

Jan 1st, 12:00 AM

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Potts, Natalie and Reeves-DeArmond, Genna, "Re-evaluation of Laver's Law in the context of fashion trend revival" (2014).
International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings. 79.
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Re-evaluation of Laver's Law in the context of fashion trend revival

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Keywords: historical continuity, Laver, theory, trend

There is significant research that does show historical continuity in fashion trends (e.g., Lowe & Lowe, 1983). These theories and research methods are used today by many designers, fashion forecasters and trend analyzers (e.g., Seivewright, 2012); Laver's Law of Fashion is one such theoretical framework. Laver's ideas are loosely regarded as a theory, so one will "most likely not find any scholarly work specifically on Laver's Law as it is his own reflection of describing fashion trends rather than a true theory based on data" (L. Burns, personal communication, November 1, 2013). That said, we argue that it is possible that the reevaluation of Laver's Law (and possible revisions) could be used to show historical continuity in fashion trends and provide theoretical underpinnings for the process of fashion trend revival. This paper describes Laver's Law, how it has been applied in fashion trend analysis thus far, and suggestions for future use that will assist in advancing the fashion and dress body of knowledge.

Laver's Law chronologically describes fashion as it is introduced, accepted, rejected and eventually considered 'beautiful' 150 years after it was first considered current fashion (see Figure 1). Laver's Law provides a framework with which to evaluate the fashion trend lifecycle. The traditional fashion cycle describes the way that a particular item will progress through stages of acceptance by consumers. An item will pass through an introduction phase, an increase in popularity, a peak phase, a decline in popularity and eventually will be rejected (see Figure 2) (Dias, 2008). This trend cycle can only exist if fashion leaders accept the item when it is in its introduction phase.

The reevaluation of Laver's Law is important to both fashion historians and the fashion industry because fashion trend life cycles have changed since the theory was first introduced with James Laver's book, *Taste and Fashion* (1937). It is important to also evaluate how the trend lifecycle can be adjusted to accurately represent today's increasingly fast paced fashion industry for practical use.

An analysis of recent fashion trends has shown that many trends from the 1990s reemerged in 2013 and continue to do so in 2014 (e.g., grunge, postmodern and hip hop fashions). The revival of 1990s fashion trends actually negates the speed of the fashion trend lifecycle proposed by Laver's Law. There are several factors about 1990s fashion that may affect the application of Laver's Law in its current form. For example, the increased speed of communication has caused the fashion cycle to accelerate and has changed the rate at which an item passes through the stages of Laver's Law (Dias, 2008; Winterman, 2009).

The reinvention of these trends has been prominently visible to fashion columnists and consumers alike (e.g., Winterman, 2009), but has yet to be studied in depth from a scholarly perspective. Scholarly research is needed to examine this phenomenon. One important question to consider is the following: How does a trend become refreshed or recycled in a way that it is

viewed as ‘new’? That is, “[what is] the point when something that was viewed as old and outdated for so long started looking refreshing?” (Winterman, 2009, para. 10). In this way, an interdisciplinary alliance can also be formed between Laver’s Law of Fashion and the philosophy of aesthetics because Laver’s Law draws upon concepts related to ugliness and beauty. A bipolar beautiful-ugly dimension (i.e., describing the aesthetic of objects as either beautiful or ugly) is the primary means by which the aesthetic of objects are described (Jacobsen, Buchta, Kohler, & Schroger, 2004). As can be seen in Figure 1, all of the descriptors in Laver’s Law describe a positive or negative aesthetic experience that is determined by the passage of time, lending support to examine Laver’s Law in the context of ‘ugly’ versus ‘beautiful.’ Identification with a past or revived trend also creates a relationship to the concept of nostalgia.

Because it is important to extend fashion theory into practical application, we are currently conducting research to obtain feedback from women through a focus group who were 15-25 in the 1990s to design a collection of garments that reinvents ‘ugly’ trends of the 1990s into ‘beautiful’ designs, in accordance with the definition of these concepts in Laver’s Law. The goal is to determine what changes are necessary and/or made to help a trend become reaccepted at a later time, in addition to what makes a revived trend ‘beautiful.’ Also, collecting data from consumers will assist in bringing more formal acknowledgement and attention to Laver’s Law as a theory. It would be useful to work toward the formation of a model for scholarly use that showcases factors involved in refreshing fashion trends. Research conducted with consumers who adopted these trends in the past and experience them again in the retail environment are valuable resources for the formation of such a model. Practical application of this theory can also be applied to classroom assignments as well. Students could be given assignments to take something along a historical timeline and make it ‘beautiful.’

Laver's Law	
Indecent	10 years before its time
Shameless	5 years before its time
Outré (Daring)	1 year before its time
Smart	'Current Fashion'
Dowdy	1 year after its time
Hideous	10 years after its time
Ridiculous	20 years after its time
Amusing	30 years after its time
Quaint	50 years after its time
Charming	70 years after its time
Romantic	100 years after its time
Beautiful	150 years after its time

Figure 1. Explanation of Laver’s Law of Fashion

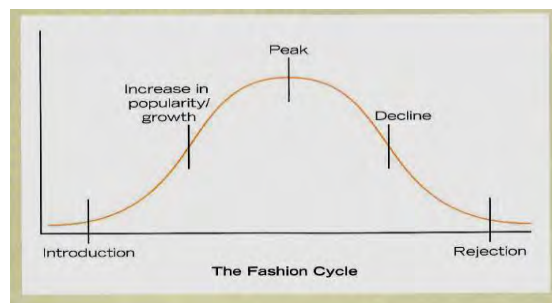


Figure 2. The Fashion Cycle (Dias, 2008, p. 33)

Dias, L. P. (2008). *Core concepts in fashion*. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Lowe, J.W.G., & Lowe, E.D. (1983). Model of fashion change. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 11, 731-734.

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