals that co-exist in groups (Kaiser, 1997). Susan B. Kaiser (1997), analyzing fashion in relation to culture, builds on Elizabeth Wilson’s theory that the dynamic between the two is a phenomenon defined as an, “aesthetic medium for the expression of ideas, desires and beliefs circulating in society” (p. 20). The culture of fashion and its impact on the modern world was stated best by Christopher Breward (2003):

Fashion now occupies the centre ground in popular understanding of modern culture. It enjoys unprecedented coverage in the Western media and defines the tenor of urban life like no other visual medium (p. 9).

Modern fashion as we know it today was built on a relationship that exploited the creative ingenuity of the designer and the historical backdrop of its epicenters (Breward, 2003). The culture of fashion can not be considered in isolation, it is the result of the social context of the history of fashion in tandem with the history of industrial manufacturing and distribution, the growth of the urban metropolis, the vivacity of the consumer culture, and the influence of visual reproduction (Breward, 2004). Fashion and its aesthetic appeal are an expression that depicts “the ways people choose to dress and appear [which] reflects themselves and the cultures they live in and also helps to shape them and their cultures” (Delong, p. 7). Moreover, Davis (1994) makes the inference that style of dress exists over time and formulates a code that is constantly shifting and transforming. It is this code that stimulates an intrinsic
involvement and importance placed on fashionable dress as defined by the norms of society (O’Cass, 2004). Furthermore, the culture of fashion and its effect on society is exemplified in the divergence that exists in British and American style of dress as a direct result of the divergence that exists in the culture and societal views of each country.

*English Dress vs. American Dress*

English dress for the past 150 years has been known for its avant-garde, imaginative, and creative style of dress. Compared to American dress, which is more conventional and conservative, the fashion-forward style of dress in Great Britain was born out of the revolution of sub-sects of the population against the rigidity of British society.

What makes the dress of the English so individualistic is that throughout history clothes were seen as a reflection of self, eccentricity, and extremity, most notably depicted by its youth. Fashion in England is interlaced in its cultural history. There isn’t just one image of English dress, it is rooted in many forms and social contexts ranging from the conservative, quintessential English tailoring and traditionalism seen in the “…satirical clichés of Englishness popularized by the English Tourist Board, the kind of heritage clothing, such as Burberry coats, Savile Row suits, Cashmere twinsets” juxtaposed with the “adventurous street style of dress, initiated by English subcultures from the 1950s onwards, and linked to successive influences from global worlds of popular music, video, and film” (Breward et al., 2002, p. 25).

This individuality in style of dress became a hallmark of English style, exemplified by the first known sub-cultural style of dress, the first displays of the British “rage against the fashion machine,” dandyism. (Breward et. al.,
This style of dress serves a purpose in this context in that it provides a clear example of what makes British style of dress so different; it is a “...style and philosophy [that] is uniquely British” (British Council, 2005). The Dandy, originated by George Bryan ‘Beau’ Brummell (Figure 10), was a departure from what was the norm in the 1800s. According to the British Council (2005), the style of dress initiated by Brummell involved stylistic touches that made him different from the norm. For example, dandyism was displayed in the turn of a cuff, the knot of a cravat, or the fabric of a waistcoat. The individuality of the style of dress, dandyism that Brummel generated caused a few to stand out among many. It began the avant-garde style of dress that pairs “the tension between old and new, personal/individual and public, tradition and rebellion” observed in modern British style today (British Council, 2005). It is this concept, according to both Breward (2002) and the British Council (2005) that separates British style from any other style, because it is a style wrought in history and born out of a cultural system built on the contradiction of traditional rigidity and contemporary creativity.

A Difference in the Longevity and Significance of Social Class: Identity defined by Dress

As verified by Barnard (2002) fashion demands social organization, in fact, it can not exist if that social organization isn’t multi-layered, allowing classes to exist and upward mobility to be sought. Concisely put: no social class, no fashion.

Over the course of history, style of dress has been a visible delineator of social perception, prosperity, status, and boundaries (Crane, 2000). Barnard (2002), in accordance with Marx, agrees that clothing defines social status in
that “every day we make decisions about the social status and role of people we meet based on what they are wearing: we treat their clothes as ‘social hieroglyphics’...which conceal, even as they communicate, the social position of the wearer” (p. 9). It is through the theory of Elizabeth Wilson utilized by Barnard (2002) that the concept of individuality in relation to social class is defined as the association that exists when a person is a member of a social group and then communicates to others this membership via style of dress.

Great Britain

The act of illustrating social class began in England in 1350 during the Middle Ages and feudal rule. Dress was an indicator of one’s social status, not one’s personality (Barnard, 2002). Royalty and the upper class citizens of England were denoted by trendier, more lavish styles of dress versus the plain and simple clothing of the lower class (Breward, 1995). Style of dress and adornment as a dictation of social class was regulated by laws or social codes created by the British royal government in the 14th century -16th century, called the Sumptuary Laws, which created a society ruled by the differences between classes’ identity and dress (Breward, 1995).

Towards the mid-15th century until the early 16th century, after the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, the idea of style of dress as a reflection of the person, more specifically their personality, continued to strengthen and increasingly became a topic of popular debate (Breward, 1995). The continued debate over style of dress and social class gained further importance in the 17th century, when in England the “new conception of ‘popular’ [dress] was especially pertinent to the potential of dress as a communicator both of social distinction and of belonging, preceding and contributing to the consumer and
technological revolutions of the 18th century” (Breward, 1995, p. 97). With the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, fashion production, promotion, and in turn consumption increased in speed. More specifically, as the 20th century progressed, and the “turnover of fashionable styles” increased in speed, style of dress as dictated by social class became less distinguishable (Buckley & Fawcett, p. 4). However, emulation of upper class style of dress still took place, despite the more relaxed construction of fashionable dress. This continued into the 19th and early 20th century, in which style of dress still revolved around and was dictated by the London ton and season under the reign of Edward VII (Mendes, 1999).

In order to inject ingenuity into their clothing and revolt against the dictation of style of dress by social class, style mavens had to engage in home dressmaking. Since 1850, eccentricity and avant-garde fashion was born from the concept of home dressmaking that merges social identity and hierarchy with the creation of ones individuality (Breward et al. 2002, p. 79). Home dressmaking allowed the fashion that permeates this fashion epicenter to be hand crafted, allowing “the individual to circumnavigate dominant fashion or amend its extremes to suit themselves or a means by which they can generate new avant-garde or quirky styles or decorations of their own” (Breward et al., 2002, p. 89). It is this quirkiness and freedom of expression that posed as a common denominator between classes. During the 19th-20th century, more specifically in London, it was this shift to more extreme displays of individuality that proved that “style idiosyncrasies can flourish in a society where tolerance is believed to be valued” (Breward et al., 2002).
British style was built on the departure of a few from the monotony of the trickle down theory, in which fashion historically began with the elite. More aptly put, fashion editor for the *International Herald*, Suzy Menkes, theorizes that British style of dress, in fact, is so directional and fashion forward because:

…the class system that hovered over England for so long convinced creative people that they had to define their own visual vocabulary, rather than following the codes of the Sloane Rangers (pleated skirts and headscarves) or the bankers (pin-stripes and flash ties).

Concurring with Menkes, the British Council’s Alice Cicolini (2000), argues that “a strong sense of personal projection is the fashionable Brit’s most defining trait” due to their formative years spent wearing uniforms, which has encouraged a fashion sense unique in its creative pairings of uncommon fabrications, silhouettes, and colors, for example, torn tights and cowboy boots, showing bloomer underwear and a patchwork scarf or ripped jeans, mismatched tie-dye t-shirts, and a stretchy head-wrap (Figure 20).

*American Class System: The Meaning of Middle Class*

The difference between the English and American class systems lies in the question that many social historians have had difficulty answering, How do you define the American middle class? (Severa, 1995). In agreement with the theory of Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., Severa (1995) concluded that the reason it is difficult to pinpoint who comprises the middle class is because Americans do not like “…class distinctions; that the upper class preferred not to be called wealthy because of the implicit suggestion of being undemocratic, and
the lower classes as a whole preferred to think of themselves as middle
class” (Preface, XVIII).

According to Devine (1997) many sociologists over the years have
cited the relatively new existence of America versus the centuries-old founding
of Britain as a reason for the once distinctive, yet now subtle differences of
social class structure. Devine (1997) theorizes that Great Britain historically
has been a more closed society, in which social mobility was rare, whereas
America offered a more open society, a meritocracy in the truest sense. Based
on the research and interviews conducted by numerous sociological
researchers/theorists, a marked openness exists in America more so than in
Britain. For example it was noted that in Great Britain in the mid-1950s, “a
considerable amount of short-range mobility [existed] which had remained
unchanged from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century” (Devine,
1997, p. 59). Moreover, Devine found that although class consciousness exists
in both American and British society, it is more profoundly felt in British
society than in American society. According to Crane (1997) this societal
difference existed in the 19th century and translated to a more democratized
society in the United States “was widely believed to be a classless society,
characterized by a high level of upward mobility” (1997, p. 5). This American
societal mindset was eloquently stated by Tocqueville in 1840, after his many
travels to America, when he said “[A]t any moment, a servant may become a
master” (Crane, p. 5).

The Birth of Social Class in the United States

However, this is not to argue that social class distinctions did
not and do not exist in the United States. Social class began with the
settlement of America in 1607 by the second sons of the British mobility and continued with the later settlement of Puritan separatists in the 1620s (Warwick et. al, 1965). Given the rustic wilderness of America at this time, the difficulty in receiving news or shipment of the latest fashions in Britain, and the later simplistic style of the Puritans, gave birth to the conservative American style of dress seen today.

According to Warwick, Piti, and Wyckoff (1965) Puritans had a blatant dislike for all things ostentatious; in fact it was one of the reasons they left Britain, in order to remove themselves from “the symbols of loose living and the gallants of the royal court” (p. 96).

In the early 1800s, it was expected that American women dress properly and follow the dictates of what was deemed decent and publicly respectable (Severa, 1995). With the mandate and pressure to dress conservatively, the lower class felt pressure to conform or risk being deemed uncouth (Severa, 1995). By 1890, and as indicated in Figure 11, style of dress in America was becoming more universal, lenient, and functional with the increased popularity of clothes that were less about fashion, and more focused on plain fabrication, simple construction, and comfort (Severa, 1995).

*The Power of Fashion Capitals*

Fashion capitals were built on the foundation of fashion as a transitory commodity. Style of dress was seen as not only a way to define a culture and a society, but to categorize a city (Breward, 2003). Thus, by the middle of the 20th century, the impact of fashion capitals, such as Paris, Milan, London, and New York were exemplified through the “the influence of an
American engagement with European fashion via the instruments of mass culture [that] had also become a defining factor in forging a popular understanding of the generic fashion city” (Breward, 2003, p. 170). It is, in fact, the fashion capital that is seen as the dictator of style, creating, displaying, and controlling what is fashionable in terms of dress and metropolitan life. Breward (2003) justifies the significance of the fashion capital by stating that “the tension between longer histories and future projections, situated in fashion’s status as a marker of the present, is what lends clothing and its representation, such value as a measure of city cultures that are also assumed to be in constant flux” (p. 171). It has been theorized that fashion and its accessibility to the mass-market has significantly effected the course of society and the definition of aesthetic, economic, and moral values (Breward, 2003, p. 159). More profoundly, the parallel that exists between fashion and the history of nations, most notably Great Britain and the United States, has allowed style of dress to “…set the agenda for defining the nature of urban life and culture in the west, challenging the older rule of crown, family and religion” (Breward, 2003, p. 159). The power of style of dress lies in its ability to generate communication that goes beyond the enticement and sale of the product; it is a global, holistic communication that identifies changing behaviors and preferences of the consumer on an individual, collective, and cultural level (Breward, 2003). Fashion transcends time, defines decades, and more astutely expressed by Valerie Mendes (1999), has a “fluidity [that] reflects shifts in the social matrix”. In saying this, Mendes (1999) implies that a change in society causes a change in style of dress.
History of London Fashion

Since 1960, as depicted in Figure 12, from Camden Market to High Street, London has represented a multi-dimensional culture built on the duality of innovative and traditional styles of dress (Breward, 2003). London culture often throws out the rule book, so to speak, and is defined by the ability to remain original in the face of a continual preservation of tradition.

London has been known as a place of fashionable consumption since the mid-16th century when fashionable dress was dominated by the upper echelon of London’s ruling elite (Breward, 1995). Given its historical association as one of the great global trading centers and its historical tolerance for other cultures and races, London has been inhabited by immigrants from Vietnam to Greece adding to the diversity in style of dress (Breward, 2003). Thwarted by the proximity of the great couturiers of Paris, London wasn’t able to capitalize on their expert tailoring for womenswear until the late 19th–early 20th century. The minimalist construction of London’s tailored fashion was especially in vogue during WWII. The popularity of tailored suiting and simplicity in design brought English fashion to the forefront by greats, Hardy Amies, Norman Hartnell, Digby Morton, Victor Steibel, and Charles Creed (Figure 13). It wasn’t until the mid-20th century that the work of astounding, revolutionary, and innovative young designers changed the course of English style of dress. Most notably, it was the designs of Mary Quant and Vivienne Westwood that caused London to become synonymous with avant-garde fashion.
Mary Quant

The 1950s were marked by the modern, informal, and quirky style of Mary Quant. Quant revolutionized London’s retail sector, transforming its staid conservatism and revitalizing the retail scene with innovative energy and divergent styles of dress still seen in London today. Thus began a change in style of dress to a more radical form, but it was successful because the immense demand by London’s youth coinciding with the radicalism sweeping London’s cultural scene (Breward, 2004). The design genius of Mary Quant’s mod style took London fashion out of its staid conservatism and austerity post-WWII, and enabled London to “rediscover its confidence following the devastation wrought by the war” (Breward, 2004, p. 151). On the pinnacle of a sexual revolution, Quant did away with the elegance of bygone years and replaced it with an exaggerated fashion sense and a drama of the eccentric. Her first shop, Bazaar, opened in 1955 and became iconic in the Chelsea area of London (Figures 14 a-c). In 1962, Quant’s “London Cool” was so sought after that she was asked to produce a clothing and lingerie line for J.C. Penney and other American wholesalers (Breward, 2003). By 1964, Bazaar and its owner was a symbol of national identity and the cultural/sexual revolution, opening the door for other avant-garde fashion designers/retailers, such as Thea Potter, Ossie Clark, Babara Hulanicki, and Zandra Rhodes and later Vivienne Westwood(Figure 15).

The Westwood Effect, the Woman Who Set England on Fire

Vivienne Westwood was a visionary, a woman who felt that her clothing creations were “nostalgia for the future” (Breward et. al., 2002, p. 161). From her to Victorian romanticism of the Teddy boy in the early 1970s
to the kitschy, sexually overt, anti-establishment style of dress of the 1976 punk revolution, Vivienne Westwood has challenged the status quo with her creative ingenuity (Figure 16a). From punk to her own fashion line, Westwood’s influence on London style was and continues to be profound. For instance, since her first runway show, the Pirates collection, to the influential 1993-1994 Anglomania collection, to her recent fall 2006 collection (Figures 16 b-d), Westwood has personified avant-garde fashion.

Westwood brought national, and eventually world-wide, attention to the creative vision of underground fashion during the late 1970s into the 1980s. This underground style that permeated Britain’s younger set was an “anything goes” homage to fashion utilizing looks from “the reactionary panache of New-Edwardianism to the camp opulence of Glam-Rock and the do-it-yourself kitsch of Punk” (Breward, 2004, p. 179). It set the tone for the fashion-forward style of dress that became London’s hallmark. As depicted in Figure 17, London became synonymous with Punk, so much so that tourist artifacts such as postcards were made to commemorate the Punk phenomenon (Breward, Fashion, 2003).

The power of Vivienne Westwood as an icon of the roots of contemporary British style of dress, according to Alice Cicolini (2000) who stated that Westwood’s subversion of “…traditional uniforms and historical styles, exaggerating their motifs, putting the infrastructure (and the underwear) on display, mixing old in the details with new in the attitude, turning the inside out, Westwood continues to be ground breaking and typically British”. Vivienne Westwood did for London fashion what Ralph Lauren did for American fashion associated a look with a national culture.
However, it wasn’t just Westwood or Punk that made London such a fashion hotbed, it was the voice of London’s youth in tandem with burgeoning street markets that generated a style of dress creative and organic in nature. In the 1980s, British youth scoured Camden, Portobello, Brick Lane, Bell Street, and Greenwich, to find fashion pieces that were edgy, grungy, borderline absurd with unusual pairings, such as “narrow-lapelled three-button Harris tweed suits with collarless ‘granddad’ shirts or arrow point collars, jazz-style silk ties, and ox-blood Doc Martens” (Breward, 2004, p. 178). These markets from Camden to Brick Lane epitomized London style of dress, a style of dress born on the streets. The eccentricity of this style of dress, in tandem with its birth in the British phenomenon, “the Market” allowed London in the 20th century to emerge as an alternative fashion capital to Paris, New York, and Milan (Breward, 2004). Additional proof of the creative energy that permeated London was Gaultier’s opinion in 1986, voiced in *Interview* magazine, in which he stated:

> I feel closer to the streets of London than the streets of Paris because I hate the poorness of Paris streets. By ‘poor’ I mean not rich in imagination. Everybody wants to be like the other one, they want to be anonymous. In London I don’t really get my inspiration. I get my energy (Breward, 2004, p. 194).

London embodies a fashion style that is innovative as seen in the individuality and creativity of the styles created by leading English fashion designers Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen, John Galliano, and Matthew Williamson. Reputed for their ability to take fashion out of historical context and bring it into the present, “British fashion designers have an international reputation for being eccentric, thought-provoking, and boldly innovative” (O’Mahony & Braddock, 2001). O’Mahony & Braddock (2001) in accordance with Breward
(2004) further argue that the history of British fashion and the subsequent unconventional nature of British style allows for clothing choices that are not scripted, encouraging a sense of style that is original, unique, and reflective of the identity of the wearer.

**History of New York**

Similar to London, New York is a hub for the global transport of goods, welcoming immigrants from Hong Kong to Russia (Breward, 2004). Divergent from the avant-garde, unique, seemingly “over-the-top” fashion of London, New York fashion designers are known for clean lines and simple construction archetypical of New York’s modernity, as exemplified by Halston and his successors, Calvin Klein, Donna Karan, and Ralph Lauren (Breward, 2003). Design historian, Adrian Forty concurs with Breward (2003) when describing American fashion design as a “homogenizing socio-political force, engineered to smooth over the ethnic differences which have driven deep fault lines across its diverse population” (p. 194). American design seemingly has always comprised the duality of standardized styles of dress to generate a uniformity among racial, geographic, and class differences. Breward (2003) theorizes that the “blandness” seen in American fashion, in contrast to the ingenious creativity of Paris and London fashion, is due to the fact that these fashion capitals went through the evolution of the fashion system a century earlier.

In 1910, NYC’s fashion district flourished from Seventh to Madison Avenue. A growing shopping, garment-making business developed alongside a burgeoning art culture and the glamour of the fashion publication (Breward, 2003). It was not until the inter-war years and even post-WWII, when
Americans became secure with their more traditional, conservative lifestyle and embraced ready-to-wear, giving birth to the relaxed informality of American sportswear (Breward, 2003). By the 1950s, in comparison to London’s Quant style, Americans were embracing the “rational and democratic practicality of the blouse, skirt, and the shirt-waist dress which had emerged, at the turn of the century as the uniform of the ubiquitous Gibson Girl, [which] suited both the informal and active nature of the modern life and the organization of production in New York” (Breward, 2003, p. 197) (Figure 11).

In agreement with Breward, Mulvey (1999) describes American style of dress at this time as conservative, as typified by the simplistic designs of Clarie McCardell (Figure 19). It was her basic yet classic, designs and minimalist construction that set the stage and eloquently showcased American sportswear (Breward, 2003). Her clothes lacked complexity, as opposed to what was being worn in London at the time, and were “the antithesis of the Parisian New Look, (Breward, 2003). It was the designs of McCardell and designers of her ilk, with their focus on sportswear that inaugurated what became known as the “American Look” (Steele, 1997).

Against the grain, non-traditional fashion did exist in America, most notably portrayed in the 1960s and 1970s. Blass with his unisex suiting, Johnson with her quirky boutiques, and the elaborate, one-of-a-kind designs of Scassi marked the somewhat underground, counter-culture of the fashion scene in America in the 1960s. However, the reason this “new” style of dress failed and did not create a fashion revolution similar to Quant or Westwood was because the market on uniquely original fashion and “kookiness did not play so well to the innately conservative consumers of middle America who still
constituted the core market of New York-produced fashions” (Breward, 2003, p. 201).

Halston and American Sportswear

It was the designs of Halston in the 1970s that represented true American fashion. Halston was known for the creation of “soft, relatively unconstructed, interrelated separates” (Steele, 1997, p. 102). His trademark was his expert use of ultra suede and jersey to create luxurious clothing from caftans to halter jumpsuits with understated style (Steele, 1997). The straightforward designs of Halston’s suiting gave birth to the great American designers of the late 20th and early 21st century: Geoffrey Beene, Perry Ellis, Calvin Klein, Donna Karan, and Ralph Lauren. Classic, clean lines, beiges, tans, blacks, and navies were their staples. It was the implied luxury and the adaptability of the clothes that set them apart, perfect for the Manhattan urbanite. With Donna Karan, Calvin Klein, and later Ralph Lauren fashion became the selling of a lifestyle infused with luxury, elegance, relaxed Americana, rather than an individualized look (Breward, 2003).

Globalization of Fashion: Its spread to America

Fashion looks occur in cycles, evolve over time, and in diverse cultures. Fred Davis (1994) defines a fashion cycle as “the phased elapsed time from the introduction of a fashion (a new ‘look’, a new visual gestalt, a pronounced shift in vestmental emphasis, etc.) to its supplantation by a successive fashion” (p. 103). The cyclical, continuous re-definition of fashionable dress draws the consumer of fashion into “the ‘style’ or fashion of the moment” (O’Cass, 2004).
However, with regard to the cyclical relationship between British and American fashion, upon arrival in the Americas, according to Pulitzer Prize winner, Alison Lurie, author of *The Language of Clothes*, “American fashions followed the English, though at some distance, as is usual in the provinces” (p. 61). This lag in fashion trends, by which America experienced the introduction of a fashion innovation later than the British and French, continued into the 1800s (Severa, 1995). With style being dictated by fashion plates in women’s magazines, such as Sarah Hale’s *Godey’s Ladies’ Book* and the later *American Ladies’ Book*, and given the lag time that often amounted to a year, “fashion changes were not in general used in America for some time after a French introduction, and some were never popularly adopted” (Severa, 1995, p. 3) According to Severa (1995), the adoption of new, cutting edge Parisian fashion occurred years after its introduction in Europe, and was applied in America with a mind towards conservatism. Many examples exist to prove this lag in fashionable dress.

**Example 1: From New Woman to Gibson Girl**

As displayed in Figure 11, the look, “New Woman” came into fruition in the late 19th century and was the first British fashion trend to garner international attention and prominence (Ewing, 1995). By 1903, the look had reached the United States and was transformed into the more relaxed version with skirt and blouse coined the “Gibson Girl” (Ewing, 1995).

**Example 2: The Establishment of Punk**

The Punk Revolution was a time when British youth revolted against authority and the class system in particular, which no longer fit Britain’s multicultural society. It was an era of anti-establishment fashion that was
anything but aesthetically pleasing typified by pierced noses, ripped t-shirts, Mohawk haircuts, and black eye-makeup. However, it wasn’t until the 1980s that Americans left their hipster 1970s looks and traded in polyester bell-bottoms for the neo-modern, punk attire Westwood had made a household name.

**Example 3: The Establishment of Goth**

On the heels of the Punk Revolution, gothic style of dress was born in London in the late 1980s. Americans did not start embracing this extreme style of dress until the late 1990s. Conversely, in the late 1980s when British youth were channeling the wardrobe of Count Dracula, American youth were coining a straight-laced, khaki-inspired style of dress called “preppie.”

**The Effect of the Fashionable Image on the Consumer**

The fashionable image has had a powerful impact on the history of fashion, more specifically, the movement of fashion from Europe to America. From the fashion plate to the highly stylized fashion photograph, the depiction of fashion has made it a discourse of art showcasing the stylish dress of the moment. The “golden years” of fashion illustration brought a sense of honesty and accuracy seldom seen today with the fashion photograph. However in the beginning, fashion photography’s greatest success was the power to discern what was fashionable, while intuitively conveying reality (Poschardt, 2000). The transfer of the images, first as illustrations and then as photographs, has had a gross impact on the industry, and an even more profound effect on the minds of the fashion consumer. It is through this image that fashion is translated and conveyed. Fashion at its best was transferred and then mimicked
by the consumer through the display of fashion as art, as life, and as reality in fashion illustration and photography since the early 16th century.

The Historical Context

Fashion Illustration

The 16th century marked the first time the fashionable image was promoted via the circulation of artisan drawings and woodblock engravings from court to court. However, the first fashion illustration occurred with the advent of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg. Illustrators utilizing primitive wood and copper engravings created illustrations used in two of the first “fashion magazines,” Le Mecure Galanat and later, La Gazette du Bon Ton (Barnes, 1988). Fashion illustration, as we know it, was in its prime for three decades, from the early 1900s to the 1940s. The predominance of fashion illustration wasn’t relegated to just fashion spreads and covers in Vogue, but advertisers also saw the power of fashion illustration as an opportunity to speak to the consumer, more specifically, it was seen as a “commitment to the drawn and painted image, as yet unchallenged by the camera” (Barnes, 1988, p. 16).

Fashion Photography

During the early 19th century fashion illustration was the premiere method of depicting fashion. However, primitive forms of fashion photography did exist, as seen in the first crude publication, Les Modes in 1901 (Hall-Duncan, 1979). It wasn’t until 1914, that Baron Adolf de Meyer, with his pictorialism technique utilizing light, shadow, and contrast to create an impressive photograph, that set the standard of fashion photography (Hall-Duncan, 1979). The 1930s and 40s were distinguished by the revolutionary
work of Man Ray, Erwin Blumenfeld, and Cecil Beaton. The ingenuity and originality of the 1930s and 40s carried over into the 1950s with the impressively gifted work of Richard Avedon and Irving Penn. Their work was as artistic as it was in many ways simplistic. The 1960s and 70s were ruled by the societal obsession with sex, differentiating the photographic work of this era’s photographers from their predecessors. Most notably, during the 1970s, shocking, “tongue-in-cheek sexuality and violence” were used to sensationalize advertisements and fashion spreads, particularly seen in the work of Guy Bourdin, Helmut Newton, and Deborah Turbeville photographs (Kismaric & Respeni, 2004, p. 16).

In the 1980s and 90s, photographers began placing importance “on the creation of a theme, attitude, and scene” (Jobling, 1999, p. 38). The late 1980s signified the emergence of the powerhouse “supermodels” that began the unabashed use of the power of the star model in ads (Poschardt, 2000). The 2000s brought a return to classic glamour in photography with the work of the highly acclaimed trio, Mario Testino, Steven Meisel, and David Sims.

*The Power of the Fashionable Image*

In the days of the fashion-illustrated ad, the focus was on the fashion as shown through the artistically drawn line and use of color, which added character to the fashion ad. This was also seen in the early years of fashion photography, where the images were solely taken to display the fashion of a particular designer, ultimately enhancing the fashionable image. This is best witnessed with the New Look phenomenon of 1947, which had women from Paris to New York flocking to department stores and freestanding Dior shops after seeing Dior’s fashions advertised in *Vogue* magazine. This indisputably
shows the power of the fashionable image captured in a photograph, which can spawn instant emulation. It is this emulation that is seen today, in the mass consumerism of fashion and the successful sale of fashion magazines, in which the fashion obsessed or curious, pore over the latest fashion must-haves and mimic styles of dress.

Primary research indicates that the British, French, and Italian editions of Vogue magazine, available to the subjects while studying in London, are much more avant-garde, and “push the fashion envelope” compared to their American counterpart. The case study entitled, Fashion Change and Fashion Consumption: The Chaotic Perspective by Law, Zhang, and Leung (2004 highlights this seemingly osmotic phenomenon, the “filtering stage” that occurs when the recipient receives new fashion information that generates an interaction between the consumers’ self influence or personal tastes and external influence or environment (Law et al., 2004). Through the interplay between this internal and external imagery, the fashion consumer is encouraged to take on new style roles (Law et al., 2004). More pointedly, the adoption of new trends or styles of dress occur if the trend matches the consumers’ perceived barometer of what is fashionable, or more specifically, their taste level, contingent on their exposure to the external factors alluded to above (Law et al., 2004). Perception of images as a definer of what is fashionable is a conscious and subconscious phenomenon, whereby people react, to absorb, and interpret the images they see in a public forum, on the street or in a magazine (Delong, 1998).

A Divergence in Fashion Publication
Great Britain, it seems, was ahead of its time when it came to fashion publications. Fashion photography in Europe in general, as aforementioned, was more extreme, in-your-face, using visual imagery that, when compared to American fashion photography, would be seen as shocking and vulgar. To the European fashion community, this avant-garde perspective of fashion and in turn fashion photography was accepted and, more importantly, seen as art. According to Anna Wintour, the current editor-in-chief of American Vogue Magazine, and former editor-in-chief of British Vogue, the difference between English and American fashion spreads lies in the amount of creativity given to fashion editors (Breward et al., 2002, p. 173). British fashion editors are given free-rein to execute their vision, whereas American editors’ creativity is limited. Wintour’s theorizes that the difference lies deeper, identifying the fashion editor as the producer of fashion imagery, and the limitations of American Vogue and the liberation of British Vogue illustrate the national identity of each magazine (Breward et. al., 2002, p. 173).

Methodology

The purpose of the research conducted was to determine if spending an extended period of time, in this case three to four months, immersed in a culture divergent from what one is accustomed to, affects one’s style of dress and clothing. More specifically, this thesis centers on determining if in fact, a change occurs that reflects the style prevalent in the divergent culture and environment. In this case, if American students adopt a more British, avant-garde sense of style as result of spending three to four months abroad. To answer this research question, a convenience, non-probability survey was conducted. The survey (Figure 1) was short in nature, consisting of 3 questions.
The survey asks subjects between the ages of 18 and 21 years old, to answer non-intrusive questions about the way in which they dress, their style type, and retail stores most frequented.

The 51 subjects surveyed were predominately female college students. Out of the 51 subjects, 45 were American students and 6 were foreign students from India, Italy, Japan, Sweden, and the Netherlands. More specifically as depicted in Figure 2, 48.9% of the American students are from the northeastern/eastern region of the United States. Also, the majority of the American subjects came from three universities, Syracuse University, Marist College, and Iowa State. Lastly, all of the subjects were study-abroad students for the spring semester of 2005. They were all attending the prestigious London College of Fashion, world-renowned for its specialization and superior tutelage in numerous subject matters, from fashion design and retail management to image creation/consultancy.

The survey was administered in two installments, the first given the first week of classes in January 2005 and the second given the last week of classes in April 2005. It was important to conduct the survey in this manner, in order to truly gauge if the subjects changed their style of dress over an extended period of time after and exposure to London fashion and style of dress. Furthermore, a continuum was used to measure the style of dress of each subject from conservative to avant-garde, fashion-forward, British style. Conservativeness was generally defined as being classic, preppy, and sporty, as illustrated in the first three pictures (A-C) of Figure 3. The ultimate conservative consumer is a traditionalist who values clothes that are simple and straight-forward in design. A fashionista she is not, but similar to Jennifer
Aniston (Figure 9), she knows what looks good on her: clean lines, solid colors, no frills. Her style ranges from the American classic Gap to Abercrombie & Fitch.

As you continue down the continuum, the style of dress becomes more stylish, adventurous, and unique. From fashion-savvy to European, as depicted by the last four pictures (D-G) of Figure 3, the style of dress becomes quintessentially “London” more fashion-forward, edgy, and avant-garde. The definitive fashion forward London consumer is chic, and fashion conscious, with an individualized style. Avant-garde is her mainstay. European style is her language. Mixing and matching patterns, fabrics, colors, textures, and lengths differentiate her style from everyone else. Similar to Sienna Miller (Figure 9), it is in the details for her, the pairing of clothes and accessories to form a unique look, i.e., pairing heels with cropped sweat pants, or a mini skirt with torn bright colored tights. Her role model is Sex and the City’s Carrie, her favorite store, she doesn’t have one.

Results

First Question

As Figure 4 indicates 56.9% of those surveyed changed their style of dress from the first administration of the survey in January 2005 to the second in April 2005, where as 43.1% did not change at all. More specifically, when asked the question, “Which pictures best resemble your personal style right now?,” compared to those who did not change their style of dress, more subjects changed their style of dress to a more avant-garde style. By the completion of their semester aboard, they either changed their style of dress to
a more avant-garde style or conversely, changed their style of dress to an even more conservative style.

Based on Figure 4 and utilizing the Style of Dress continuum (Figure 3), a move forward on the continuum (e.g. from B to F) means that the subject’s style of dress became not only more fashion-forward, but began to emulate “London” style of dress, while a move backwards (eg. from C to A), means the subject’s style of dress became more conservative on the continuum. The data collected and displayed in Figure 5 indicates that 86.2% of those surveyed moved forward on the continuum, perceiving their style of dress to be more avant-garde or British at the completion of their semester abroad in London. Juxtaposed to the overwhelming majority of those who became more avant-garde in their fashion sense, 13.8% of those surveyed moved backwards on the continuum, effectively becoming more conservative. As Figure 6 illustrates, 81.8% of the subjects that did not change stayed fashion forward, where as 18.2% stayed conservative. Interestingly, the majority of those who did not change were already fashion-forward in their dress before they began their semester in London.

Demographics for Those Who Changed

In regard to the regional breakdown of those who did change (Figure 7), 56% were from the northeast/eastern region and 44% were from a region outside of the northeast/eastern region. The northeast/eastern region of the United States was defined in this study as New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. The non-northeast/eastern region of the United States was identified in this survey as Iowa, Illinois,
Minnesota, Georgia, and foreign exchange students from Italy, India, Sweden, Netherlands, and Japan.

The subjects whose style of dress changed primarily attended three universities in the United States: Syracuse University, Marist College, and Iowa State University (Figure 7a). More specifically, the majority, 44% attended Syracuse University; 24% attended Iowa State University; and 12% attended Marist College. Twenty percent matriculated at other universities, such as University of California-Berkeley, University of Colorado-Boulder, George Washington University, Loyola University, etc.

Demographics for Those Who Did Not Change

Those who did not change their style of dress were equally divided with regard to region. Fifty percent of the subjects were from the northeastern/eastern region defined in this study, whereas 50% were outside of this region (Figure 8). As evident in Figure 8a, 41% of the subjects who did not change their style attended Syracuse University, 27% attended Iowa State University, 23% Marist College, and 9% other colleges.

Discussion

The analysis of the data found in the survey indicates that 86.2% perceived their style of dress by the end of the semester to be more avant-garde or fashion forward (Figure 4). The fact that such a large majority changed their style of dress substantiates that being in a fashion-forward, more forward-thinking culture or environment causes a change in the style of dress of the individual who experienced this culture or environment. Scrutiny of the data also determined that when the number of subjects who changed their style of dress to more avant-garde or conservative is compared to the number of those
whose style of dress did not change, 13.7% more subjects changed their dress, indicating that being in an avant-garde culture divergent from America has a considerable impact on style of dress. However, based on the data, it can be assumed that the fashion-forward, avant-garde nature of London had little to no effect on the fashion sense of those individuals who were already fashion-forward, as indicated by Figure 6.

In regard to the demographics of the subjects, regional locality played an interesting role in the analysis of the subjects. Given the approximate even division of regional locality of the subjects who did change versus those who did not change, it is assumed that where the subjects are from had no effect on the change in their style of dress after the completion of a semester abroad in London, England. According to Figures 7a and 8a, the majority of the students who attended the London College of Fashion were from Syracuse University and, thus, the data are skewed in this direction. Therefore, predictably, 41% of those who did not change and 44% of those who did are from Syracuse University. Likewise, as indicated in Figures 7a and 8a, a difference of 3% exists between those who did not change and those who did for the rest of the categories. For instance, 24% of those who did not change and 27% of those who did change were from Iowa State.

This analysis is important because it eliminates the university the subject attends while home, in the United States, as a probable reason for the change in style of dress. However, it is worthy of mention that Iowa State had the second highest percentage of students who changed. It can be assumed that this is impacted by the fact that a large percentage of the students who attended the London College of Fashion (second to Syracuse University) came from
Iowa State. Furthermore, an interesting finding from the research conducted was that students from Iowa State University drastically changed in their style of dress by the second administration of the survey. One can assume that the reason for this drastic change from the more conservative A or B to the more avant-garde For G was due to the extreme divergence of London, England from the rural, middle America of Iowa State attended by those surveyed for approximately 2½-3 years. Consequently, the overall conclusive finding when analyzing the data was that the subjects that changed their style of dress from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester, becoming more fashion forward in the process, were individuals who either were from mid-western, middle American states or matriculated at universities, most notably Iowa, Minnesota, and Colorado. Those who changed little or not at all and were seemingly already fashion forward predictably came from states and universities in more fashion-conscious locations on the eastern and western seabords, such as New York and California.

The second question on the survey inquired about the subjects’ fashion influencers, more specifically celebrity figures, magazines, and peers/environment. It was determined that the subjects overwhelmingly chose magazines and their environment as fashion influencers. This response did not change upon the second administration of the survey. However, it was found by the end of the semester more subjects cited the environment, indicating and in turn proving the environment’s influence on the style of dress of the subjects.

The third question asked the subjects to note the retail stores that best represented their style of dress. Given the subjectivity of retail stores coinciding with style preferences and the potential for the third question to be
misinterpreted and answered based on the subjects aspirations, the implications of this question were difficult to analyze. However, there were two interesting findings. Firstly it was determined that the majority of subjects changed their response from the first administration of the survey to the second. Secondly a substantial number of subjects went from an American brand to a London brand. The dichotomy of the extreme, pointedly a change from The Gap to TopShop, wasn’t as rare as expected and a pattern was found that those who changed from a more American retailer to a more British retailer were those who also exhibited a similar transformation in style from American to British.

Future Research

Utilizing the theories of Fernie (2003), Azuma (2003), and Kaiser (1997) discussed above, setting can play an important role in ones style of dress. All three researchers allude to the fact that a change in setting could cause a change in dress, in an effort to assimilate to the social construct of that setting. Kaiser (1997) and other researchers have further noted that a need to “fit in” or assimilate to your surroundings or a group via style of dress can be interpreted as a form of conformity. This conformity or adoption of style of dress is contributed to the ambiguity of the style of dress. As aforementioned, the more ambiguous or futuristic the style of dress, the greater the conformity because individuals are simultaneously curious and enticed by the uniqueness of the style of dress dominant in the environment where they find themselves. Therefore, this theory and Crane’s ideology of the seduction of avant-garde fashion can be used to explain the observed transformation of dress.

From Kaiser’s theory of high and low self-monitoring, it can be inferred that those individuals who transformed their style of dress pointedly, a
style more avant-garde in nature, are high-self monitors. In accordance with
this theory, Kaiser (1997) and the study conducted by Davis and Lennon in
1985 lend themselves to the change in dress observed in this study, in that not
only are more female college students high self monitors, but they also exhibit
high levels of individuality and fashion leadership. In addition, Kaiser, in
congruence with Barnard (2002) adds more depth to the theory of self-
monitoring, correlating high-self monitoring and style of dress to not only an
individual’s self-consciousness, but also to identification with and assimilation
to the norms of a community. When analyzed in this context, those who
drastically changed their style of dress to that of a more avant-garde sense of
fashion are high self-monitors as well as highly self-conscious. Therefore, it
can be inferred that the drastic shift in style of dress of more than half of the
subjects can be attributed to the greater susceptibility of these subjects to
conform to a more avant-garde style of dress associated with a reference group.
Simply put, the overwhelming majority of those subjects surveyed who
adopted a more fashion-forward style of dress similar to that of
London/European dress can be attributed to a need to “fit in,” or be affiliated
with a group.

The propensity to conform, as indicated in the literature review, is
part of American culture and could further explain the transformation in dress
to a more British style. More specifically, the findings conducted could be due
to a need of the subjects to feel that they are members of the London College
of Fashion community or the city at large, where highly evolved avant-garde
fashionable dress was not the dress of a few, but it was a mainstay, a virtual
uniform. In order to determine if self-monitoring or one’s level of self-
consciousness has anything to do with the transformation that occurred in style of dress, more research would need to be conducted and the survey revised to investigate the subjects’ high or low self-monitoring status and the self-conscious nature of their personalities.

Significance of Social Class

As reported by Barnard (2002), fashion demands social organization; in fact, it can not exist if that social organization doesn’t contain a class structure that is multi-layered and where upward mobility is possible and much sought after. Concisely put, no social class, no fashion. However, what does this mean in the context of this study? Can it be theorized that without a social class system fashion isn’t born, and in turn without social class, a divergent, non-traditional style of dress notably witnessed in London, England wouldn’t exist? Raising the question, if fashion demands a social structure, does the longevity and significance of that social structure in turn dictate the extent of traditional and non-traditional, cultural and sub-cultural dress? If so, given the history of British social class in relation to fashion and, in turn, the relationship that exists between America’s class system and its style of dress, what does this divergence do to the style of dress of an American in London? Especially when one considers that American dress was built from a pointed departure from English style to a more “straight-forward” conservative style that can be attributed not only to the more conservative mindset of America compared to the British, but also to its translation to the transformation in the style of dress of the subjects surveyed.
Social class can further be analyzed through the lens of its longevity. Social class as a demarcation of style of dress began in England two and half centuries before its existence in America. As analyzed above and using the research of Warwick, Piti, and Wyckoff (1965), Severa (1995), and Devine (1997), the longer and more rigid striation of the British social class and more advanced evolution of their fashion system, compared to the shorter and more recent manifestation of social class and dress in the United States, could have contribute to the conformity and monotony of American dress and the prevalence of Great Britain’s sub-cultural and avant-garde style of dress. In turn based on the research conducted, is it possible that the historical rigidity of British social structure could have perpetuated a style of dress so divergent from the style of dress adopted in America that its appeal to the subjects surveyed was inevitable and the reason for their drastic transformation? In order to answer this question and discern its impact on the survey under discussion, more research is needed.

*The Influence of the Fashion Capital and Fashionable Image*

Similar to the “copy cat phenomenon” discussed in the case study, *Fashion Change and Fashion Consumption: The Chaotic Perspective*, in which Law, Zhang, and Leung (2004) analyzed the influence of Tokyo, Japan as a fashion capital, creative design imagery paired with the compelling need to emulate the innovative, street style of London’s fashionable natives can be theorized as reasons for the transformation in dress by the American subjects surveyed. Simply put, it was a case of “When in Rome do as the Romans do.” Furthermore,
Lisa Armstrong, fashion editor of *The Times*, stated that “British fashion is famous for its individuality, whereas the US tends to be much more mainstream and pared down”. Perhaps it is the rebellion in all of us, the yearning to go against what is expected that adds depth as to why the American students, whose style of dress in America was often distilled and confined to the strictures of American conservatism and causal dress, while in London “threw-caution-to-the-wind” and dressed in a divergent style.

Utilizing the theories of Law et. al (2004) as well as the primary research, it can be inferred, similar to the New Look phenomenon in 1947, that the fashionable images in European fashion publications, London shops, and on the street seen by the American subjects surveyed haven’t lost their touch. It can further be implied, but not proven, that the power of these images caused the notable transformation in their dress. Given Anna Wintour’s experience and opinion alluded to above, perhaps the American mindset of staunch creativity and the necessity to appeal to the mainstream is at the heart of why, when in England for an extended period of time, where creativity, especially in fashion, is rampant, Americans seized the opportunity to express a more avant-garde sense of style. However, in order to conclude that the divergent external imagery prominent in London caused or even influenced the subjects to change their style of dress, more research needs to be conducted.

**Research Limitations**

There are certain biases in the survey that could have affected the outcome. The age of the subjects, as young adults, is conducive to indecisiveness in dress. Therefore, given the “fickle nature” of young adults, in
particular with regard to fashion/style of dress, it is possible that the transformations that did occur would have occurred regardless. In order to discern if this is in fact true, a control group in the United States, at possibly, each of the top three schools of the subjects surveyed, have had to be conducted to observe, over the time frame of three to four months. Also, it would be interesting to survey other students studying abroad in other countries and cities to decipher if a transformation in dress solely occurs in London. Also, given the small nature of my survey, involving only 51 students, is not a large enough sample to prove that this transformation would be experienced by a majority of young adult/college-aged individuals. More subjects would need to be surveyed in order to deduce the large-scale impact of London culture on American style of dress.

Lastly, the findings found in this survey could be strengthened if fully matriculating London College of Fashion students were surveyed twice like the American students, in the beginning of the semester and at end of the semester. Surveying LCF students, could help to add depth/understanding to the drastic change in style of dress by the American students. This would be especially significant if the fully matriculating LCF students did not change at all or very little while being in London for the same amount of time. This would prove that their longer exposure and immersion in British culture prior to the survey limited their ability to transform drastically. This would prove that it was the culture and style of dress prevalent in London exposed to American students for the first time, and for an extended period of time, that caused a noticeable and self-perceived transformation in style of dress.
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Appendix

Figure 1. Survey

SURVEY: WHAT IS YOUR STYLE?

Please answer the following:

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Check One: _______ Male _______ Female

Age: ____________

State of Birth (hometown): __________________________________________

University/College: ________________________________________________

SURVEY:

1. Which pictures best resembles your personal style right now? Write Letter Here: ______

A) 

B)
2. What are your fashion influencers? (Circle answer and list examples)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>celebrity figures</th>
<th>magazines</th>
<th>peers</th>
<th>your environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. The store that best represents my style preferences? Write Number Here: ______

1. The Gap
2. Abercombie and Fitch
3. Express
4. Arden B.
5. Urban Outfitters
6. Marc Jacobs
7. Ralph Lauren
8. Betsey Johnson
9. Baby Phat
10. TopShop
11. Primark
12. Muji
13. Mango
14. Oasis
15. Miss Selfridge
16. Hoxton Boutique
Figure 2. Total Northeast/East Region vs. Total Not Northeast/East region
The northeast/east region was defined as those subjects from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. The non-northeast/east region was defined as those subjects from Illinois, Iowa, Colorado, California, Georgia, and Minnesota.

Figure 3. The Style of Dress Continuum
Style of dress as a measure of conservativeness (i.e. traditional) compared to a more avant-garde (i.e. eccentric, European/British) style.
Figure 4. Change vs. No Change
Graph depicting from the total subject distribution, those who did change their style of dress versus those who did not.

Figure 5. Move Forward vs. Move Backward on the Continuum
The above graphical depiction illustrates the impressive difference in the number of subjects that identified their style of dress as more fashion forward at the completion of the semester compared to those who became more conservative.
Those Who Did Change: Regional Breakdown and University Breakdown

Figure 6. Those Who Didn’t Change
Those that did not change either already exhibited a fashion sense similar to that sense of style or a conservative and their style remained as such, after the completion of the semester.

Those Who Did Change: Regional Breakdown and University Breakdown

Figure 7 & 7a. Those Who Did Change Regional and University Breakdown
Figure 8 & 8a. Those Who Did Not Change Regional and University Breakdown

Figure 9. Jennifer Aniston and Sienna Miller
The All American Girl vs. the UK’s It Girl
Figure 10. The English Dandy
George Bryan ‘Beau’ Brummell vs. The Modern-Day English Dandy

Figure 11. British and American Fashion in 1890
The difference of a more rigid, traditional dress of the “New Woman” with the bustle compared to the more relaxed dress of the “Gibson Girl” that was starting to appear in America during this time.
Figure 12. The Famous Carnaby street and a British Youth
Carnarby Street, the famous shop lined streets of this bustling marketplace in the heart of London. Photo of the unique style of dress Great Britain made famous, the quirky combination of the wild pattern of Versace and the ascot, create a Saville row meets street wear look photographed in 1991 for I-D magazine.

Figure 13. Victor Stiebel, fashion plate 1951, Elaborate Gowns by Norman Hartnell and Hardy Amies, courtiers to the Queen
Figure 14a-c. Mary Quant’s London
Figure 14 a. The Swinging London’s Quintessential “shop around the corner,” Biba
Figure 14 b. Mary Quant Afoot, Mary Quant’s shoe line
Figure 14 c. Sketches by Mary Quant of her signature “Mod” minis

Figure 15. Barbara Hulanicki’s Biba stores – 1960s
Flower power, Wild prints, and the Huge Sunglass.
Figure 16 a-d. Homage to Everything Westwood.
Figure 16 a. Vivienne’s Punk Revolution with her entourage in 1975 at her infamous, SEX boutique
Figure 16 b. Westwood’s first collection, Pirates (1981) was inspired by 17th – 18th century dress, fanciful pirates, and African prints.

Figure 16 c – d
Figure 16 c. Westwood’s famous Anglomania collection that incorporated what she is known for incorporating English fabrications and dress in inventive and new ways
Figure 16 d. Westwood’s latest fall 2006 collection that utilized her trademark rebellious interpretations and use of Scottish plaids, toga wrappings, and Edwardian pannier pants.
Figure 17. British Youth in Punk attire

Figure 18. Comparison of British Sportswear to American Sportswear: Quant vs. Halston
Figure 19. Claire McCardell

Figure 20. Comparison of Style: British Youth (top) vs. American Youth (bottom)