Flicker to Fade: Students' Consumption of Fast Fashion for High School Dances

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Introduction

“Fashion is obsolescence. Fashion is change,” states Elizabeth Cline, a journalist specializing in the fashion industry (3). To Cline, fashion is a critical staple of pop culture that rapidly evolves as consumers express themselves. However, this phenomenon reveals fashion’s dark side, namely its relationship to allegations of worker exploitation and environmental degradation. These exploited environments coupled with the subject’s trendy nature is considered ‘fast fashion,’ as styles are here today and gone tomorrow due to changing cultural pressures. As in-person stores become less favored shopping models, more consumers turn to social media as a platform to shop for fast fashion, which exposes teenagers to advertisers flushed with cash, luring them to pursue in vogue styles with clever captions and photoshoot worthy models. Teenagers themselves are fueling this fashion rush for their peers as they create social media trends on Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. After teen consumers craze over their purchase of the fashion style that appeals to them the most, which makes them popular through their looks or the completion of a social media challenge, the garment is relegated to a consumer’s closet or a nearby landfill in order to make room for the next accessory.

As fast fashion becomes more prevalent in culture and throughout the fashion industry, the fashion industry's strategy to tailor and market their products for culturally significant events, while keeping their prices relatively low so they can generate more revenue and manufacture clothes at an environmentally harmful level should be concerning. For high school consumers, these culturally significant events tend to be school events such as homecoming, winter formal, and prom, where uniqueness and financial accessibility become top priorities. Since these school-wide cultural traditions are most relevant in the middle school to high school years, popular fast fashion brands such as ZARA, Windsor, and Shein pour large amounts of money into trendy social media ads that morph into trends to effectively attract teenagers’ eyeballs. These companies know their audience, as fast fashion attire for homecoming and winter formal would consist of semi-formal sleeveless knee-length dresses, while prom often consists of more formal long length dresses that look similar to a traditional ball gown. Previous scholars have noted that high school dances are often the most memorable events in a student’s high school life, since they are often seen as a break to their rigorous high school curriculum. As high school students continue to immerse themselves in social media, the expectations for a uniquely special presentation in high school dances increase, resulting in exponential pressure to conform to a particular look depending on the dance. This research study will examine the effects of high school students' consumption of fast fashion when participating in high school dance culture. In the effort to understand more about how these effects arise, examining previous scholar's causes of why teens buy fashion can provide further valuable knowledge about dance culture.

Literature Review

How Fast Fashion Accelerated

Previous scholars within disciplines of marketing, fashion, and business note the innovative approach to marketing and its emphasis on geographic diversity to cater to various consumer tastes. In “Global sourcing: insights from the global clothing industry—the case of Zara, a fast fashion retailer” by The New School Adjunct

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Professor Nebahat Tokatli, the author establishes the traditional start of fast fashion and its marketing to young consumers in general. Tokatli suggests ZARA utilizes “different stores in different cities manage not to stock precisely the same products [since] the clothes are used to encourage individuality and reflect the profile of specific groups of customers at particular places” (29). This article primarily analyzes ZARA’s effective marketing in different regions to ensure that their fashion tastes can be significantly geographically expansive and suitable. The geographical expansion of products can help other scholars understand the cultural significance of styles in fast fashion. Moreover, the article contributes to the marketing of fast fashion companies, which scholars could use to examine the brand identity and psychological triggers that drive high school consumers to fast fashion. Therefore, Tokatli’s explanation of initial fast fashion marketing articulates the foundation of fast fashion marketing into why fast fashion began for young consumers.

Scholars within disciplines of marketing, fashion, and business also acknowledge the increasing demand on companies to manufacture and cycle through trends more quickly due to a rising social media use among young consumers. As social media users and social media platforms continue to evolve, previous scholars examine more conformity among young consumers of social media influencers’ fast fashion wear when purchased online. In “How Social Media Micro-Influencers Are Disrupting the Business of Youth Fashion,” Temple University professors Jay I. Sinha and Thomas T. Fung note a growing number of youth audiences utilizing online fashion companies such as Asos and Boohoo who are known to draw in fast fashion consumers: “[These companies have] visually appealing content, often modeled by the influencers themselves” (44). The article focuses on the heavier use of social media marketing on Instagram and Tiktok and the use of micro-influencers that can potentially achieve a “modicum of fame through their charismatic appeal and niche expertise, by focusing on a particular domain of interest” which in the case of these companies, are fast fashion appeals (45). Sinha and Fung distinguish between traditional non-online marketing and the Social Media tactics used by fast fashion companies, which are more relevant to high school students shopping fast fashion online in today’s society. The effectiveness of social media recognizes the importance of micro-influencers and their portrayal of their fashion towards possible young consumers. Social media can be the most significant relevant marketing to youth consumers; however, it also depends on the geographical region and how many effective micro-influencers can convince consumers to buy fast fashion clothing. This particular article, therefore, can help suggest the interplay between geographical considerations and persuasive influence of micro-influencers in the realm of fast fashion.

Both articles from Tokatli and Sinha and Fung highlight the effects of fast fashion brand marketing towards young consumers in general; however, neither article details the significance social media trends have influencing the style of high school fast fashion that high schoolers wear. While Tokatli focuses more in brands expanding their marketing to tailor as many geographic regions as possible as a traditional form of advertising fast fashion products, Sinha and Fung’s article discusses the use of social media by fast fashion companies purchase their attire to persuade high school consumers in purchasing these attires, providing scholars more information on the culture of visual appeal aimed at high school consumers. The comparison between two different methods of fast fashion marketing and shopping among brands and young consumers can suggest a deeper understanding of the visual advertising culture of fast fashion.

Ethics and Effects of Production

Many scholars have researched the possible harmful ethical effects of fast fashion that result from the expansive and intense speed of fast fashion purchase by consumers and manufacturing of such wear by fast fashion companies. In “The Law, Culture, and Economics of Fashion” by Columbia Law Professor C.Scott Hemphill and Harvard Law School professor Jeannie Suk, the article analyzes the ethics, law and economics of fast fashion. Fast fashion significantly contributes to the differentiation of individuals from each other through the theory of social differentiation. Suk and Hemphill define differentiation in high school students to support their theory on social differentiation: “to express themselves as a distinctive individual, then it is valuable to

have available a large range of different identifiers" (1164). The authors of this article illustrate the ethics of rapid expansion and production of fast fashion because of the consumers' demand to be unique, requiring more production of fast fashion clothing. The contribution of fast fashion usage ethics can analyze consumer rights and transparency should the manufacturer break ethical work implications during the manufacturing process. Even though this article represents the needs and theories of why consumers would want fast fashion as rapidly as possible, this article allows scholars to examine more trends that go on that do influence the psychology of consumers, specifically a younger audience of consumers. The examination can also suggest possible reasons as to why fast fashion manufacturers influence young consumers to still purchase fast fashion products even though consumers may be aware of the unethicality of fast fashion manufacturing.

Due to consumers' rapid purchasing and fast fashion companies' unethical use of manufacturing of fast fashion, environmental studies scholars have further analyzed its effect on the environment. The scholarly article titled "Slow Fashion in a Fast Fashion World: Promoting Sustainability and Responsibility" by Sheffield Business School professor Mark K. Brewer introduces possible solutions to the 'fast fashion paradox' that "supports the emerging slow fashion movement" (1). Slow fashion movement refers to the advocacy of environmental harm and unethical practices to the excessive production that fast fashion companies have caused (Vito). The article features multiple quantitative data such as the number of production of fibers and textiles, producing an estimated "1.2 billion tons of greenhouse emissions in 2015" (qtd. in Brewer). In addition, Brewer describes many companies' goals as they "respect social, environmental, ecological, and economic issues locally and globally" to reassure top consumers that their company is legitimate yet ethically safe (4). Brewer then concludes the discussion of preferring slow fashion by suggesting that it could be a way for consumers to know multiple additional sustainable types of design (8). Brewer focuses his study on the business marketing aspect of fast fashion, which correlates with his business specialty, making the source credible for readers. The article also focuses on multiple references to the companies' supply chain when considering the garments used for fast fashion and shifting scholars toward developing literature on more sustainable manufacturing options. However, this article regards the sustainability of 'slow fashion' for a general consumer audience therefore further asserting scholars on whether slow fashion could be a motivation factor for young consumers to purchase fast fashion.

Hemphill, Suk and Brewer's articles narrowly spotlights the importance and use of ethics in fast fashion production that are aimed towards younger consumers. Hemphill and Suk's article provides a more in-depth methodology and analysis of the marketing effort to make fast fashion more expensive. On the other hand, Brewer's article further describes the possible solutions to combat the uncontrollable speed of fast fashion consumption in the ethical sense. Overall, both articles can suggest scholars on the ethical harm of consumption and demand of fast fashion by consumers and consider slow fashion to control the cycle of fast fashion as a way to sustainably produce attire efficiently for high school students' demand.

High School Consumers of Fast Fashion

Previous scholars began analyzing the qualitative reasoning behind youth's attraction to fast fashion. In "Millennial Perceptions of Fast Fashion and Second-Hand Clothing: An Exploration of Clothing Preferences Using Q Methodology" by University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Textiles Assistant Professor Dr Jennifer Johnson Jorgensen and Former University of Nebraska-Lincoln Graduate Teaching Assistant Katelyn Sorensen, the authors initially establishes the definitions of fast fashion and second-hand clothing, which is another alternative method of clothing for millennials. It also establishes the threshold of the Millennials age as Generation Y. Other scholars including Professors Hwang, Griffith, Lam, Lee and more suggest Millennials would "also be willing to pay extra money for socially responsible products when compared to the same product that is not ethically made" (qtd in Jorgenson and Stransen 10). Jorgensen and Stransen then conclude, "Some consumers also dislike common or soiled clothing typically found in second-hand stores" (11). Jorgenson and Stransen's study on their qualitative data can be used for other scholars to expand its

existing surveys towards the styles of dresses worn to the types of high school dances. Ultimately, the researchers concluded that certain trends that youth may be appealed to when purchasing fast fashion. With the conclusion in mind, more scholarly work should examine the motivations of current youth consumer's motivation in purchasing different types of fast fashion, whether it is affordability of second-hand clothes or purchasing brand new fashion for school dances. Therefore, Jorenson and Sorenson's article effectively highlights the willingness of millennials to invest in socially responsible products, especially in second-hand clothing, offering a foundation for future scholars to examine potential motivations of young consumers that explore the specific styles of dresses worn to high school dances whether it constitutes as fast fashion or not.

Building on how previous scholars examined how fashion reflects personality, scholars also identify how previous cultural background can contribute to a high school student's fashion interests and the social interaction of their attire with their peers. In "Agenda Setting for a Research Project on Youth's Clothing Consumption" by Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania Professor of Socio-Human Sciences Laura Nistor suggests that there is a strong difference between shoppers who have a lower socioeconomic status compared to shoppers who have a higher socioeconomic status when purchasing fast fashion for their self esteem: "While upper class individuals' conspicuous consumption demonstrates their social and economic potential, lower class consumers' imitative behavior (i.e. aspirational consumption) can be explained by their need to increase their self-esteem in the context of social comparison" (76) . This article examines the possibility of socioeconomic status and its potential relation to students purchasing fast fashion that is affordable enough to showcase their identities. Nistor's article may highlight the presentation of high school students toward their peers; however, there is no expansion on the other possible psychological and cultural factors in terms of geographical regions that were made to further examine a youth's cause for consuming fast fashion. By understanding the communicative motivations of students towards fast fashion, scholars can understand the motivations behind student's purchase of fast fashion by socioeconomic status.

Because scholars acknowledge that social media plays a large role in the consumption of fast fashion, there are some who are exploring various ways high school students record their prom memories and how that could contribute to a higher expectation of their presentation of themselves at prom. In the 2010 article "Taking a New Spotlight to the Prom: Youth Culture and Its Emerging Video Archive," Bowling Green State University Associate Professor Montana Miller analyzes a more in-depth expectation of the prom reality, examining primary sources such as vlogs on YouTube and examining the effects of capturing prom through videography which contributes to the fanfare for fast fashion prom dresses. One of the primary sources that Miller uses to discover the fanfare for fast fashion dress shopping is a YouTube video with the caption "Me and my friends like prom dress shopping," which illustrates "a posse of girls examining themselves in a department store mirror while talking on cell phones and fiddling with bra straps" as they try on different prom dresses (Miller 15). As more social documentaries of prom experiences emerge online, high schoolers feel pressured to access outlets for shopping and dance experiences such as YouTube "for individual self-expression and also learn a process of self-display" (Miller 16). This article details the use of technology and how it influences the trend of high schooler's interest in purchasing prom dresses for themselves. The use of primary sources by Miller illustrates a real-time account of excitement in high schoolers as they buy their prom attire to look gorgeous in front of their peers and remember their prom night as tradition has previously stood for. At the same time, the primary sources also highlight immense pressure for high school students to stand out from the abundance of social media posts and likes of their peers. Therefore, this can contribute to the literature of how high school students document their prom, providing more insight to the cultural and societal aspect of prom today.

Previous Scholars have examined fanfare amongst high school students' expectations regarding the existing prom culture by generalizing previous prom experiences. In America At The Prom: Ritual and Regeneration by University of Pennsylvania professor Felicity Hannah Paxton, prom is seen as a traditional ritual closely followed by high school students. Paxton suggests, "prom night is a ritual with a heart and soul as primitive as any ascribed to the rites of Others" (2). In the book, the specifics of bodily preparations such as makeup and

hair for prom per high school student were evident as “the anxiety produced the creation of the perfect prom body” (Paxton 4). The prom rituals and traditions take up most of the book, suggesting that the prom culture and expectations that high school students can expect are typical of each other. Paxton stresses the importance of high school students achieving the perfect overall dance attire look, a motivation of high school students’ purchasing fast fashion. Another argument that scholars can develop from this book is Paxton additionally explores the efforts that young girls make to achieve a bodily figure that fits a certain style of dresses in order to meet the social expectations of their peers. Therefore, even though Paxton establishes the basic traditions and rituals of prom, which helps the readers understand the prom culture more, the article’s emphasis on bodily rituals enhances the overall motivation of a high school student in order to achieve a certain overall dance attire look in fast fashion specifically for prom.

The motivations of purchasing fast fashion centrally focuses on the pressures of student’s need to adhere to a particular dance attire that impresses the students’ peers. Both Jorgensen and Stransen and Nistor’s articles highlight the high schoolers’ need to meet societal acceptance with each of their peers and the types of clothes they would most likely purchase. However, Jorgensen and Stransen’s article specifically focuses on the preferences and motivations of millennials in relation to the affordability of second-hand clothes and the allure of brand-new fashion for school dances. Meanwhile, Nistor’s article can be analyzed to determine the most effective method of fast fashion presentation among youth and how it could impact high school students’ view of high school dances. In contrast, Miller and Paxton address the pressure of achieving certain dance attire and bodily looks in order to have similar prom experiences as students’ peers that were previously posted online. While Miller focuses more on the pressure of students having an overall positive experience of prom, Paxton narrowly prioritizes the pressure of high school students’ need to achieve a stand-out dance look in comparison to students’ peers. Therefore, the articles relating to the motivation of young consumers’ purchase of fast fashion can suggest initial reasons as to why young consumers are more motivated to shop certain fast fashion styles than other styles in fast fashion, allowing scholars to examine the evolving dynamics of youth consumers’ fashion choices more in-depth.

Research Question

Previous studies of fast fashion in youth have not specifically been in-depth of fast fashion in relation to high school dances, especially for homecoming and winter formal dances. However, this study aims to investigate the causes of fast fashion among high school students with its relation to these dances and why it is the case. In order to conduct this research, high school students around Irvine, California will be surveyed, being asked on how often they go to the dances, how often they buy fast fashion, whether or not these high school students attempt to match color clothing with their dance date and why they choose to buy fast fashion specifically for high school dances. This study aims to analyze these results mainly by connecting the why factor of buying fast fashion to whether the high school student has a date or not and whether they also reuse fast fashion intended for one dance to another dance based on how many dances they have been to. Through these variables, the study can contribute to the general literature of fast fashion and high school students as to why the societal pressures prompt these high schoolers to change their fashion for every dance.

Methodology

This study involves a sociological participant survey to determine why high school students partake in rapid fast fashion in purchasing their high school dance attire.

Surveys

Participants of this study were students enrolled in University High School and Irvine High School, high schools that are a part of the Irvine Unified School District in Irvine, California. 124 students completed an online survey

that asked for their gender and grade. Survey responses were anonymous and each respondent was restricted to answer once, refraining participants from answering the survey twice. The survey featured 8 multiple choice questions, 3 scaled questions and 2 questions that participants can check any and all answer choices. This survey was taken by participants between 12th November and 17th November.

Frequency of Dance Attendance

In order to understand the popularity of fast fashion among high schoolers within the subject area of high school dances, the survey sought to determine how often the participants attend these dances. If the participant has not been to as many dances as their peers, the demand for fast fashion would not be as high as another participant who has gone to every single dance in their high school career. By knowing the frequency of a high schooler attending high school dances, we can further correlate on whether high schoolers' attendance of these dances affect the amount of fast fashion they purchase for these high school dances. The frequency of dance attendance will be asked through a single question on both the preliminary and final survey: "How many high school dances have/did you attend so far in your whole high school career?". This question will be formatted as a range of: 0, 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 9-12 as multiple-choice questions.

Frequency of Purchase and Use of Fast Fashion for High School Dances

Because the main aspect of the study is the frequency of fast fashion usage of high schoolers in high school dances, it is important to measure the variable in which a high schooler shops and wears fast fashion. Multiple criterias that determine the rate of purchase and use of fast fashion include where they purchase their high school dance attire as well as how often they tend to go out and shop to suggest the possibility of high school students reusing their fast fashion dance attire for other dances of the same attire nature such as Homecoming and Winter Formal. In addition, the question of which brand these high school students purchase from can be essential in order to further examine these fast fashion brand's marketing strategies and expansion globally, which can contribute to the sustainability of the clothing market and the designs tailored to high school students depending on their geographic region and culture. I surveyed participants on where they shopped (whether it is online or in-person) as well as their frequency of shopping fast fashion and whether they will be reusing their dance attire for future dances. I also ensured that the participants name a brand of fast fashion clothing that they tend to shop at to further research the company's branding and appeal to high school students and whether this affects the fast fashion chain with high school students and finding out the most popular brand chain for young consumers like high school students. These questions will be surveyed as scale questions from 1 (lowest on the scale of the noted question) to 5 (highest on the scale of the noted question).

Fast Fashion Among Those with Dance Dates

This study is not only focused about the fast fashion effects on high school students as a whole, but also their perceptions of themselves in comparison to their other peers. In order to fully understand the social interactions with other friends, this study focuses on examining past dance culture traditions on previous interactions with their peers. Majority of these interactions are through the form of dance dates, particularly in trying to impress one's dance date and whether going with a date made it more likely that someone purchased fast fashion. In order to investigate this measure, I asked two specific questions: "Did you go to events or school dances with a particular date?" and "If yes, did you buy any particular semi-formal/formal clothes to match with your date?". These questions are able to suggest the kinds of interactions as well as an individual preferred representation of themselves when they are not just with themselves to a high school dance. There were three choices that participants could choose from regarding this question: "Yes", "No" and "I did not have a date".

Motivation of Shopping Fast Fashion

The most important measure of this particular study is the motivation into buying different types of fast fashion for each dance despite some high school dances such as Homecoming and Winter Formal having similar if not the same type of attire requirement. Based on the research of previous scholars, I decided that I will survey the high school students on the motivation of their shopping with factors such as: “Keeping up with Social Media Trends”, “Keeping up with Dance Traditions”, “Presenting yourself better”, “Affordability”, “Pass Time” and filling in the “Others” box. These options were mainly chosen because these are the most common reasons concluded by previous scholars such as Nistor and Miller mentioned in the literature review section on the topic of fast fashion interest among young consumers. This question will be surveyed as a checkbox question due to the fact that high school students could have many different reasons as to why they would purchase fast fashion in the first place. Therefore, by check boxing the motivations for fast fashion measures, it can be suggested that the more checkboxes are marked, the more of a draw high school students will show to fast fashion.

Results

Out of a total of 124 respondents, 78 were female students, 44 were male students and 2 were non-binary students. Due to the small number of non-binary students, it would not be reliable enough for a generalization of their relation to fast-fashion and dances, therefore this study will exclude non-binary students from the analysis but still include them in the overall proportions.

Frequency of Dance Attendance

To measure the frequency of high school dance attendance, students were asked to choose a suitable numerical range that accurately depicted their attendance to dances ranging from “1-3”, “4-6”, “7-9”, “9-12” dances. Out of the 122 respondents, 47.5% indicated that they have been to 1-3 dances per year, followed by 32.8% of respondents attending 4-6 dances, 10.4% of respondents having attended no dances, 5.6% of respondents attending 7-9 dances and 4% of respondents attending 9-12 dances. In comparison between genders, 3.5% of women have attended more dances in the higher ranges of the number of high school dances of “7-9” and “9-12” than men. In addition, more than one-fifth of male respondents have not attended any high school dance (as seen in Table 1).

Range of High School Dances Attended	**Female**	**Male**
0	3.8	20.5
1-3	53.8	38.6
4-6	32.1	34.1
7-9	6.4	2.3
9-12	3.9	4.5

Table 1: High school students’ frequency of dance attendance sorted by gender. Values in percentages.

Frequency of Purchase and Use of Fast Fashion for High School Dances

To measure the frequency of shopping for semi-formal/formal clothing specifically for high school dances, students were asked to rank the extent to which the question applies to them through a scale of 1-5, 1 being almost never and 5 being often. Out of 122 respondents, 99.2% of total students indicated that students almost never shop for semi-formal/formal clothing specifically for high school dances (cumulative from ratings of 1-3, 1 being 45.1%, 2 being 29.3% and 3 being 14.8%) with only 0.8% of respondents often purchasing fast fashion

for high school dances. These percentages are even more prominent with the male respondents where more than half of the male respondents indicated a number “1” in comparison to less than 5% of female students as seen in Figure 1.

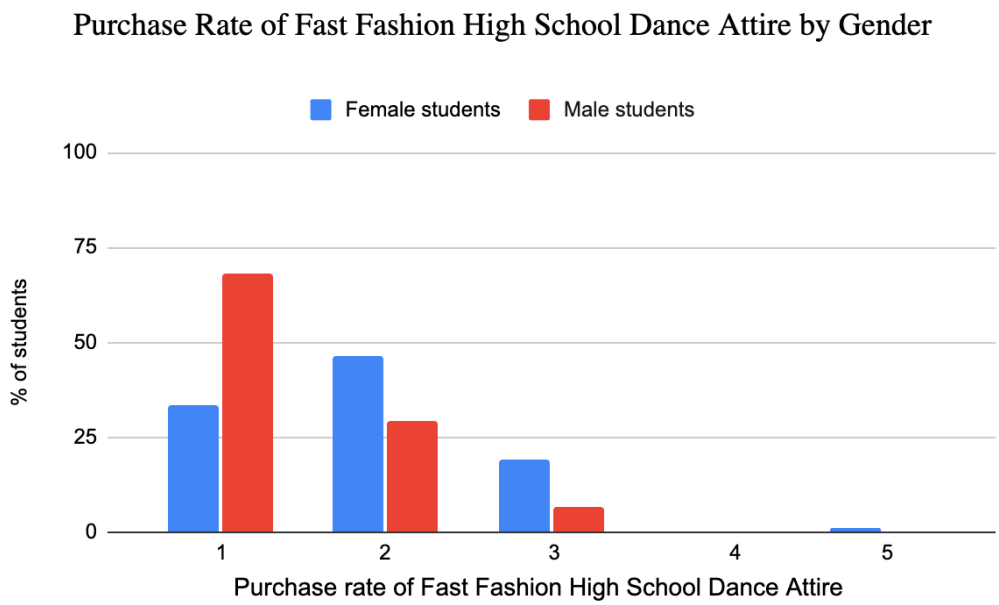

Figure 1: Purchase rate of fast fashion high school dance attire sorted by gender (a rate of 1 indicates almost never and ranges up to a 5 indicating often purchase of dance attire)

Respondents were also asked whether they prefer purchasing their dance attire online or in-person. Within these respondents of the combined two genders, around 56.6% often shop in in-person stores, and the remaining 43.4% of respondents shop online. In each gender, both female and male students tend to prefer in-person shopping, but there is a more distinct difference of 18.2% between a preference for online and in-person shopping amongst male students as seen in Table 2.

Preferred shopping method amongst students	**Female**	**Male**
In person	55.1	61.4
Online	44.9	43.2

Table 2: Preferred shopping method amongst students sorted by gender. Values in percentages.

Additionally, respondents were asked to choose all the applicable brands that they usually purchase their dance attire from, which was also included in the “Others” option to add their own clothing brand that was not previously mentioned. The most popular brands among respondents would be Amazon (in general purchasing dance attire from the website) with 32.8% followed by Windsor with 29.5%, H&M with 19.7%, Lucy in the Sky with 18%, and Shein with 13.1%. Respondents also indicated that they also shop at other brands such as Bloomingdales, Zara, Urban Outfitters, PacSun, Uniqlo, and more. Amongst female students, almost half of the respondents indicated that they purchased their high school dance attire from Windsor, while male respondents chose Amazon as their preferred clothing brand for dance attire as seen in Table 3.

In order to determine the possibility of high school students re-wearing fast fashion from their high school dance attires, respondents were asked whether they would reuse the dance attire that they have previously bought by answering “Yes”, “No” or “Maybe”. More than half of the respondents (67.2%) stated that they would want to reuse their dance attires in the near future. This is more common in men, where more than three

quarters of respondents indicated that they would reuse their previous high school dance attire for future dances as seen in Table 4.

Clothing Brands Respondents purchase from	**Female**	**Male**
Shein	14.1	2.3
Windsor	47.4	31.8
Amazon	26.9	79.5
Lucy in The Sky	28.2	20.5
H&M	20.5	4.5
Other	26.9	52.2

Table 3: Respondents' clothing brand choice sorted by gender. Values in percentages.

Possibility of reusing dance attire	**Female**	**Male**
Yes	62.8	77.2
No	21.8	11.4
Maybe	15.4	11.4

Table 4: Possibility of students reusing their dance attire sorted by gender. Values in percentages.

Fast Fashion Among Those with Dance Dates

This study is primarily focused on the fast fashion effects on high school students as a whole. For this measurement, respondents were asked if they attended at least one dance with a dance date, followed up by questioning whether both the dance date and the respondent purposely matched dance attire colors. Out of all respondents, more than half (63%) did not participate in at least one dance with a dance date. Within the remaining 36.5% of respondents who went to at least one high school dance with a particular date, at least 21.4 % of individuals purposely bought high school dance attire to match their date. For both females and males, there is a significant difference in percentages between those who have been to at least one dance with a dance date and those who have not as seen in Table 5. For those with dance dates, male respondents were more likely to purchase their dance attire to purposefully match their dance date than female respondents as seen in Table 6.

Been to at least one dance with a dance date	**Female**	**Male**
Yes	38.5	34.1
No	61.5	65.9

Table 5: Students who have been to at least one dance with a dance date sorted by gender. Values in percentages.

Matched with at least one dance date	**Female**	**Male**
Yes	16.7	22.7
No	21.8	11.4
I did not have a dance date	61.5	65.9

Table 6: Students who have purposefully matched with their dance date sorted by gender. Values in percentages.

Motivation of Shopping Fast Fashion

This study also focused on the factors that motivate high school students to purchase their dance attire. Respondents were asked to choose all the applicable options that best represent their motivation of purchasing a new and different attire for every dance occasion. Based on the reasons given and the free response question of “other”, answers ranged from following dance requirements and wearing to stand out from other peers. The most common reason why high school students often wear different dance attires for different dances is because they want to present themselves better with more than 82.5% of respondents choosing the particular choice. Other top reasons for their motivation in purchasing their dance attire included: keeping up with the dance traditions (35.7%), affordability (24.6%), keeping up with Social Media trends (13.5%), and purchasing to pass time (8.7%), with the remaining percentages on ‘other’ reasons for motivating their continuous preference on purchasing dance attires. Similar to the total percentages of respondents, both female and male respondents significantly consider their presentation compared to other peers as seen below in Table 7.

Motivations for purchasing High School Dance Attire	**Female**	**Male**
Keeping up with Social Media Trends	19.2	2.3
Keeping up with dance traditions	42.3	31.8
Presenting yourself better	87.2	79.5
Affordability (deals happening)	25.6	20.5
Pass Time	11.5	4.5
Other	11.5	11.5

Table 7: Motivations of students purchasing dance attire sorted by gender. Values in percentages.

Discussion

Engagement in dance culture and dance traditions

The measures of engagement of high school students involve the examination of Irvine dance culture, the frequency of dance attendance, and the presence and effort to match with a dance date. The findings showed that high school students in Irvine engage themselves in the dance culture by attending dances with and without a dance date, which reveals that there is a noticeable presence in Irvine about adherence to high school dance traditions. While there is an adequate adherence to high school dance traditions, the participation is still relatively low with most participants attending 3 high school dances or less.

Overall, having a date increases the likelihood of purchasing clothes, as seen with the results of this particular study that most respondents with a dance date usually are motivated to purchase dance attire that matches their dance date. Previous scholars, such as George Mason University Sociology Professor Amy Best, suggest no matter how 'typical' the prom dress may seem, students would still be eager to participate and keep up with the prom and high school dance traditions with their dance date because there is "the opportunity to feel as though they too were 'coming out,' that they could transcend the boundaries of class, that you did not have to be rich to wear a fancy frock, to be adorned with a corsage, or to waltz the night away" (144). For this particular study, the majority of high school students from Irvine did not have a dance date. But, when students do have a dance date, the commitment to matching attires with each other is noticeable, supporting the adherence to dance traditions. The present study, however, does not take into account the socioeconomic class of each respondent. By knowing the socioeconomic class of each student, the study could have also either supported or contradicted the hypothesis of whether a student's socioeconomic status could prevent students from buying the dance attire that they prefer to wear with their date. Overall, however, based on the current statistics of the study, most students with a dance date do take the effort of matching with their dance date showing adherence to dance culture.

The study also suggests that there is a relatively low dance attendance rate among students. University High School in Irvine largely focuses on the academic culture of students rather than the social culture. Because of the academic culture, students focus their time more on academic success such as college admissions and resume boosting activities. Since respondents were surveyed from University High School, the need to succeed academically overlaps with students' time to enjoy high school dances. Most of the respondents in this survey were majority upperclassmen (Juniors & Seniors), who are the most susceptible students to be engaged in time-consuming academic classes such as Advanced Placement classes, which follow a similar structure to a typical college level class instead of a high school level class. Consequently, the academic time constraints cause students to leave little room for social events like high school dances, which can be perceived as less academically significant and therefore not wearing their fast fashion dance attire as often. In the particular study, more female students have a higher frequency of dance attendance than male students because females require extensive time in order to be ready for school dances. Because of the extensive time, more female students are motivated to attend school dances in order to showcase their identities. Even though male students do also require time to showcase their identities, male students are less likely to attend events more geared towards showing off individual student's beauty like school dances. Therefore, factors such as grades and gender can have a significant impact on dance attendance, which also contributes to how often students purchase and wear fast fashion dance attires.

Motivation to purchase

Overall, the findings showed that most students purchase dance attires they want to portray themselves better to their peers. In the present study, it is suggested that students are not specifically purchasing new dance attire for dances, but rather have a preference for presenting themselves as best as possible to their peers.

As more social media users within the high school students' age range increases, there is mounting pressure for those who do utilize Social Media platforms to portray their conformity to traditional dance attire expectations for their feeds. As more consumers turn to Social Media as a platform to view and shop these continuously evolving patterns of fashion, more psychological causes of the desire to obtain certain fashion styles can be seen within teenagers especially, teens aged 13-17, who are the largest Social Media account users with 90% reported to using some form of social media at least once in their life (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry 2023). Because of this pressure, many high school students are pressured to buy different high school dance attires, such as new styles of dresses for traditional female students and ties for traditional male students in order to stand out from their peers. For this particular study, almost all of the respondents purchase their dance attire with the goal of presenting themselves better in general. This

particular study, however, does not specifically ask where specifically the respondents would present themselves better, whether it is at the actual dance or on social media or both. The present study does ask whether the motivation of purchasing fast fashion dance attire stem from respondents wanting to keep up with social media trends. Based on the conducted study, female students have a much higher percentage than male students at keeping up with social media trends. As mentioned previously, female students have a wider variety of fast fashion dance attires that these students could choose to wear to the school dance. Because of the substantial variety of fast fashion dance attire, the majority of the female students in the study want to ensure that the style of their attire is matching the current social media trend of the respective dance which increases the pressure of presenting themselves to the best of the female student's ability. Moreover, the majority of male students in the study also purchase their fast fashion dance attire because of how these students want to present themselves better. Yet, the male students in this particular study significantly do not purchase their dance attire to keep up with social media trends compared to women. The difference of the pressure to keep up with social media trends between male and female students suggests that female students in this particular study feel more pressure to adhere to social media standards at the time of the respective dance than male students. Regardless, this particular study also acknowledges that male students also feel pressure to present themselves extravagantly towards their peers.

Despite the pressure of most overall students in this present study to present themselves better is relatively high, previous scholars such as Best states in her book: "[Females] use this [prom] space to solidify and display their feminine identities" (35). Female students, such as the female respondents in this study, have an emphasis on their attire appearance to male students when it comes to high school dances due to the wide variety of beauty combinations that make up the overall female dance attire such as the dress itself, hair and makeup. The beauty combinations for female students in the particular study showcase the female students' individual "fashion language", a form of communication of an individual to another individual through their own unique style of clothing (qtd in Nistor 75). Because of the numerous beauty combinations that go into preparing for the school dance, more female students in this study are drawn into participating in school dances than male students since the female student respondents are more motivated to showcase themselves in the way that communicates their feminine identity.

Professor Ann Anderson, author of the book High School Prom: Marketing, Morals and the American Teen states: "As the millennium changed over, and we're in a different generation now, there's just much more acceptance of gender fluidity" (225). Even though this particular study illustrates how high school students, with the inclusion of non-binary students, effectively showcase their personal identities, the study does not highlight enough on gender fluidity in the respondents that identify themselves as non-binary. Within the significantly small sample size, the present study suggests non-binary students purchase fast fashion dance attire to present themselves as representative as possible. The motivation for non-binary students to represent their individual identity as much as possible shows their comfortability in the dance attire these students choose to wear at school dances. However, the survey results also only presumed that female students wear traditional dresses and male students wear traditional suits. Some high school students wear attire that does not match their gender's traditional attire, which is an example of gender fluidity. Therefore, the comfortability of gender fluidity in this particular study can contribute as a possible motivation factor for students purchasing fast fashion dance attire for school dances.

The affordability of the dance attires is something to consider due to the rising inflation prices of textiles nationwide, making it difficult for fashion companies to be able to produce as many high school dance attires that meet the demand of high school students. In the present study, a moderate portion of the total respondents factor 'Affordability' as the motivation for purchasing fast fashion dance attire. Specifically in the study, more female students factor affordability when buying fast fashion dance attire than male students. Because female students traditionally wear more extravagant dance dresses, the cost of the dresses are much higher than male students' traditional attire of a suit, a button up and a tie to school dances. Therefore, female

students often consider the price of dance attire more than male students prior to purchasing, but there is still a noticeable amount of male students who also consider affordability as a factor to purchasing dance attire.

Purchase habits

Overall, the findings showed that almost all surveyed students do not shop for their high school dance attire often, which reveals students' noticeable purchasing habits for dance attire. The measure includes the discussion of the frequency of reusability and purchasing of fast fashion dance attire amongst students. The lack of frequent purchasing of fast fashion dance attire among most high school students is because the timings of the dances are not close together, with dances ranging from three to five months apart. Because of the wide time frame between each dance, it is less socially acceptable to wear something again from long ago as it is expected of high school students to have come up with a completely new attire by the time the next dance commences. Because of the wide time frame of dances, high school students will not purchase their dance attire until right before the dance which influences the purchasing frequency of students.

Based on the dance culture at University High School, high school students from this particular school have a lower rate of purchasing fast fashion dance attire overall lower than expected based on previous studies of prom purchasing from scholars. Gender specifically, Female students in this particular study tend to have an increased rate of purchasing their high school dance attire. The reason for the more frequent purchasing rate among female students in this particular study than male students is because of the wide variety of dresses that are designed specifically for females and the wide variations of companies that design dresses for high school females. While for men, the dance culture is not significant in terms of varied clothing because traditionally, they only have a limited attire type for dances, dark-colored suits or button-ups. Male students can wear button-ups inside the suit and can also take off their suits which only reveal their button-up only. Also, students can easily reuse the same button-up and suit for the next dance and just change their tie to match the specific dance tradition attire or to match with their dance dates. With this limited variety, there is not much room for creativity among males, which contributes to the limited amount of purchasing.

Limitations of the study

This study has offered numerous answers to the gaps of previous research in this particular high school dance fashion field; however, some gaps still need to be expanded outside of the scope of this study. Because the study focuses only on one high school in Irvine, the trend of high school dances and the behavior of high school students in relation to their attitudes toward preparing for these dances is not representative of the entire City of Irvine and cities beyond Irvine. For future research, I will expand the scope of the research to include more high schools within Irvine in order to help come to a conclusion that applies to all Irvine high schools. Moreover, when asking the population of respondents who said they had a date, there is a possibility that the individual attended a dance with a dance date of the same gender, which was not made clear in the survey. The specification of a same gender dance date can provide answers on the different adherence to the overall dance culture of a female and male date and whether the dance culture influences students to wear non-traditional fast fashion dance attire. The different adherence of the overall dance culture of same gender couples can also impact on the types and rate of fast fashion dance attire among specifically same-sex dance couples, which scholars could consider when further expanding on this specific aspect of the study. Furthermore, as stated in the ‘Results’ section, there were only two non-binary students for the entire survey which makes it ineffective for a general comparison as there is very little data being presented. For future studies, it is recommended, if possible, for scholars to collect more data in determining the motivation and engagement of non-binary students in relation to high school dance attires because since non-binary students identify “neither entirely male nor entirely female” (Merriam Webster 2023), there might be variety in the types of attire that they wear. Therefore, further research in these particular groups can help scholars understand the recent evolving trends of gender fluidity in high school dance attire.

Conclusion

Overall, engagement and participation in purchasing high school dance attires are less prominent in Irvine in comparison to previous studies in other areas nationally and globally. However, high school students in Irvine who continue to attend school dances frequently noticeably adhere to the dance culture and dance traditions that have stemmed for multiple decades. Throughout the study, the factors of high school dance dates and keeping up social media trends were considered when determining the motivation and frequency of high school students purchasing their attire. Increasing attention to gender fluidity on social media established a new perspective on the types of attire that are deemed appropriate in high school dances. As this social phenomenon continues to evolve, there is an ongoing need for nuanced discussions and considerations surrounding the cultural and social influences shaping high school dance attire preferences therefore expanding upon the overall adolescents' view of the cultural phenomenon that they continue to be exposed to in today's U.S. society.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank their respective high school teachers, who wish to remain anonymous, for support in outreaching the survey to high school students. Additionally, the author would also like to thank Dr. Emily Liu for comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.

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