

EVOLUTION OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY



Here you can see two examples of clothing that were handmade for the individual. The image on the left is a dress indicative of the 1850s. During the 1850s women's skirts grew to become larger, supported by an undergarment.

The image on the right is of my grandmother's wedding dress. Handmade with lace detail and later altered to fit my mother. Both demonstrate the craft involved and level of detail involved with hand stitching a clothing, in this case dresses.

Prior to the mid-19th century, the crafting of clothing was a highly personalized process typically handmade through home production or special orders from a dressmaker and/or tailor. However, with the dawn of the 20th century came an outpouring of industrial technologies, including the introduction of products like the sewing machine and power loom, and the growth of global capitalism which increased the popularity of factory system business models. This, in turn, facilitated the rise of retail outlets and department stores, where clothing became mass produced in standard sizes and sold at fixed industry prices. The practice of making clothing is one of the oldest crafts known to man. With the rise of global fashion we can see how it has changed and progressed over the centuries.

OVERVIEW:

The fashion industry is a vast and lucrative enterprise that involves creating and selling clothing with underlying symbolic meaning. At its core, the fashion industry is a process of social diffusion whereby groups of consumers embrace new styles. The fashion system is a reflection of contemporary pop culture, politics, and business trends, and its evolution has been a significant part of history that is often overlooked. Fashion has continually adapted, grown, and transformed through the years, with annual revenues reaching an impressive \$2.5 trillion and over 80 billion new pieces of clothing produced worldwide each year, making it a structural part of the global economy.



My grandmother and her date at the 1965 Sadie Hawkins dance. These outfits show how fashion evolved from the 1850s, both more simple in design.

1980 - 1990 :

The 1980s-1990s were truly iconic decades for fashion, marked by an explosion of creative and distinctive styles. In the 80s, legwarmers, scrunchies, leotards, and oversized shoulders dominated the scene, exemplified by puff sleeves worn by Princess Diana and actress Melanie Griffith. Scrunchy socks and sneakers, black pantyhose, big bow accents, and brightly colored clothing were also lightly sought-after, along with pleated jeans and sailor collars. Designer Ralph Lauren was a pivotal figure during the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s, as were other influential designers like Vivienne Westwood and Fendi.

The 1990s ushered in a more minimalist aesthetic, with oversized blazers, slip dresses, biker shorts, claw clips, polo shirts, and trousers representing the new frontier of fashion. What's interesting about the fashion industry is the way it continually recycles and adapts nostalgic styles to the present day. For instance, Birkenstocks, which were popular in the 90s, have made a comeback. My own mother often comments on how much of today's fashion is an "updated" version of what she wore in her youth, like baggy jeans, oversized jackets, and other timeless pieces.



Photos depicting classic 80s/90s everyday fashion style.



My mother in her senior prom year dress: 1990. This dress shows an adaptation in fashionable style.

2000 - PRESENT :

From 2000-2010, the fashion scene was flooded with "sweet" colors, glitter, denim, crop tops, low waisted jeans, and thin scarves, often layered together to create a unique look. Skinny jeans gained popularity only to be replaced by baggy jeans once again, dubbing skinny jeans "cheugy" and we saw the rise and fall of the VSCO girl look. In recent years we have seen a shift from less form-fitting clothing, back to more minimalistic styles, like the slip dress. Today, the fashion industry is marked by a fast-paced evolving consumer culture, with the mass production and fast fashion industries dominating the market alongside the high-end couture industry.

It's remarkable to reflect on how far we have come from the elegant and meaningful craft of clothing before the onset of industrialization. Today, fads come and go with the seasons, with trends emerging each year and many people eagerly predicting what the next big thing will be. Looking ahead it will be interesting to see what the next decade of fashion hold, but it's certain that the fashion industry will continue to evolve and push boundaries in new and exciting ways. The only constant in fashion is change, what do you think will be next?



Photos depicting class 2010s style.



Example of a common style seen worn today.