

Analysis of College Girls and Fashion Proportion in *Mademoiselle*, 1960-1974

Bopeng (Pollyanna) Zhang, Yu Pu, Amanda Jorgensen, Sara Marcketti
Iowa State University, USA

Keywords: College, proportion, *Mademoiselle*, dress

The period of the 1960s and 1970s was a transitional era characterized by the Vietnam War, Civil Rights, ambiguous gender roles, and the increased use of recreational drugs (Rielly, 2003). It was also a time marked by great changes for women. The approval of the oral contraceptive pill, the 1963 release of *The Feminine Mystique*, and President John F. Kennedy's *Presidential Commission on the Status of Women*, which spoke to gender inequality, ushered in a second-wave of feminism. In addition to challenges, such as official legal inequalities, women gained greater opportunities, as a larger percentage of American women than ever before was attended college and entered the labor force (Blackwelder, 1997). During this period young women, in particular, used appearance to express their identities and individuality (Linden-Ward & Green, 1993). Past researchers Saiki and Makela (2007) examined proportion of women's daywear and changes in female's roles from 1945 to 1995 in *Vogue* and found that the proportion of women's fashion was influenced by the increasing diversity and complexity of women's roles. Due to the great transitions of the 1960s and 1974, the researchers were interested in exploring how proportions were expressed in a magazine dedicated to college women during this time.

Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to analyze the proportion of college girls' dress from 1960 to 1974 to better determine the ways in which societal upheaval impacted fashion. To achieve the research goal, content analysis of advertisements in every August issue of *Mademoiselle* was conducted. Launched in 1935, *Mademoiselle* targeted "smart young women" between the ages of 18 and 34 (McCraken, 1993). The August issue was subtitled "College" and devoted to college women's fashions.

A total of 1436 fashion advertisements were analyzed. The researchers selected the advertisements based on two criteria: the images needed to be larger than one fourth of a page size and the advertisement needed to include a full-frontal view of a woman, presumed to be of the traditional college age 18 to 22. Full-frontal views of photographs were examined in both horizontal and vertical directions. Horizontal proportion was measured with a ruler from left shoulder point (SP) to right using visual breaks. That is, if there was a definite line of a jacket opening, measurements were taken from the left SP to the opening as one section and from the opening to the right SP as a second side. Each length was recorded in centimeter (cm) and rounded off, reserving three decimal values. The data was recorded to values such as .40/.60 and .35/.65. Each length then was converted into percentages, with a total distance from left to right equal to 100/0 (e.g., 40/60, 35/65). Vertical proportion was measured with a ruler from the highest point, excluding the collar, to the lowest point of the garment. To find statistical significance, the section of the garments was defined by visual breaks created through different parts or layers of the ensembles. Each section was measured to arrive at a percentage of the

whole. Similar with measuring the horizontal proportion, each length was recorded in centimeter (cm), and then calculated into percentages, with the total distance from the highest point (excluding the collar) to the lowest equal to 100/0. The calculations were rounded based on the first reserved decimal value; then converted to percentages.

The most frequent daywear horizontal proportions of college girls' from 1960 to 1974 were 100/0 and 50/50. There was greater variety in vertical proportions, 100/0 was the most prevalent; followed by the "long-top" category, which referred to the proportions of 55/45, 60/40, 65/35, 70/30, 75/25, 80/20, and 90/10. Other proportions included: 40/60, 35/65 and 45/55.

Similar to Saiki and Makela's findings, this study found that there was great variety of proportions presented in 1960s and 1970s fashion magazines. The variety of proportions may relate to social unrest; and particularly to girls' roles (Saiki & Makela, 2007), social acceptance and individualized lifestyles (Blanco, 2007). Girls received higher education, and thus were involved in more diverse social roles. The legalization of contraceptives and attitudes toward sex changed people's attitudes toward women's fashion and their fashion style (Blanco, 2007). Changes to women's roles seemed to result in a great variety of proportions in women's, specifically college women's apparel.

References

- Blackwelder, J. K. (1997). *Now hiring: The feminization of work in the United States, 1900-1995*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.
- Blanco, J. (2007). The postmodern age: 1960-2006. In L. Welters & Lillethun, A. (Eds.) *The Fashion Reader*. Oxford: BERG.
- Linden-Ward, B., & Green, G.H. (1993). The liberation of women's fashion. In D. M. Haugen, & M. J. Box (Eds.) *The 1960s: Examining Pop Culture*. Detroit: Thomson Gale.
- McCracken, E. (1993). *Decoding women's magazines: From Mademoiselle to Ms*. Houndmills: Macmillan.
- Rielly, E. J. (2003). *The 1960s*. Westport, London: Greenwood Press.
- Saiki, D., & Makela, J. C. (2007). Proportion in the design of women's fashionable clothing: A 50-year retrospective. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 36(2), 110-129.