Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

In *every day* usage, the term 'fashion' refers to the use of certain objects and certain ways of doing things that are considered to be in-style amongst a given group of people at a given time in history." (cf. http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mode). In general, fashion is constantly changing due to changes in society and as such relates to a short-lived phenomenon. The same holds for *fashion clothing.* Fashion brings new modes of behaviour and ways of thinking as well as values which either emerge as discretionary models or actually become *de rigueur.*

The *sociological* definition emphasizes *standardization*; the desire of an individual to *belong* to a certain social class strived for and to a larger group (cf. Lehnert 1998 and http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mode, http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kleidermode). The term 'fashion' also has an aesthetic connotation, as dressing in style is also equated with 'beauty'. The role of clothes goes far beyond its utility function of protecting the body. According to LEHNERT (1998), wearing fashionable clothes expresses much more than aesthetic aspects including:

- a desire to conform i.e. to conform to mainstream society or rather;
- to draw attention because of something new, not yet well-known;
- to express belonging to a (high) social class through labels, brands and trademarks;
- to simply impress;
- to show self-assurance or rather;
- to cover up one's uncertainties, etc. (cf. König 1982).

According to SIMMEL (1973), psychological behaviour with regard to clothes & fashion is related on the one hand to imitating and on the other hand with the desire to set oneself apart from the masses and to distinguish oneself as "someone special".

Historically speaking, fashion in Europe in the 60s experienced its first far-reaching change: the cultural conflict resulted in a break with the traditional functions of fashion and its way of spreading. Trends were no longer uniquely and solely set by French "fashion dictators" and rich Parisian ladies. All of a sudden, diversity and at the same time individuality became important in fashion. The role of *youth* took on an important function: youth became the creator of fashion and at the same time actively participated in societal and political changes (cf. Zsolt 2003). ZSOLT (2003) further stressed that in the 1960s and the 1970s, through their dress and their music, young people wanted to express their freedom, their protest feelings and their revolt against the "ancien régime" (protest against the war in Vietnam, the 1968 student movement, the sexual revolution, etc). At that time, the so-called unisex-clothes became popular and therefore gender differences in clothes became less of an issue.

The 1980s and the 1990s represented a much more peaceful era for the clothes & fashions of young people: dress was no longer used to express "revolt" and "protest"; several, parallel fashion trends coexisted and to a great extent drew their inspiration from fashion orientations of earlier years. Today's sub-culture mainly only reflects a musical preference, which nevertheless is connected to a certain way of dressing.

One of the major changes regarding fashion nowadays, however, is that *children* are increasingly targeted as an important consumption group for fashion clothing. In fact, this target group has become so profitable that the American author Juliet SCHOR (2004) even referred to children as being ("Born to Buy"). In this regard, German studies have shown (cf. Oelkers 2005a), that in 2003, children between the ages of 6 to 13 years of age had, at their disposal, more than 5.6 billion euros

every year in pocket money or from money gifts. It is therefore hardly any wonder that children have become an important consumer target group. Almost 70% of those surveyed could decide themselves about how they dressed. "The children learn (...), that consumption makes a person happy and they have a fixation for brands that are connected with prestige. This kind of a learning environment has consequences: 70% of children and young people state that appearance is more important than character and that fashion is almost as important to them as their own family" (cf. Oelkers 2005/a).

In addition to the fact, that children and young people have a fixation for fashion and that the media continues to focus more intensely on them (i.e. in the form of targeted advertising), OELKERS (2005/b) stresses that gender-specific differences are clearly visible in advertising, while in child-rearing and in education they are almost completely ignored. According to the above-mentioned study, child-reading today is no longer strictly influenced by role models from the family or teachers. OELKERS (2005/a, 2005/b) is however, not painting a gloomy picture either, along the lines of "values are on the decline" or "a total disintegration of prosperity": rather he stresses the importance of children and young people acquiring strategies in order to be able to consistently deal with consumer advertising. Children now need to do nothing *more* than make a distinction between the media and dimensions of experience and learn how to cope with them. Every day consumption and the fashion issue does not therefore simply refer to negative "seduction" that should be avoided, but rather represents a problem area where children must learn to draw the limits. According to OELKERS (2005/b), an additional challenge related to this learning process, is to gain awareness for and to take into consideration gender-specific differences.

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