An Investigation of College Men's and Women’s Fashion Adoption

Influenced by Celebrities

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This thesis titled
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Influenced by Celebrities

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Dean, The Gladys W. and David H. Patton College of Education and Human Services
Abstract

STURGILL, AARON A., M.S., August 2011, Apparel, Textiles and Merchandising

An Investigation of College Men's and Women’s Fashion Adoption Influenced by Celebrities

Director of Thesis: V. Ann Paulins

An exploratory study about the influence celebrities have on young adults, with regards to fashion, was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Participants were recruited from Ohio University courses, and a total of 481 usable surveys were collected, with 120 male participants and 361 female participants.

The subjects in this study confirmed, through survey responses, that celebrities set appearance standards through their highly visible lives that are portrayed in the media. It was evident that, because the general population is not exposed to celebrities face to face, media outlets allow the celebrities to become highly visible. Actors and musicians were the two categories most often listed by subjects as influential celebrities. Two themes emerged that support the notion of celebrity influence and the manner to which their influence occurs: (a) celebrities are viewed as role models and (b) celebrity lives are desirable and envied because they are associated with wealth, power, and fame. In fact young adults view celebrities as role models to the extent that they are influenced not only with fashion choices, but also in the adoption of non-fashion items such as, food, cars, electronics, drugs, and alcohol. Additionally celebrity behaviors, particularly language, emerged as areas of influences for college men and women in this sample.
Both similarities and differences were observed between men and women with respect to the way celebrities influence them. Although the levels of reported influence were generally similar, women consistently reported significantly higher levels of perceived celebrity influence than men. Male respondents more frequently mentioned athletes as an influence than female respondents, and female respondents mentioned reality television people more often than men. There was a general agreement between both men and women, though, regarding which specific celebrities were most influential.

In addition to providing insight about the way celebrities influence college age men and women, topics worthy of exploration in future research were revealed. Specifically, this information provides insight into the role of celebrities as endorsers for clothing or brands. Marketers, retailers and brands can use this information to determine effective ways to reach their target customers.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

V. Ann Paulins

Professor of Human and Consumer Science Education
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Clothing serves many purposes in the everyday lives of people; it protects the body from the elements, covers the body for modesty purposes, and serves as an expressive media (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). Clothing is used both consciously and subliminally by the wearer to communicate nonverbal messages to the people viewing the clothing (Kaiser, 1983-84). Fashion, often expressed through clothing items, is defined as “temporary cyclical phenomena adopted by consumers for a particular time and situation” (Sproles, 1979 p.116). Fashion tends to follow a predictable sequence, referred to as the fashion cycle, which includes introduction, acceptance and regression stages (Solomon & Rabolt, 2009). Simel (1904) described fashion as a form of class distinction in a relatively open class society, with the upper class actively searching out observable symbols, such as fashion, to express their superior status. The subjacent lower class adopts the same fashion in an attempt to associate themselves with the upper class, then they are copied by a lower class and this imitation and adoption process continues. As a result, the upper class repeatedly loses its distinction from other classes and adopts new styles, creating the fashion cycle (Simel, 1904).

Famous actors, musicians, athletes, and models, commonly referred to as celebrities, have some influence on the general population particularly through the vast arrays of current visual communication media including television, movies, Internet, magazines, and print advertisements (Winge, 2008). In today’s world celebrities can be considered the elite class of citizens, identified by Simel (1904). A celebrity can be any person well known in one of a wide variety of fields such as science, politics or
entertainment (Boorstin, 1961 p.57), but in contemporary society fame is not restricted to achievement. Today’s celebrities are famous for being famous (Carter, 2006). Because of celebrities’ far reaching potential for influence, the manner and extent to which they influence people is of interest.

Fashion has gained significant attention in today’s media. Fashion and media experts claim that fashion, like other cultural forms, has a considerable presence in serious press (Janssen, 2006). Innovative fashion shows regularly make the front page of major newspapers, unlike in the past where only racy fashion was noteworthy (Church & Gibson, 2006). Fashion consumers in the 21st century use media technologies including computers and mobile devices, to access immediate information and thus have become key conduits for fashion information and influence. For the purpose of this study, the definition of fashion media includes, but is not limited to, magazines, television, websites and movies with fashion content.

Children born after 1980, better known as Generation Y, have been subjected to as many as 20,000 commercial messages a year for a decade and a half (Syrett & Lammiman, 2004). Because of their heavy exposure to mass media messages the process of information gathering is of interest. With access and ability to simultaneously surf the web on a laptop, listen to music on an mP3 player and text on a cell phone, the way information about a specific topic, such as fashion, is gathered is of interest. Through these technologies today’s citizenry has the ability to be constantly connected to media sources. Not only are members of generation Y interested in media and technology, but also they are known to have high fashion involvement (Belleau et al., 2007).
Men and women are different in many ways and their decisions, opinions and behaviors concerning fashion are no exception (Soloman & Rabolt, 2009). Traditionally, shopping and clothing were considered to be female domains (Bakewell, Mitchell, & Rothwell, 2006), but as times change men are no longer viewed as fashion-less (Edwards, 1998; Mort, 1996; Wernick, 1991; Featherstone, 1995; Kacen, 2000; Tseelon, 1995; Patterson & Elliot, 2002).

Given the lucrative market potential of Generation Y consumers and opportunities for the merchants to partner with celebrities to attract their target market, the following research questions were identified:

• Are young adults, men and women, influenced by celebrities with respect to their fashion choices?
• If so, how are they influenced?
• If so, are there differences in the way men and women are influenced by celebrities?

Definition of Terms

*Celebrity.* A human pseudo-event, a person known for his or her well knownness (Boorstin, 1961 p. 57).

*Fashion Adoption.* An individual decision making process used for the adoption of any given style (Forsythe, 1991).

*Fashion Media.* For this study, fashion media include magazines, television, and movies with fashion content and fashion websites.
Symbolic Interaction. The study of social actions and social objects (McCall & Simmons, 1966).
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

By definition, celebrities are widely recognized in popular culture. Whether young adults are influenced by celebrities with respect to their fashion choices was the focus of this thesis. Because communication, whether intended by wearers or simply perceived by observers, occurs based on visual cues such as clothing (Kaiser, 1983-84), the symbolic interaction perspective serves as the theoretical framework for this study. For this study, the influences of age, gender and communication media are of interest, particularly with respect to celebrities, specifically the influence of clothing. Each of these elements is explored in depth in the review of literature that follows.

Celebrity

In contemporary society celebrities have become integral in the everyday lives of people through various media sources. Celebrities can be defined as a human pseudo-event; a celebrity is a person known for his or her well knownness (Boorstin, 1961). Celebrities are products of mass media (Chia & Poo, 2009), and because of this celebrities can be any person well known in one of a wide variety of fields such as science, politics or entertainment (Boorstin, 1961). Entertainment celebrities, such as singers and actors, are preferred by adolescents (Cowen, 2000; Arnett, 1991; White & O’Brien, 1999; Yue & Cheung, 1999).

The rapid growth of entertainment media sources have allowed people, more specifically adolescents, to become acquainted with celebrities and as a result, celebrities have become influential (Brown & Basil, 1995; Giles & Maltby, 2004). In the media the luxurious and seemingly perfect lives of celebrities are depicted as they walk in high-end
fashion shows, or are photographed on the red carpet. Conversely, media also portrays celebrities as being “just like us,” wearing normal everyday clothes, getting married, having children, getting divorced or dealing with drug or alcohol addiction (Moeran, 2006). Young adults often develop relationships with the figures they see in various media sources. Along with the relationships formed with family and friends, the attachment to celebrities can help the transition to adulthood (Adams-Price & Greene, 1990; Balswick & Ingoldsby, 1982; Erikson, 1968; Greene & Adams-Price, 1990).

Involvement is defined as the degree to which an individual actively participates in decoding a media message (Krugman, 1967; McLuhan, 1964; Rogers, 2000). In the case of celebrities, an admirer would actively seek out information about a celebrity through media sources. Celebrity admirers often talk about celebrities as if they truly have a relationship with them (Alperstein, 1991; Caughly, 1984, 1985, 1994; Levy, 1979). In many cases, celebrities become the idealized self-image for their admirers because their admirers find attributes that they would like to develop or improve in themselves (Caughly, 1978, 1984, 1985, 1994). Celebrities become role models and can inspire change in their admirers, which can deeply affect their lives (Caughly, 1985). Many studies have shown a correlation between celebrity involvement and the adoption of clothing styles, product purchases, and health behaviors (Brown & Basil, 1995; McGuire, 1974). With regard to adolescent celebrity admirers, involvement can potentially influence personal values and subjective well-being (Adams-Price & Green, 1990; Chang, 1997; Greene & Adams-Price, 1990; Boon & Lomore, 2001; Maltby, Day, McCutcheon, Martin & Cayanus, 2004; Ravin et al., 1996). To further explain this,
Kelman’s Theory of Identification (1961) can be useful. According to Kelman’s Theory of Identification, identification occurs when an individual adopts an attitude or behavior from another person to establish a self-defining relationship with that person (Kelman, 1961). Multiple studies have applied Kelman’s Theory of Identification to show how celebrity admirers view celebrities as role models and alter their lifestyles and values to imitate those celebrities (Basil, 1996; Basil & Brown, 1997; Brown, Basil & Bocarnea, 2003; Brown, Basil & Bocarnea, 2003). In terms of fashion adoption, when celebrities are seen wearing high-end designer brands and living luxurious lifestyles, celebrity admirers seek to adopt similar styles (Chia & Poo, 2009). Boon and Lomore (2001) also offer an explanation of celebrity influence, stating that the illusionary relationship adolescents have with celebrities is very similar to the real relationships they have with friends and family and can alter their values and subjective well-being. Celebrities typically obtain desired characteristics such as good looks, wealth and popularity, all of which an admirer may want to emulate (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Caughey, 1985; Caughey, 1994). Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) offers another explanation of celebrity influence. Social Comparison Theory states that within each person exists a drive to seek out outside images to evaluate their own opinions and abilities (Festinger, 1954). Application of the Social Comparison Theory to media images suggests that people are vulnerable to comparing themselves with media images, but motivation level determines whether or not actual comparisons are made (Botta, 1999). For adolescents, due to high levels of media consumption, celebrities become ideal sources of comparison (Botta, 1999; Goethals, 1986).
Involvement with celebrities can be divided into two concepts, (a) a para-social relationship with celebrities and (b) identification with celebrities (Brown, Basil & Bocarnea, 2003). The para-social celebrity relationship can be defined as an imaginary relationship with a deep sense of intimacy with that celebrity (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Levy, 1979). Para-social relationships with celebrities have been linked to media consumption because media outlets allow for an illusionary face-to-face experience with celebrities (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Levy (1979) suggested that celebrities promote para-social relationships through the media by speaking directly to the camera as if in a real conversation with the viewers, engaging in clever monologues and behaving in a casual manner with other media characters. Brown et al. (1997) note that para-social celebrity relationships are not limited to television and can be extended to include a variety of media outlets (i.e., television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet).

Identification with a celebrity refers to the imitation of a celebrity by an admirer to nourish the imaginary relationship (Kelman, 1961; Basil, 1996; Basil & Brown, 1997). To sustain and further build their relationships with celebrities, admirers consume vast amounts of media in addition to other activities such as collecting mementos, newspaper and magazine clippings, joining fan clubs and attempting to make contact with celebrities. These actions serve as a substitute for real interaction (Caughly, 1978, 1984, 1985, 1994).

Symbolic Interaction

After a thorough review of literature, Davis (1984) observed and presented three themes emerging from clothing research. First, clothing offers cues to form impressions
of others (Buckley & Roach, 1974; Workman, 1988). Second, behavior towards others may change based on their clothing (Bickman, 1971). Third, individuals are more attracted to clothing that shares attributes similar to their own (Buckley & Roach, 1974).

Clothing plays a role in communication and within that role serves two primary functions. The first function clothing serves is as a tool for identity negotiation (McCall, 1976) and the second function is to help define a situation (Thomas, 1923). Clothing can allow individuals to fit into social roles or help to better understand the roles of others. Social interactions occur more smoothly when identities are negotiated and understood than when there is confusion (Kaiser, 1983-84). Appearance plays an important role in social interaction, potentially deterring or promoting social interaction as people make interpretations about others’ appearances (Stone, 1962 & 1967). In the process of defining identity, individuals use clothing because clothing is a part of everyday life, clothing constitutes a frequent public display, and clothing is an easily manipulated symbol (Feinberg, Mataro & Burroughs, 1992). When making indications about peoples’ appearances two processes can occur: (a) identification of one another and (b) identification with one another (Stone, 1962). When the perceiver identifies with another person, clothing and appearance symbols are mutually understood. This mutual understanding is conducive to a process called role-taking (Mead, 1934). The definition of role-taking is being able to place oneself imaginatively in another person’s position to see objects from his or her point of view (Mead, 1934). Role-taking can help to facilitate symbolic interaction because, in most cases, individuals who empathize with one another
share the same meanings for symbols and thus have a mutual orientation toward each other’s lines of activity (Sherohman, 1977; Stewart, 1981).

McCall and Simmons (1966) described symbolic interaction as the study of social actions and social objects, building upon Mead’s (1934) and Blumer’s (1969) definitions of symbolic interaction as a process in which meanings of symbols form the basis for many interactions. To help make sense of the social world in which they live, individuals assign meanings to the objects that exist in these worlds. This process is also referred to as self-indication (Morrione & Farberman, 1981a). To effectively communicate through symbolic interaction, with respect to clothing, it is crucial that the perceiver and the wearer arrive at mutually congruent meanings assigned to the clothing items (Kaiser, 1983-84). Kaiser (1983-84) offered an example of potential dissonance in communication such as a jogging suit worn by a coworker to a business meeting. She noted that the perceiver might question why the coworker is wearing the jogging suit and until a mutual interpretation is made the meeting may not proceed smoothly.

The second function that clothing serves is to help define situations during social interactions (Kaiser, 1983-84; Thomas, 1923). During social interactions individuals use their own life experiences to help define situations, but definitions can be established during social interactions. Clothing is used to help define situations, or in some cases modify previous definitions once symbolic interaction occurs (Kaiser, 1983-84).
Generation Y

People born after 1980 have been categorized as Generation Y, or Millennials. These young consumers have been identified as a highly demanded market (Bush, Martin & Bush, 2004) for many reasons, specifically because of their (a) spending power, (b) ability to be trendsetters, (c) receptivity to new products, and (d) tremendous potential for becoming lifetime consumers (Bush et al., 2004). With a population of nearly 60 million, Generation Y is a rapidly growing market segment and one that is comparable to the current dominating segment, the Baby Boomer generation (Belleau, 2007). Members of this emerging potential market group have been introduced to the consumer world earlier than past generations (Tru, 1999), have been raised in households where both parents work and teach them how to be consumers (Bakewell, 2003), and have greater disposable income than previous youth generations (Tomkins, 1999). Teenage Research Unlimited estimated that young adult spending increases by almost eight percent annually (Earnest, 2002). Earnest (2002) reported that U.S. teens spend $897.3 billion a year, two thirds of which purchases clothing (Earnest, 2002). When comparing U.S. teenagers to other shoppers, they visit malls more frequently and spend significantly more time in malls (Connolly & Rogoff, 2008). This youthful market has been raised to regard shopping as a leisure activity (Bakewell, 2003) where they not only purchase goods but also socialize with peers (Chaney, 1983).

Generation Y members enjoy knowledge of a wide variety of product and lifestyle choices due to an abundant exposure to mass media (Phelps, 1999). They have opposing attitudes, values, and behaviors about shopping when compared to other generations due
to technological, socio-cultural, economic, and retail advances in the last several decades (Bakewell, 2003). Generation Y is a particularly unique group because they have been raised in a media driven, technologically saturated world, making it difficult to reach them through traditional marketing strategies (Morton, 2002). They are known to use multiple forms of technology simultaneously, such as watching television, accessing the Internet on their computers, texting on their cell phone and listening to music on mp3 players. Syrett and Lammiman (2004, p. 64) reported that “children born after 1980 have been subjected to as many as 20,000 commercial messages a year for a decade and a half.” The Nielsen Report on Television (1995) reported that members of Generation Y watch around 7 hours of television a day. The images shown on television portray the importance of material goods and luxury (O’Guinn et al., 1985). Various forms of communication technologies, mass media, international travel and advertising campaigns also display this idea of the “American Dream” one where affluence is important (Mitchell, 1995). High-end designer labels have become central to young consumers’ lives because the image of luxury and expensiveness that they exude. The Internet has also been a gateway to the fashion world to members of Generation Y. Cravatta (1997) reported that two thirds of the Generation Y members who have access to the Internet use it to purchase or explore product information. The effects of heightened consumption of media and increased use of technology have made consumerism and brand awareness a central aspect of their lives (Syrett & Lammiman, 2004).
Gender

Traditionally men have had a utilitarian relationship with clothing whereas women view the purpose of clothing to be more hedonic. Females are more fashion focused and more likely to view owners of fashion products in a positive light (Mayer & Belic, 1985) and use clothing to form ideals of self (Gould & Stern, 1989; Soloman, 1989). Society places pressure on women to be concerned with appearance and because of that gender differences have emerged (Bakewell, 2006). Women generally enjoy shopping, spend more time shopping and are concerned with fashion more than men (Dholakia, 1999).

In the past, fashion has been regarded as a female domain but due to a number of environmental changes it has become more and more acceptable for men to display fashion interest. Men’s perceptions of themselves as shoppers have been molded by remaining single longer without a significant other to shop for them (Scase, 1999). The heightened awareness of fashion is due to many reasons including a significant growth in men’s magazines such as *FHM* and *FHM Collections*, *Menswear*, *Loaded*, *Sky Magazine*, *Men’s Health*, *Maxim*, *Attitude*, *GQ*, and *Esquire* (Mintel, 2000). Generation Y males, when compared to other generations, are more interested in fashion for a number of reasons including media influences, marketing strategies and changing gender roles (Bakewell, 2006). The emergence of the “new man” in advertisement has allowed men to reevaluate ideals of fashion and appearance. The new man is an icon that connects clothing and style to success (Mintel, 2000). Advertising campaigns are utilizing professional athletes to gain the attention of male consumers and to develop positive
attitudes about fashion. “The footballer is now a permanent fixture in the fashion world. He walks on the catwalks, sponsors and advertises certain labels in magazines, beds and models, poses half-naked on the sides of buses and accepts that clothes are a vital part of his armory” (Hewitt and Baxter, 2004, p.115). A wider acceptance of homosexuality has also shaped men’s ideals of fashion. Masculinity is characterized as white, heterosexual, and middle class (Kimmel, 1994). Fashion and shopping are considered to be feminine and men run the risk of de-masculinizing themselves by having an interest in fashion (Bakewell, 2006). Due to these changes men are now using clothes for hedonic purposes more so than for utilitarian reasons (Lasche, 1979). Female adolescents tend to shop with peers and rather than with their parents at an earlier age when compared to their male counterparts (Kaiser & Freeman, 1989). However, male adolescents are concerned with fashion; boys by the age of nine begin to recognize and appreciate brands (Hogg & Bruce, 1998).

**Fashion Media**

Fashion Media is defined as magazines, television, and movies with fashion content, and fashion websites. Fashion has emerged since the late 20th century as a cultural form of information. Like film, photography, jazz, and pop music, fashion media has gained a presence in the serious press and has attained artistic legitimacy (Janssen, 2006). Since the 1980s fashion journalism has diffused into various media outlets, such as television, magazines, and daily newspapers (McRobbie, 1998). Fashion media coverage is greater than any other area of human interest such as art, education, architecture, theater, literature, the environment, or technology (Polan, 2006).
Mass media functions as a significant source of communication in contemporary society. Consumers are exposed to innumerable mass media messages through multiple sources such as television, radio, Internet, and print. Fashion magazines are released in monthly installments, and most contain model and/or celebrities gracing the cover wearing current fashions, offering life advice for readers, current events, and how-to guides for fashion and beauty. Most fashion publications dedicate their March and September issues to the latest spring/summer and autumn/winter fashion shows in London, New York, Paris, and Milan (Moeran, 2006). Many people regard magazines as the voice of the fashion industry. They mirror the cultural zeitgeist through both images and text. Fashion magazines can be seen as cultural media objects, narrating dominant cultural trends (Kopina, 2007). In a study exploring the relationship between fashion studies and anthropological studies, Kopina (2007) profiled fashion magazine readers as culturally western oriented, economically successful, and socially liberated. Fashion magazines reach multiple audiences, most obviously made for and targeted at consumers, but they also have to be aware of potential advertisers and the fashion industry, as they are the financial backbone (Moeran, 2006). Fashion magazines work as a guide to readers. They show the reader how to incorporate the fashions seen on the pages of the magazines into their everyday lives. Fashion magazines build an intimacy with their readers by giving them insight into the fashion world (Moaran, 2006). Without fashion magazines, encompassing clothing and fashion on its pages, the current fashion system would not exist (Moeran, 2006).
Celebrities and models are seen on the covers of nearly all fashion magazines. In the world of fashion magazines, celebrities and models serve three functions. The first function, most obviously, is to sell clothing, accessories and beauty products. Celebrities and models are depicted on the pages of fashion magazines wearing clothing and accessories with current styles of makeup and hair, thus selling the product to the magazine’s audience (Moeran, 2006). The second function they serve is to sell the magazine itself (Winship, 1987). Fans or admirers of a celebrity or model are more likely to purchase magazines where popular celebrities appear on the cover. By placing themselves in a fashion context, celebrities and models serve a third function by selling the fashion and entertainment world itself (Moeran, 2006).

Research Questions

The following specific research questions were developed to explore the influence of celebrities on college age men and women with respect to their fashion choices.
1. Do celebrities influence fashion adoption in young adults? If so, how and to what extent?
2. What types of celebrities most influence fashion for college aged men and women?
3. Who are the most influential celebrities with regards to fashion for contemporary college age men and women?
4. Are men and women influenced by celebrities in similar ways?
5. How do college age men and women obtain fashion information?
6. Is symbolic interaction evident in celebrity influence?
Chapter 3: Methodology

To explore the influence of celebrities on fashion adoption among young adults, an explorative, primarily qualitative method was applied. The methodology used in this study is outlined in the following sections.

Pilot Study

To inform survey development for this study, and to identify specific research questions for investigation in this research project, a pilot study was executed in the form of focus groups. The purpose of the focus groups was to identify college students’ inferred definition of “fashion media” and to identify specific types of fashion media that college students reference when considering fashion adoption options. After obtaining approval (Appendix A) from the Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were recruited from an entry level merchandising course. Two interview sessions were held. Because only a single subject participated in the first, it was a one-on-one interview. The other focus group occurred with two subjects. The focus groups yielded insights that were used to develop the resulting research project. The key emergent theme that informed the overarching research question of this study was a focus on celebrity influence on fashion. All of the interviewed subjects revealed a strong celebrity influence on fashion awareness and decisions. Subjects mentioned that they see celebrity fashion activity on television, in magazines, online, and in movies. Interestingly, feelings of embarrassment attached with celebrity influence became evident in the interview discussions. Subjects indicated reluctance in admitting to their friends or others that they draw upon celebrities for fashion ideas. Although some shame was paired with
celebrity influence, participants indicated that they were more likely to use celebrities as fashion resources than fashion magazines or television.

Current Study

After identification of the research purpose, to investigate the influence of celebrities on young adults’ fashion choices and to determine whether differences exist between men and women, a survey was constructed to yield both qualitative and quantitative data. The exploratory nature of the study warranted a survey with primarily qualitative questions, while analysis of some quantitative data was also desired. The qualitative questions were open-ended questions probing for further explanation on the topic of celebrity influence. The quantitative component served the purpose of comparison. Quantitative questions were scored on a seven point Likert scale. To ensure clarity of terms used in the survey, definitions were presented at the beginning of the survey. The survey included demographic questions such as age, race, gender, income, and college major. These areas were addressed for comparison purposes. The remainder of the survey addressed the following research questions:

• Are young adults, men and women, influenced by celebrities with respect to their fashion choices?
• If so, how are they influenced?
• If so, are their differences in the way men and women are influenced by celebrities?

Based on the overarching theme of shame attached to celebrity influence, which was identified in the preliminary study, questions were worded in such a way that participants
were asked their opinions of celebrity influence on all young adults rather than celebrity influence on themselves. This type of question allowed participants to be free from shame but still describe the influence of celebrities. The last four questions naturally transitioned into questions directed at the specific survey participant.

Recruitment

Approval by Ohio University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted (see Appendix B) prior to recruitment of subjects. Young adults were the targeted population for this study, so college students were recruited for a purposefully convenient sample. Professors teaching large sections were contacted through email to request permission to administer survey to their students. Courses with large numbers of students were selected to efficiently obtain the desired number of completed surveys.

Consent

Consent was addressed verbally prior to administering the survey. No potential risks or discomfort were expected. The first page of the survey informed prospective participants that their participation was voluntary and that they must be 18 years of age to participate. Participants were also informed that their surveys would be kept confidential and anonymous.

Data Analysis

Completed surveys were numbered and coded according to identification number. Data from the surveys were placed in an excel document, with all of the quantitative questions entered on one spreadsheet and each qualitative question entered individually on their own spreadsheet. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to determine
demographic profiles and statistics such as means and t-tests. The qualitative data were coded according to theme based on the Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
Chapter 4: Results

A total of 481 usable surveys were completed. Of the 481 participants, 120 (24.95%) were men and 361 (75.05%) were women, with ages ranging from 18 to 27. The mean age of subjects was 20. Table 1 contains a summary of the demographic profile of the respondents in the sample. Nearly half (54.47%) of the respondents were ages 19 and 20 with the smallest age representation (3.95%) 23 to 27. The largest race represented in this study was White, making up 87.53% of the sample. The sample was relatively affluent, with a little more than one third (37.84%) of the sample reporting the annual income level with which they most affiliated being $100,000 or more.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>361 (75.05%)</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other or non-reporting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Household Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-19,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000-29,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000-39,000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000-49,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-59,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000-69,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$70,000-79,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000-89,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,000-99,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-149,000</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than $150,000</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-reporting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do celebrities influence fashion adoption in young adults? If so, how and to what extent?

The subjects in this study confirmed, through survey responses, that celebrities set appearance standards through their highly visible lives that are portrayed in the media. It was evident that, because the general population is not exposed to celebrities face to face, media outlets allow the celebrities to become highly visible. One respondent offered insight into the pervasive media visibility of celebrities through the statement, “I see it everywhere, young people attempt to mimic those they see in media.” Another said, “we're constantly being exposed to them [celebrities] through media.” Current media platforms and celebrity influence were referenced in the quote, “Young adults see the celebrities via social media and change themselves to be more like them.”

Two themes emerged that support the notion of celebrity influence for fashion in young adults and the manner in which their influence occurs. These were (a) celebrities are viewed as role models and (b) celebrity lives are desirable and envied because they are associated with wealth, power, and fame. Multiple comments were generated by respondents indicating, “Celebrities are our role models.” One female respondent stated, “People want to be more like people they look up to, like celebrities.” Another female respondent articulately reflected comments about celebrities as role models with the statement, “Celebrities are glorified in modern society and everyone hopes to one day be revered as such. People change their tastes, quirks and mannerisms and style to emulate celebrities.” Celebrities’ privileged positions as rich and famous people were confirmed through comments such as “Celebrities are powerful/popular people that others envy and
attempt to relate to, celebrities represent a like of fun, power, sex, and money. People want these things so they imitate.”

In fact young adults view celebrities as role models to the extent that they are influenced not only with fashion choices, but also in the adoption of non-fashion items such as, food, cars, electronics, drugs and alcohol (see Table 2). Additionally celebrity behaviors, particularly language, emerged as areas of influences for college men and women in this sample.

With particular emphasis on fashion influence, respondents offered insight about the way celebrities set standards for appearance to which others strive to achieve. In addition to clothing, their hairstyles, make-up, and body types emerge as reference items. A female subject noted that she is influenced, “because our society makes us, for the majority, believe that what celebrities are doing and wearing is what is beautiful in our culture.” Another insightful comment reflective of numerous respondents was “People look to celebrities to find out what is hip or fashionable.” Recognition of celebrities’ influential roles was clarified by the statement, “Celebrities are always held as being agents of change in the fashion world, so following them closely can keep people in the know.”
Table 2

*Frequency of Mention: Non-Fashion Items Influenced to Purchase by Celebrities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Men (n = 120)</th>
<th>Women (n = 361)</th>
<th>Total (n = 481)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>24 (20.00%)</td>
<td>87 (24.10%)</td>
<td>111 (23.08%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cars</td>
<td>28 (23.33%)</td>
<td>82 (22.71%)</td>
<td>110 (22.87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs/Alcohol</td>
<td>27 (22.50%)</td>
<td>60 (16.62%)</td>
<td>87 (18.09%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty Products</td>
<td>17 (14.16%)</td>
<td>69 (19.11%)</td>
<td>86 (17.88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics</td>
<td>20 (16.67%)</td>
<td>66 (18.28%)</td>
<td>86 (17.88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/Fitness</td>
<td>13 (10.83%)</td>
<td>49 (13.57%)</td>
<td>62 (12.89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music/Movies/Books</td>
<td>9 (7.50%)</td>
<td>44 (12.19%)</td>
<td>53 (11.02%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragrance</td>
<td>5 (4.17%)</td>
<td>26 (7.20%)</td>
<td>31 (6.44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets</td>
<td>4 (3.33%)</td>
<td>19 (5.26%)</td>
<td>23 (4.78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate</td>
<td>1 (0.83%)</td>
<td>15 (4.16%)</td>
<td>16 (3.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Items</td>
<td>1 (0.83%)</td>
<td>9 (2.49%)</td>
<td>10 (2.08%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacations</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>5 (1.39%)</td>
<td>5 (1.04%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic Surgery</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>5 (1.39%)</td>
<td>5 (1.04%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babies</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>5 (1.39%)</td>
<td>5 (1.04%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>2 (1.67%)</td>
<td>2 (0.55%)</td>
<td>4 (0.83%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total number of responses exceeds 100% because of multiple responses from some subjects.
What types of celebrities do you believe most influence fashion?

Table 3 contains a presentation of the types of celebrities who were reported as most influential in fashion. Actors and musicians were the two categories most often listed by subjects. The category “other” was the third most frequently designated; responses such as “young,” “individuals who take risks,” and “female,” were coded as other because they were unable to be placed into an identified category. Additional categories of celebrities reported to influence fashion were athletes, reality television stars, models, and socialites.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Mention: Celebrities That Most Influence Fashion</th>
<th>Male (n = 120)</th>
<th>Female (n = 361)</th>
<th>Total (n = 481)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>52 (43.33%)</td>
<td>167 (46.26%)</td>
<td>219 (45.53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musicians</td>
<td>48 (40.00%)</td>
<td>152 (42.11%)</td>
<td>200 (41.49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>34 (28.33%)</td>
<td>128 (35.46%)</td>
<td>162 (33.68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>26 (21.67%)</td>
<td>16 (4.43%)</td>
<td>42 (8.73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality TV stars</td>
<td>4 (3.33%)</td>
<td>35 (9.70%)</td>
<td>39 (8.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models</td>
<td>7 (5.83%)</td>
<td>27 (7.48%)</td>
<td>34 (7.07%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialites</td>
<td>1 (0.83%)</td>
<td>8 (2.22%)</td>
<td>9 (1.87%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The total number of responses exceeds 100% because of multiple responses from some subjects.
Who are the most influential celebrities with regards to fashion for contemporary college age men and women?

The most frequently mentioned celebrities who currently influence college aged men’s and women’s fashions are presented in Table 4. There was general agreement among men and women, who listed similar male and female celebrities. Female celebrities listed included Lady GaGa, Kim Kardashian, Beyonce, Rihanna, and Katy Perry. The most frequently listed male celebrities were Brad Pitt, Justin Beiber, Kanye West, and Johnny Depp.

Are men and women influenced by celebrities in similar ways?

Subjects responded to the question “How much influence do you believe celebrities have on young adults’ fashion choices?” on a scale of one (very little) to seven (a great deal of influence). Men’s and women’s average scores were 5.24 and 5.65 respectively, indicating that the subjects recognize a considerable level of celebrity influence. These average scores were compared using a t-test ($t = 3.43; p = 0.001$), which showed significant differences between men and women with respect to the level of celebrity influence they perceive. In other words, even though both men and women perceive celebrities to be influential, women perceive celebrities having significantly more influence on young adults fashion choices than men.

Table 5 shows the mean scores and standard deviations for the young adults’ responses to quantitative survey questions. Statistically, men and women demonstrated significant differences with regard to their opinions of celebrity influence. However, both men and women showed responses around the neutral range. Women consistently
reported significantly higher levels of perceived celebrity influence than men. Men and women showed no significant difference when asked, “To what extent do you believe that celebrities inspire young adults to pursue a hobby, career or other activity?”

Table 4

*Frequency of Mention: Most influential celebrities, with Regards to Fashion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most frequently mentioned female celebrities (number of mentions)</th>
<th>Reported by men</th>
<th>Reported by women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lady GaGa (37)</td>
<td>Lady GaGa (108)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyonce (16)</td>
<td>Beyonce (16)</td>
<td>Kim Kardashian (93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Kardashian (15)</td>
<td>Rihanna (42)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katy Perry (9)</td>
<td>Miley Cyrus (42)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miley Cyrus (7)</td>
<td>Jennifer Aniston (41)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britney Spears (7)</td>
<td>Beyonce (39)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rihanna (7)</td>
<td>Kardashian Sisters (34)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris Hilton (6)</td>
<td>Katy Perry (28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Aniston (5)</td>
<td>Taylor Swift (27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan Fox (5)</td>
<td>Paris Hilton (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Lopez (5)</td>
<td>Taylor Swift (27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Portman (5)</td>
<td>Paris Hilton (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor Swift (5)</td>
<td>Paris Hilton (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most frequently mentioned male celebrities (number of mentions)</th>
<th>Reported by men</th>
<th>Reported by women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brad Pitt (25)</td>
<td>Justin Bieber (81)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanye West (18)</td>
<td>Brad Pitt (71)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Beiber (14)</td>
<td>Justin Timberlake (49)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny Depp (13)</td>
<td>David Beckham (32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Clooney (11)</td>
<td>Johny Depp (31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeBron James (11)</td>
<td>Usher (29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Beckham (6)</td>
<td>Kanye West (29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diddy (6)</td>
<td>George Clooney (28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kobe Bryant (5)</td>
<td>Zac Efron (26)</td>
<td>Ashton Kutcher (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robert Pattinson (19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total number of responses exceeds 481 because of multiple responses from some subjects.
Table 5

Young Adult Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) and t-test Results for Selected Survey Criteria and Scale Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>t-test (sig)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of influence celebrities have on young adults</td>
<td>5.24 (1.160)</td>
<td>5.65 (0.984)</td>
<td>3.426 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much young adults look to celebrities for fashion</td>
<td>5.12 (1.231)</td>
<td>5.70 (1.069)</td>
<td>4.648 (.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of celebrity influence on appearance, language, mannerisms or behaviors</td>
<td>4.58 (1.158)</td>
<td>4.98 (1.125)</td>
<td>3.281 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of celebrity influence on pursuing a hobby, career, etc.</td>
<td>4.39 (1.420)</td>
<td>4.52 (1.228)</td>
<td>0.835 (.405)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort level allowing friends and family know about celebrity influence</td>
<td>3.55 (1.355)</td>
<td>3.99 (1.360)</td>
<td>3.081 (.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of fashion consumption activity</td>
<td>3.14 (1.568)</td>
<td>4.59 (1.687)</td>
<td>8.537 (.000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at $\alpha < 0.05$

NOTE: survey scale on 7 points: 1=very little; 7=a great deal

Responses from the survey show evidence that celebrities influence men and women in similar ways, although some gender differences did emerge. With regards to the media through which young adults obtain information about celebrities, both men and women responded similarly, most frequently indicating magazines, Internet and television. Both men and women most frequently mentioned musicians, actors, and others as celebrities with the most influence in fashion. Male respondents indicated athletes more often than female respondents, and female respondents mentioned reality television people more often than men. There was a general agreement between both men
and women regarding which specific celebrities were most influential, and interestingly, only females mentioned an athlete (David Beckham) in the top five.

*How do college age men and women obtain fashion information?*

Table 6 displays the most frequently mentioned outlets young adults use to obtain information about fashion. The most common responses were magazines, Internet, and television. Other less frequently mentioned outlets were family/friends/peers, stores, personal preference, celebrities, social networking sites, movies and thrift/vintage retailers.

*How do college age men and women obtain information about and influence from celebrities?*

Survey responses with respect to how young adults obtain celebrity information include Internet, television and movies, technology, magazines and newspapers, social networking sites, stores, radio, advertisements, peers, music, media, and books. Responses are presented in tabular form in Table 7. The most prevalent answers to this question were television and movies, magazines and newspapers, and the Internet.
Table 6

*Frequency of Mention: How Young Adults Obtain Information About Fashion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Men (n = 120)</th>
<th>Women (n = 361)</th>
<th>Total (n = 481)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>22 (18.33%)</td>
<td>232 (64.27%)</td>
<td>254 (52.80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>35 (29.17%)</td>
<td>132 (36.57%)</td>
<td>167 (34.72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>18 (15.00%)</td>
<td>117 (32.41%)</td>
<td>135 (28.07%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Friends/Peers</td>
<td>20 (16.67%)</td>
<td>57 (15.79%)</td>
<td>77 (16.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stores</td>
<td>15 (12.50%)</td>
<td>55 (15.24%)</td>
<td>70 (14.76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Preference</td>
<td>18 (15.00%)</td>
<td>12 (3.32%)</td>
<td>30 (6.24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not seek information about fashion</td>
<td>12 (10.00%)</td>
<td>8 (2.27%)</td>
<td>20 (4.16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>2 (1.67%)</td>
<td>11 (3.05%)</td>
<td>13 (2.70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking</td>
<td>2 (1.67%)</td>
<td>11 (3.05%)</td>
<td>13 (2.70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>2 (1.67%)</td>
<td>10 (2.77%)</td>
<td>12 (2.49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrift/Vintage</td>
<td>1 (0.83%)</td>
<td>1 (0.28%)</td>
<td>2 (0.42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music/Radio</td>
<td>2 (1.67%)</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>2 (0.42%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total number of responses exceeds 100% because of multiple responses from some subjects.
Table 7

*Frequency of Mention: How Young Adults Obtain Information About Celebrities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men (n = 120)</th>
<th>Women (n = 361)</th>
<th>Total (n = 481)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV and Movies</td>
<td>88 (73.33%)</td>
<td>298 (82.55%)</td>
<td>386 (80.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines and</td>
<td>53 (44.17%)</td>
<td>276 (76.45%)</td>
<td>329 (68.40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>65 (54.17%)</td>
<td>199 (55.12%)</td>
<td>264 (54.89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>31 (25.83%)</td>
<td>68 (18.84%)</td>
<td>99 (20.58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Network</td>
<td>9 (7.50%)</td>
<td>25 (6.93%)</td>
<td>34 (7.07%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>4 (3.33%)</td>
<td>15 (4.16%)</td>
<td>19 (3.95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>1 (0.83%)</td>
<td>7 (1.94%)</td>
<td>8 (1.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>1 (0.83%)</td>
<td>7 (1.94%)</td>
<td>8 (1.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>3 (2.50%)</td>
<td>4 (1.11%)</td>
<td>7 (1.46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>2 (1.67%)</td>
<td>4 (1.11%)</td>
<td>6 (1.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stores</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>3 (0.83%)</td>
<td>3 (0.62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>0 (0.00%)</td>
<td>1 (0.28%)</td>
<td>1 (0.21%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note total number of responses exceeds 100% because of multiple responses from some subjects.

*Is symbolic interaction evident in celebrity influence?*

Participants did indicate the presence of symbolic interaction in celebrity influence, evident in the data obtained from the survey through responses that indicated the use of fashion or products to appear like or be more like celebrities. An example of this type of response was reported by a female participant who stated, “Young adults are
very malleable because of their age and are constantly seeking acceptance from society, so to mimic celebrities who are popular and accepted means you will be closer to being accepted by society.” Two additional female participants offered insight into the mutual understanding of symbols, in this case fashion influenced by celebrities, by stating, “I think it makes them feel more like celebs because if they look/act like them they most likely get comments about looking/acting like a certain celeb and it makes them feel good” and “Young people see the lives of celebrities and their perceived glamour and equate their fashion choices with their success.”
Chapter 5: Discussion

This study confirms that celebrity lives are highly visible through media outlets such as television, magazines, and Internet, and, through these media outlets, celebrities set appearance standards young adults strive to achieve. People use celebrities as reference points for conformity. Overall men and women viewed celebrities as role models in similar ways; however, there were some gender differences, particularly in terms of the types of celebrity perceived as a role model. Young adults emulate celebrities and conform because celebrity lifestyles symbolize success, wealth, and luxury, and those are attributes that young men and women want to achieve.

*Do celebrities influence fashion adoption in young adults? If so, how and to what extent?*

Celebrities’ lives have become highly visible because of mass media. Media outlets have allowed young adults to build intimate, yet imaginary, relationships with celebrities, reinforcing previous research on the subject of celebrity-admirer relationships. Horton and Wohl (1956) and Levy (1979) refer to this type of relationship as a para-social relationship, where an illusionary relationship is formed and nourished because celebrities interact with their audiences by speaking directly into the camera or portraying themselves as “normal” people. Because of the heightened awareness of celebrities through the media, young adults have become more susceptible to influence and the fashions adorned by celebrities become the social norm. The lives of celebrities are appealing to young adults because celebrities live seemingly perfect lives. By adopting fashions similar to those of celebrities, young adults can incorporate a celebrity lifestyle into their own.
**What types of celebrities do you believe most influence fashion?**

Young adults reported that actors and musicians were the most influential types of celebrities with regards to fashion. This speaks to the level of coverage media outlets give to these types of celebrities, and the interest young adults have in these activities. When actors star in new movies or television shows, or musicians debut new albums coming out, they appear in every possible media source to promote their work. Men and women did agree that actors and musicians were the most influential, but some observed disparities in recognition of other types of celebrities demonstrate areas of gender differences worthy of note and further exploration. Women, more than men, mentioned reality television stars as influential with regards to fashion. This could be due to the target audience for reality television programming being primarily female. Men, more than women, mentioned athletes as influential with regards to fashion. This could be due to the level of viewership of sporting events by men, which is likely more than women. Examining levels of viewership of sports and reality television programs and determining the target audience are two potential areas to be examined in future research.

*Who are the most influential celebrities with regards to fashion for contemporary college age men and women?*

The purpose of this question was to obtain a snapshot view of contemporary society to explore and understand the identities of celebrities who are currently influencing fashion. Both men and women reported that Lady Gaga is the most influential female celebrity with regards to fashion. Lady Gaga has become a major celebrity rather quickly, due partly to talent, but also because of her outrageous, over the top, high
fashion choices. Because of her extreme fashion choices, she receives considerable attention from various media outlets. Interestingly, though, while Lady Gaga was recognized as a highly influential celebrity, her style of fashion is not emulated in mainstream fashions. Thus, the definition that college men and women apply to their interpretation of fashion influence by celebrities is worthy of further examination.

Overall men and women identified the same male celebrities, with Justin Beiber and Brad Pitt being the most frequently mentioned. These responses are congruent with the most frequently mentioned types of celebrities that participants indicated in the previous question: actors and musicians.

_Are men and women influenced by celebrities in similar ways?_

Based on qualitative data, men and women showed few differences in their opinions of celebrity influence. They both indicated similar types of celebrities as most influential and similar types of media outlets used to obtain fashion and celebrity information. Differences were indicated when participants were asked about non-fashion items influenced by celebrities. Women responded with things such as household products, plastic surgery, and babies, while men did not mention these items. Future research on this topic could explore the types of things that females deem a higher priority in comparison to men. When analyzing the quantitative data, however, significant differences were indicated in levels of agreement between men and women. Women in general reported significantly higher levels of perceived celebrity influence than men. They also reported higher levels of fashion consumption than men. Both men and women reported a general discomfort with revealing their fashion influence by celebrities,
supporting the notion of shame that was identified in the pilot study. Statistically, men reported significantly more discomfort with revealing their fashion influence by celebrities than women. Future research could examine why women perceive a greater influence by celebrities than men. Also, further exploration of the correlation between fashion consumption and celebrity influence should be examined.

*How do college age men and women obtain fashion information?*

Women indicated using magazines more than men to obtain information about fashion. This could be due to the fact that there are more fashion focused magazines for women than for men. Future research could examine specific types of media outlets used to obtain fashion information and the attributes of those outlets that make them more or less appealing to men and women. When asked what types of media young adults use to obtain fashion information, men stated that they relied on personal preference, such as comfort, more so than women. This speaks to the level of priority men place fashion in comparison to women. As previously mentioned, women indicated higher levels of fashion consumption than men, which is likely related to their reported higher activity using fashion media. The relationship between seeking fashion information and fashion consumption is worthy of further investigation in future research.

*How do college age men and women obtain information about and influence from celebrities?*

Television, movies, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet were the most frequently mentioned outlets used by the subjects in this study to obtain information about celebrities. This indicates several opportunities for further exploration. First, these
outlets may contain higher levels of celebrity news than other media sources such as social networking sites and books, which were also mentioned. Second, these media outlets may be the most popular form of media that young adults consume. A better understanding of the relationship between selection and use of media outlets and fashion activity will provide fashion retailers and marketers insight into reaching this important consumer market.

*Is symbolic interaction evident in celebrity influence?*

Symbolic interaction was present in the responses to many of the survey questions. Wearing celebrity endorsed products or fashion items that are similar to recognized celebrity fashions was reported by subjects as a way of linking their lives with the lives of celebrities. Because many respondents indicated communication through fashion choices in their responses, the importance and recognition of fashion as communication is documented. For successful communication through clothing, both parties, the wearer and the perceiver, need to place mutual meaning to the fashion item(s). Because many respondents clearly recognized their fashion items as being influenced by celebrities and reflective of a mutual understanding that those items represent, symbolic interaction was supported.

**Implications**

This study provides insight into the use of celebrities as product spokespeople for the purpose of improving sales and creating brand awareness. The information from this study provides insight into the role of celebrities as endorsers for clothing or brands and how similarly and differently men and women perceive the messages sent from these
celebrities. Marketers, retailers, and brand owners can use this information to determine effective ways to reach their target customers. The level at which celebrities emerged as influential supports fashion industry professionals’ use of celebrities as brand identities, product endorsers, public relations liaisons, and fashion trend setters. Furthermore, the extensive qualitative data, with emergent themes, presents a rich opportunity for future research that can lend greater insight into the role of celebrities as fashion and lifestyle role models.

Limitations

Generalizability of this study is limited to sample being mostly White, affluent, and young in a specific geographic region, but other limitations exist. First, the participants in this study were a purposeful, but convenient, sample of Ohio University students. Second, the survey instrument prompts self-reporting from the participants, which relies on the honesty of the participants. Third, the survey instrument required participants to answer qualitative questions where some participants chose to give more detail than others. While the study lends insight into the topic, and provides emergent themes for consideration by scholars and fashion professionals, these limitations must be considered as conclusions and implications are drawn.
References


Appendix A: IRB Approval for Pilot Study

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2 - research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: The Influence of Fashion Media on Fashion Adoption

Primary Investigator: Aaron Sturgill

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Virginia Paulins

Department: Human & Consumer Science

Jo Ellen Sherow, MPA
Office of Research Compliance

2-18-10

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
Appendix B: IRB Approval for Current Study

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2 - research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: The Influence of Fashion Media on Fashion Adoption

Primary Investigator: Aaron Sturgill

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Virginia Paulins

Department: Human & Consumer Science

Date: 2/18/10

Jo Ellen Sherow, MPA
Office of Research Compliance

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
Appendix C: Survey

Survey Exploring
Celebrity Influence on Fashion Adoption

I am exploring the influence of celebrities on fashion adoption between men and women. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate. The data you provide is confidential and will be used for the master’s thesis of Aaron Sturgill, graduate student in the Apparel, Textiles and Merchandising program at Ohio University.

If you have any questions, please contact:
Project coordinator: Aaron Sturgill, graduate student 740.418.0260
Graduate Advisor: Dr. V. Ann Paulins 740.593.2880

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740) 593-0664.

Thank you in advance for participating in my thesis research study!
For the purpose of this study, please use the following definitions as your reference while completing this survey.

A **Celebrity** is a person known for his or her well knownness. Celebrities include, but are not limited to, musicians, movie and television stars, athletes, models, politicians, religious figures, etc.

**Fashion** is the prevailing style of the time. Fashion would include clothing and accessories such as shoes, handbags, jewelry, watches, scarves, ties, sunglasses and so on. Fashion also applies to hairstyles and cosmetic applications.

1. What is your age? ____________

2. What is your gender? (Please circle one)
   - Male
   - Female

3. What is your race? (Please circle one)
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African American
   - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   - White
   - Other

4. Based on the household you are most closely affiliated with, what is the estimated household yearly income? (Please circle one)
   - $10,000-19,000
   - $20,000-29,000
   - $30,000-39,000
   - $40,000-49,000
   - $50,000-59,000
   - $60,000-69,000
   - $70,000-79,000
   - $80,000-89,000
   - $90,000-99,000
   - $100,000-149,000
   - more than $150,000
5. What is your major?  

6. How much influence do you believe celebrities have on young adults’ fashion choices?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very little influence</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a great deal of influence</td>
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7. In your opinion, how much do young adults look to celebrities for new fashion and trends?

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<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>very little</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a lot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. How do young adults obtain information about celebrities?

9. In your opinion, what percentage of fashion choices made by young adults are influenced by celebrities?

| 0-25% | 26-50% | 51-75% | 76-100% |

10. Other than fashion items, what items do you feel that young adults are influenced to purchase because of celebrities?

11. What types of celebrities do you believe most influence fashion?
12. Who would you consider to be the top 3 most influential male celebrities with regards to fashion? List names below.

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________

13. Who would you consider to be the top 3 most influential female celebrities with regards to fashion? List names below.

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________

14. To what extent do you believe that young adults change aspects of their appearance, language, mannerisms or other behaviors to be more like celebrities?

1 very little 2 3 4 5 6 7 a lot

Explain why and how such changes occur and are exhibited.

15. To what extent do you believe that celebrities inspire young adults to pursue a particular hobby, career or other activity?

1 very little 2 3 4 5 6 7 a lot

If yes, explain what it is about celebrities that influence young adults to pursue a hobby, career, etc.
16. In your opinion, how comfortable do you think young adults are letting friends and family members know that celebrities influence them?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not comfortable very comfortable

Explain.

17. How actively do you consume fashion?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not active very active

18. Where do you seek out information about fashion?

Please list and describe below

19. What aspects of those media outlets appeal to you for fashion influence?

20. Describe your personal style of fashion and explain what things most influence you fashion choices.