

Minority Influence and Fashion. The Model of Style Transformation

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ABSTRACT

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This contribution focuses on the role of minority influence in fashion change. It links findings from experimental social psychology to sociological processes of aesthetical and societal change.

According to the concept of style transformation new dress fashions and other life style trends are created by active minorities, as a rule but not necessarily, youth subcultures. Through their experimental creations they express their emerging identities in a challenging context of a fast changing society. Although their values anticipate values to become relevant to the majority, too (e.g., the hedonism of the Hippies as anticipation of a hedonistic consumer society), the majority cannot identify with their provocative opposition and rejects the emerging styles.

This gap is filled by avant-garde designers and their customers. As flexible minorities they play the role of cultural intermediaries. By formalization and re-contextualization, they separate the new style elements from their subversive meaning and transfer them from the domain of objectivity norm into the area of the norms of originality and preference, from ugly provocation to expensive art and fashion. The new styles are associated with prestige. In a process of further dilution, they can be adopted by a greater part of the majority.

It is concluded that the psychology of minority influence provides a substantial contribution to the explanation of aesthetical change.

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