

**Fashion and Cultural Studies**

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## **Fashion and Culture: Cultural Studies, Fashion Studies**

Fashion is not a thing or an essence. Rather, it is a social process of negotiation and navigation through the murky and yet-hopeful waters of what is to come. Fashion involves *becoming* collectively with others. When and where does this happen, and who gets to decide what constitutes fashion? Fashion materializes as bodies move through time and space. Time and space are both abstract concepts and contexts: the process of deciphering and expressing a sense of *who* we are (becoming) happens in tandem with deciphering and expressing *when* and *where* we are. This is not as simple as it may sound. It turns out that the process of deciphering and expressing “who, when, and where” is an ongoing challenge of negotiating and navigating through multiple ambiguities and contradictions associated with the following:

- being an *individual* fashion subject in the context of a *global* economy, in which fashion flows through complex, transnational dynamics that are at once visual and material, virtual and tangible, local and global;
- *embodying*—simultaneously—gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, national identity, age/generation, place, and other “positions” that are themselves shifting through complex power relations;
- desiring at once to fit in with one’s social world and to express some degree of uniqueness within that world; and
- an ever-changing interplay between freedoms and constraints; this interplay refers to an ongoing structure-agency debate in the social sciences and humanities.

Fashion is never finished, and it crosses all kinds of boundaries. It is ongoing and changes with each person’s visual and material interpretations of who he or she is becoming and how this connects with others’ interpretations.

Fashion is also about producing clothes and appearances, working through ideas, negotiating subject positions (e.g., gender, ethnicity, class), and navigating through power relations. It involves mixing, borrowing, belonging, and changing. But it is also about matching, creating, differentiating, and continuing. It is a complex process that entangles multiple perspectives and approaches. The study of fashion, as well, requires integrative and imaginative

ways of knowing. Throughout this book, I draw on fashion studies and feminist cultural studies concepts, metaphors, and models that challenge simple oppositional (either/or), linear (straight), and essentialist (predetermined, fixed, bounded) ways of thinking about and with fashion.

Oppositional thinking, for example, oversimplifies differences and limits options for the analysis of connections and entanglements. Framing fashion in either/or terms also prevents understandings of what the feminist spatial theorist Doreen Massey (1993) calls "power geometry." That is, power is multidimensional, not just oppositional. Fashion helps us to contemplate power in ways that multiply, complicate, and intersect beyond oppositional thinking.

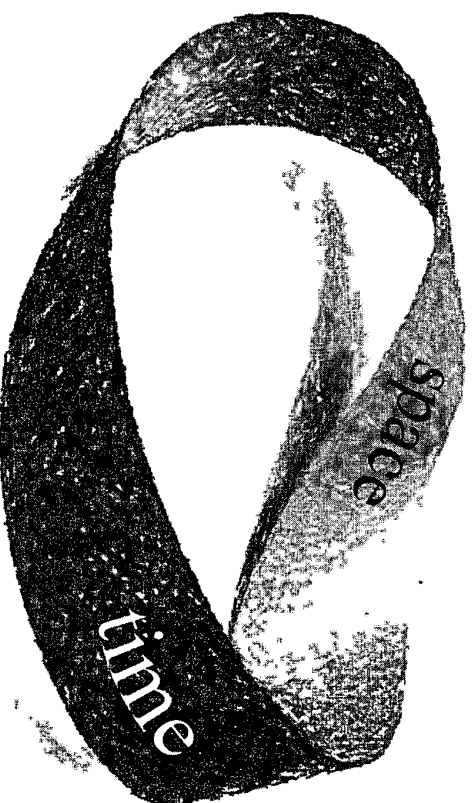
Studying fashion is a *both/and*, rather than an *either/or*, activity. Fashion thrives on contradiction (conflicting truth claims) and ambivalence (conflicting emotions): both/and ways of knowing and feeling. Combining fashion and (feminist) cultural studies perspectives encourages thinking that disrupts, blurs, and transcends binary (either/or) oppositions. One of the fundamental binary oppositions feminist theorists have critiqued is masculinity versus femininity, because this either/or way of thinking limits options for thinking about gender in a more expansive sense, perpetuates power-related hierarchies, and prioritizes masculinity as the dominant way of being in the world. In the realm of modern Western fashion, as we will see, this has meant that there has been a dominant myth that men are not supposed to care too much about how they look. Their power comes from being "unmarked" (Phelan 1993) as contrasted with women, who assume the "masque" of femininity (Tseëlon 1995) and hence become more "marked" as the "other," according to the mythical binary opposition.

Gender (considered in more depth in Chapter 6) is not the only problematic binary opposition or dualism that limits thinking with fashion, however. Indeed, modern Western thought is riddled with either/or thinking that has limited what and how we know fashion in the context of a transnational world:

- fashionable (i.e., modern) dress versus "fixed" (i.e., traditional) costume,
- Western dress versus "the rest,"
- the future versus the past,
- time versus space,
- agency versus structure,
- masculinity versus femininity,
- white versus black,
- straight versus gay,
- unmarked versus marked,
- dressing to belong versus dressing to differentiate,
- mainstream consumer fashion versus alternative street style,
- production versus consumption, and so on.

In each of these cases, the first term gets prioritized over the second, and herein lies the problem: power becomes constructed in simplistic terms. Obscured by these constructions are the overlapping realities, the contradictions, the third terms (e.g., bisexuality, Latino ethnicity, distribution) or other multiple possibilities that fall between the cracks and the subtle, subversive ways in which power operates in everyday life. We always need to be on the lookout for additional terms, beyond two. Most of the pairs of terms above would benefit from further terms, as we will see throughout this book. Some of the terms used above, such as *fixed* and *the rest* should probably be dispensed with altogether.

However, sometimes there are two terms that need to be looked at together in order to get a sense of a both/and whole. Among the binary oppositional terms listed above, four stand out in this way: *time and space* (considered in Chapter 8); and *unmarked and marked* or, better, *processes of unmarking and marking*; *agency and structure*; and *dressing to belong and dressing to differentiate*. There are some terms that cannot be easily disentangled as a pair because we experience them simultaneously (in both/and ways) through everyday embodied experience. How can we visualize "twos" as interdependent or convergent, rather than oppositional? The cultural theorist Noam Chomsky (1986) talks about convergence as a kind of mathematical mystery, using the metaphor of the Möbius strip (see Figure 1.1). The German mathematician Augustus Möbius (1790–1868) found that a strip or ribbon



**Figure 1.1** Möbius strip, illustrating convergence of time and space through the fashioned body. Developed with Ely Estoesia and Nan Turner.

that is two-sided can be experienced as one continuous surface. There is a kind of convergence that results when there is no inside, no outside, no beginning, and no end. When the ends of strip of fabric or ribbon are attached, and the resulting loop is slightly twisted, it becomes possible to move along a path without leaving a side or crossing an edge. Normally, fashion is all about crossings, intersections, and entanglements, but as the Möbius strip reminds us metaphorically, it is also about convergence. As individuals fashion their bodies (see Entwistle 2000), for example, they experience this process as a convergence of time and space. We cannot separate *when* we are from *where* we are in the course of everyday experience. This theme is addressed further in Chapter 8.

Fashion studies requires multiple metaphors or models to think *with* at once; part of the task of fashion studies is to mix metaphors in ways that enable critical and creative understandings of the pleasures and power relations associated with how we dress or style our appearances in everyday life (Kaiser 2008). We need multiple metaphors or models to think about the complex “hows” and “whys” of body fashionings. Throughout this book, a variety of metaphors are used alongside the Möbius strip (and its convergence of twos) in order to capture the complexity of flows, intersections, and entanglements among multiple concepts (Identities, materials, practices). We need multiple metaphors or models to think about the complex “hows” and “whys” of body fashionings.

We need multiple metaphors or models, in part, because the process of fashioning bodies in everyday life is inclusive: it is more than just a white, Western, heterosexual, bourgeois female consumer affair. Indeed, fashion highlights the multiple intersections and entanglements among gender, race, ethnicity, national identity, social class, sexuality, and other facets of our identities. The field of fashion studies brings these intersections and entanglements to light and helps us interpret flows and convergences along the way.

At the same time, the field of cultural studies has much to offer to the field of fashion studies. Both fashion studies and cultural studies remind us that we have to move beyond either/or, binary oppositions in order to make sense of everyday life. Why and how? Let's pursue an example using a key idea in cultural studies: articulation.

*Articulation* is both a concept and a method in cultural studies. The word articulate has at least two meanings: to connect or to join (as in a joint in the body) and to express. Articulation is an embodied concept. Think about all of the parts of the body that have to work together to allow articulation through speech: the tongue, the lips, the jaw, and other speech organs. It is only through their everyday articulations that we are able to speak—as just one form of connection and expression—through a complex blending of physiological and symbolic processes. In many ways, this kind of spoken

articulation becomes a metaphor for having a voice or a sense of agency through everyday looks or fashionings of the body. Individuals mix and match different elements to formulate temporary expressions about who they are or, more accurately, are becoming. Articulations are especially noticeable when something is slightly out of context, as shown in Figure 1.2. The man in this photograph has just arrived at a wedding reception in Washington State in the United States. He is part of the wedding party that has just taken place in another setting and is still wearing his (temporary, rented) tuxedo but has added an additional accessory: an indie rock record company cap. His articulation between the formality (and conformity) of the tuxedo and his own musical preferences let us know a little more about him: his cap softens and personalizes—as it articulates with—his rented tux.



**Figure 1.2** In the moment: articulation as temporary closure. By adding his indie rock record cap, this member of the wedding party reveals more of himself at the reception afterward. He expresses that he is *both* a member of the wedding party and a lover of indie rock music. Washington State, USA, 2010. Photo by author.

Articulation provides a sense of temporary closure. Like the temporariness of the tux, the look (or appearance style) itself in Figure 1.2 is ephemeral. It works for now, in this particular context with family and friends (and second and third degrees of family and friends) who have the opportunity to make sense of his “this and that” articulation for the time, place, and situation. His tux represents dominant U.S. cultural norms for weddings, but his cap, too, has a cultural dimension—albeit more alternative. With his cap, he represents his identification with the local indie rock community. Interpreting his tux and cap together (along with his facial hair and other appearance cues) helps the guests at the wedding to learn a little more about him and his *subjectivity* (how he thinks, what he likes, and how he is able to mix, meld, and express). He differentiates himself at the same time he communicates shared cultural and community ties. His articulation combines items that were not necessarily intended by designers or retailers to go together but that together make a new, somewhat ironic *both/and* statement.

In cultural studies, articulation is also a method that can be used to analyze culture. It is a method based on the recognition that people articulate—combining this and that to make all kinds of visual statements through style and other everyday practices. Analytically, the method of articulation involves breaking down wholes that appear “natural” or harmonious, and identifying differences, contradictions, or fractures in the whole. The method of articulation is not just a process of negative critique. It goes further by rearticulating into other wholes, by considering new possibilities and formations (Grossberg 2010: 22) or by envisioning and building up new frameworks for interpretation. Grossberg uses the metaphor of a Lego set, among others, to demonstrate how this works. But we can see how the metaphor of a body that is continually fashioned and refashioned—through articulations and rearticulations—is an especially vivid, compelling, and revealing metaphor.

### ARTICULATION: STYLE-FASHION-DRESS

Fashion theorist Carol Tulloch (2010) articulates *style-fashion-dress* as a system of concepts; she uses the hyphens between each term to propose whole-and-part relationships. She also uses each term on its own: “As long as the precision of their meanings are clear, they are always connected as part of the overall purpose of a subject of study” (Tulloch 2010: 274). Tulloch uses *style* as “agency—in the construction of self through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes that may, or may not, be ‘in fashion’ at the time of use.” She further describes *style* as “part of the process of self-telling, that is, to expound an aspect of autobiography of oneself through the clothing choices an individual makes”—what she has come to call *style*

*narratives* (Tulloch 2010: 276). The larger articulation of *style-fashion-dress* locates *style* in the context of *fashion*: a social process in which *style* narratives are collectively “in flux with time” (Riello and McNeil 2010: 1). Fashion as a social process encompasses more than clothing style. Its reach also spans food and furniture preferences, popular culture, language, technology, science, or any other dimensions of culture and change. However, there is something that is especially compelling about fashion in the context of the body’s appearance because it is so “up close” and personal in everyday experience and perception. Fashion matters in everyday life; it becomes embodied.

*Dress*, like *style* and in conjunction with fashion, begins with the body. *Style-fashion-dress* theorist Joanne Eicher (2010: 3) defines *dress* as “body modifications and body supplements.” The term *dress*—like *style*, appearance or appearance style, or look—has the advantage of being rather neutral and useful for historical- and cultural-comparative purposes. All of these terms, including fashion, can be used as verbs as well as nouns; they refer to processes and concepts, so there is a family resemblance among them (Barnard 2002).

*Style-fashion-dress*, as a system of concepts, is useful in analyzing Figure 1.2. Together with the use of articulation as a method in cultural studies, we can recognize the parts (the individual terms) and wholes (the system that connects them). It becomes possible to break down the system, while recognizing that new articulations will occur. We can consider the wedding party member’s sense of agency and the narrative he has constructed with his *style*—especially as he donned his cap between the wedding ceremony and the reception, mixing and matching elements that are not usually combined. We can think about fashion as a social process that is part of what it means to be “in flux with time”: the cut of the tuxedo, the width and color (hot pink) of the tie, the vest, his facial hair. The cap, too, and the music to which it refers, is not immune to fashion change. *Dress*, specifically, refers to the body modifications (his facial hair, for example) and body supplements (everything he is wearing, including his earring, his pocket handkerchief). Clearly, the terms overlap, but each sheds some light on a different practice or process. Together, *style-fashion-dress* is a complex system that recognizes the parts and wholes. *Style-fashion-dress* (a fashion studies concept) and articulation (a cultural studies concept and method) work well together; they cut both ways to enable understandings of context.

### THE FIELDS OF FASHION STUDIES AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Both fashion and culture demand more than one discipline or field of study to capture their complexity. As interdisciplinary fields, both fashion studies and

cultural studies require the perspectives of multiple fields, theories, methods, and practices in order to analyze fashion and culture adequately. Both fashion studies and cultural studies developed in the latter half of the twentieth century, although their roots, in some form or another, go back for centuries. They both blend various disciplines in the humanities (e.g., art, art history, design, the dramatic arts, history, literature), the social sciences (e.g., anthropology, geography, sociology), and related interdisciplinary fields (e.g., gender studies, ethnic studies), as well as the biological and physical sciences.

Fashion studies has roots in the centuries-old historical and cross-cultural interest in dress as a universal phenomenon. According to the British dress historian Lou Taylor (2004), over 200 collections of engravings, etchings, and woodcuttings were published in Germany, Italy, France, and Holland between 1520 and 1610. Europeans had an intense interest in understanding people in the "newly discovered remote corners of the world." Yet they did so in a way that created a binary opposition between self and other. Taylor indicates that these early publications are a major source of information on the visual representations of "European notions of the barbarous and exotic Other" (Taylor 2004: 5). Taylor goes on to discuss the distinct histories between museum collections focusing on ethnographic (e.g., folk, peasant) dress versus those highlighting "fashionable Euro-American dress" (Taylor 2004: 311). She also notes how the study of dress history has moved toward more interdisciplinary, critical, and inclusive approaches in recent decades, yet there is still much to be done to recover diverse dress histories around the world. Similarly, Christopher Breward (1995) has called for, and demonstrated the benefits of, blending art history, design history, and cultural studies to foster a "new cultural history" with "a more questioning framework which allows for explanations which are multi-layered and open-ended" (Breward 1995: 3-4).

Fashion studies as an interdisciplinary field also emerged from late nineteenth-century thinking about culture, social class, and modernity in the "Western" world—in fields as varied as anthropology, the arts and humanities, psychology, and sociology. A notable example includes the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1904), who was fascinated with the interplay between social-psychological impulses of imitation (to be like others) and differentiation (to distinguish oneself from others). This interplay, he argued, propels fashion change in modern societies. He, like the American economic sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1899) attributed much of this change to social mobility in an open society. Veblen highlighted the hypocrisy associated with the "conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous leisure" of the bourgeois (upper-middle) classes (to be discussed further in Chapter 5). Unlike Simmel, Veblen did not take fashion seriously as a social process and cultural phenomenon; he seemed to think that fashion made no economic sense and was the source of society's ills.

In the 1980s, the British feminist fashion theorist Elizabeth Wilson (1985) critiqued Veblen by pointing out his masculine, utilitarian bias. She argued instead for a more complex approach using themes of ambivalence and contradiction. She noted that "we both love and hate fashion," just as we both "love and hate capitalism itself" (14). She argued further that there is a profound modern, Western (masculine-biased) sense of unease and ambiguity about the body and its relation to clothing. Somewhat similarly, the American sociologist Fred Davis (1992) attributed fashion change itself to "culturally-coded identities" regarding gender, social class, and other identity issues. Like Wilson (1985) and Davis (1992), colleagues and I interpreted fashion through concepts of ambivalence and (its cousin) ambiguity (Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton 1990). Also drawing on symbolic interaction—a school of thought within sociology that has had strong ties with cultural studies since the 1980s—we highlighted the importance of negotiation as a social process in fashion change. We synthesized this theme from the works of Gregory Stone (1969) in his analysis of appearance and the self in relation to others; Herbert Blumer (1969) in his treatise on fashion as a process of "collective selection"; as well as from earlier essays by Fred Davis, which were revised and then integrated into his 1992 book.

There are multiple genealogies of fashion theory. Just a few are included here by way of introduction, but the works of other contributors are included to the extent possible throughout this book. Genealogies of fashion theory are complicated and cross-cutting; interdisciplinary routes are neither separate nor linear. In his book, *Fashion in Focus*, sociologist Tim Edwards (2011) contrasts ambivalence-based (symbolic interactionist) explanations of fashion with Elizabeth Wilson's contradiction-based analysis of modern Western fashion. Yet Wilson's (1985) *Adorned in Dream: Fashion and Modernity* (1985) revolves around themes of ambivalence (conflicting emotions), as well as contradiction (conflicting "truth" claims). These themes are integral to the work of Davis (1992) and Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton (1990), as well. Ambivalence and contradiction both rely upon both/and ways of knowing.

Another, overlapping genealogy derives from social studies of textiles and clothing developed in the United States in home economics programs in the land-grant system (historically, an agricultural system) of higher public education. Initially, this system addressed issues of production and consumption in highly gendered ways: with production as a masculine process and consumption as a feminine activity. These programs have emphasized the quality of everyday life, in recognition of clothing as a basic human need (along with food and shelter). Beginning around the 1950s, textiles and clothing scholars have conducted research on issues of self-esteem, social meaning, and other social and psychological considerations (e.g., Darnhorst 1985; Horn 1965;

Kaiser 1997; Miller-Spellman, Damhorst, and Michelman 2005; Rosencranz 1950, 1962, 1965; Ryan 1966); ethnographic and cross-cultural research (e.g., Eicher, Evenson, and Lutz 2008; Roach and Eicher 1965, 1973); historical studies (e.g., Farrell-Beck and Gau 2002; Paoletti 1985, 1987), and economic analyses of clothing consumption (Wirakor 1969). Other fields in the interdisciplinary textiles and clothing programs have included fashion design and fashion merchandising. By the early 2000s, these areas had become dominant in many university programs throughout the United States, with the other areas (e.g., social psychology, cultural and historical studies, textile science) still playing important fundamental supporting roles. A perusal of *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* over the last thirty years reveals changes in research publishing trends toward the fields of consumer behavior, fashion marketing, and merchandising.

Interdisciplinary, transnational, and critical studies of style-fashion-dress have burgeoned since the 1990s. Berg Publishers has produced the *Dress, Body, Culture* book series, along with the journal *Fashion Theory* (edited by Valerie Steele), launched in 1997. These works have circulated a wide range of interdisciplinary scholarship on historical and transnational cultural studies of style-fashion-dress. In 2010, Berg launched the journal *Fashion Practice* (edited by Sandy Black and Marilyn Delong), and the publisher Intellect introduced the journal *Critical Studies in Fashion and Beauty* (edited by Efrat Tseeñon, Diana Crane, and Susan Kaiser). Also in 2010, Oxford University Press published the ten-volume *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion* (edited by Joanne B. Eicher), which included entries from scholars around the world. In addition to the existing interdisciplinary academic programs, new fashion studies programs emerged in France, Italy, the United States (e.g., Parsons New School for Design), the United Kingdom, Sweden, and elsewhere.

Transnational fashion networks and conferences in Korea and China, as well as in Europe and North America, have fostered a lot of ferment in the field. One notable example is Carol Tulloch's organization of an African diaspora network and a special issue of *Fashion Theory* (2010) that summarizes the activities and collaborations related to this network. Increasingly in fashion studies, old assumptions about what constitutes "fashion," for example, have been shattered, and new questions have emerged in the context of critiques of globalization, garment labor and Eurocentric stories of style-fashion-dress. Interactions with the field of cultural studies—directly and indirectly—have been pivotal in new articulations within fashion studies. (Throughout this book, I use the term *fashion studies* as a shorthand phrase to refer inclusively to the study of the whole system of concepts: style-fashion-dress.)

The field of cultural studies also developed in the second half of the twentieth century, at a moment "when culture becomes both visibly central and explicitly ambiguous" (Grossberg 2010: 173). The same could be said about

style-fashion-dress. The late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed resistance against older stories of gender, "race," ethnicity, sexuality, national identity, and age/generation. In many ways, cultural studies sought to ask new questions about culture as it articulates with everyday life power relations associated with these older stories.

The feminist movement, the civil rights movement, the gay and lesbian rights movements, and other (e.g., anticolonial, environmental) social movements around the world contributed to the development of cultural studies as a field interested in understanding how cultural processes, including fashion, shape everyday life. These movements began to "unframe" some of the frameworks that had previously been taken for granted as "natural" or "the way it should be." These movements reacted to, or at least questioned, a number of assumptions associated with dominant (white, masculine or feminine, upper-middle class, heterosexual) culture.

The feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s fought not only for crucial economic and reproductive rights but also raised questions about the extent to which fashion and beauty systems entrap women in traditional feminine roles. As Evans and Thornton (1989) note, some feminists rejected exclusive symbols or practices of femininity (e.g., makeup, bras, skirts, leg shaving). Fashion itself, they argue, is a process of experimentation, and feminists have taken on different projects to fight for change (for example, garment worker rights) as they have explored the complicated ways in which feminism is not only about gender relations but also about their interplay with other vectors of power (e.g., class, "race," ethnicity, sexuality).

The study of this interplay among power relations through social movements is key to cultural studies, which emerged in various sites around the world, attempting to make sense of culture and power through everyday issues. Most visible among these was the vibrant center of theory and practice at the University of Birmingham (the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies) in the 1970s. Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-born black British sociologist, played an important role in the formation of the center and its mission, drawing on the class-based studies of Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. Hall and colleagues and students pursued studies of the interplay among class, "race," and opportunities for young people (especially working class males) to articulate their identities through style-fashion-dress as a visible system of representation. Feminist interventions in the center further complicated the studies by highlighting gender biases in understandings of "subcultures" (McRobbie 1989, 1991, 1994).

Key to a cultural studies approach is the idea that gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, and age/generation and other subject positions organize identities, social relations, and the objects and images that culture produces (Newton, Kaiser, and Ono 1998). Cultural studies refuse "to reduce

human life or power to one dimension, one axis, one explanatory framework" (Grossberg 2010: 16). It also works against a logic of essentialism: the belief that things are the way they are because that is "just the way they are." Essentialist thinking fosters stereotypes because it suggests that a subject position such as gender predetermines (biologically or otherwise) a set of traits that apply to "all women" (e.g., "women's drive to shop is in their genes") or "all men" (e.g., "men are not into fashion").

In other words, cultural studies rejects the idea that "everything is sewn up in advance" or that "identities are fixed" (Grossberg 2010: 22). In cultural studies terms, articulations and rearticulations continually challenge fixed ideas that gender (or any other subject position) is an essence or a thing that should be accepted as a "natural" or biological given (as discussed further in Chapter 6). Rather, as a feminist cultural studies perspective tells us, gender is embedded in social interactions, cultural understandings, and webs of power. It cannot be completely separated from ethnicity, social class, national identity, religion, and other power-related issues.

### CONCEPTUALIZING CULTURE AND FASHION

A dialogue between cultural studies and fashion studies can be highly fruitful for thinking through concepts of culture and fashion: Both are good concepts "to think with." The definitions of the two words are interrelated and remarkably similar, although they have different connotations. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2010) defines *culture* as "the distinctive ideas, customs, social behavior, products, or way of life of a particular society, people, or period." And *fashion* is defined as "a prevailing custom, a current usage; esp. one characteristic of a particular place or period of time" or, more specifically, "the mode of dress, etiquette, furniture, style of speech, etc., adopted in society for the time being." It seems that culture is a somewhat broader and more enduring concept than fashion, although both concepts include the idea of custom: "a habitual or usual practice; common way of acting; usage; fashion, habit (either of an individual or of a community)." Perhaps we can think of fashion as "custom for a time" and culture as "custom over time." Interestingly, the word custom is related to *costume* (a form of dress that often has rather exotic connotations, as we shall see in Chapter 3). Similarly, custom also closely relates to the cultural studies concept of *habitus*: the routine cultural practices embodied in everyday life (Bourdieu 1984), discussed further in Chapter 2 and later chapters.

Fashion, like culture, is both a social process and a material practice. Both fashion and culture simultaneously undergo continual change and continuity. These simultaneous processes are complex and even contradictory.

They remind us that everyday life and, indeed, global capitalism are full of contradictions. Either/or ways of thinking (i.e., change or continuity) are insufficient to understand how fashion and culture work. Instead, understanding fashion and culture requires both/and thinking (i.e., change and continuity). That being said, analyzing fashion and culture in tandem provides an opportunity to consider what these two concepts—and the fields of fashion studies and cultural studies that pursue them—have to offer one another. Given that both fashion and culture simultaneously undergo ongoing processes of change and continuity, perhaps fashion can best be understood as *change within continuity*, whereas culture reveals practices that emphasize *continuity within change*. Each concept, in its own way, offers a lens through which to make sense of simultaneity: how different ideas or process not only coexist but also interact dynamically.

Simultaneity, however, is not simply a combination of two items. Even both/and thinking, while necessary, is not sufficient to grasp the multiple complexities and contradictions associated with fashion and culture. Similarly, no single model or metaphor can sufficiently capture these complexities and contradictions. This book offers two models or metaphors that combine fashion studies and cultural studies, as alternatives to simple oppositional (either/or), linear (straight), and essentialist (predetermined, fixed, bounded) ways of thinking about and with everyday fashion in a transnational world: (a) the circuit of style-fashion-dress (introduced in this chapter and developed further in Chapter 2); and (b) intersectionalities, introduced in Chapter 2.

### CIRCUIT OF STYLE-FASHION-DRESS MODEL

Figure 1.3 details the "circuit of style-fashion-dress" model, adapted from the cultural studies' "circuit of culture" (du Gay et al. 1997: 3). The original circuit of culture model contains the following elements: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. The adapted "circuit of style-fashion-dress" model makes two revisions: distribution instead of representation, and subject formation instead of identity, as explained below. Overall, however, the rationale for the model remains the same: culture flows (and so does fashion).

The choice of a circuit in Figure 1.3, rather than a binary opposition (e.g., production versus consumption) or a line (e.g., a production pipeline or value chain), in cultural studies and fashion studies, is deliberate. A circuit connotes the idea of multiple sites, connected by routes with potential detours. The routes are not linear, and movements flow in multiple directions. Circuits of culture and circuits of style-fashion-dress recognize that time and space intertwine through cultural practices that are themselves interconnected. (Time



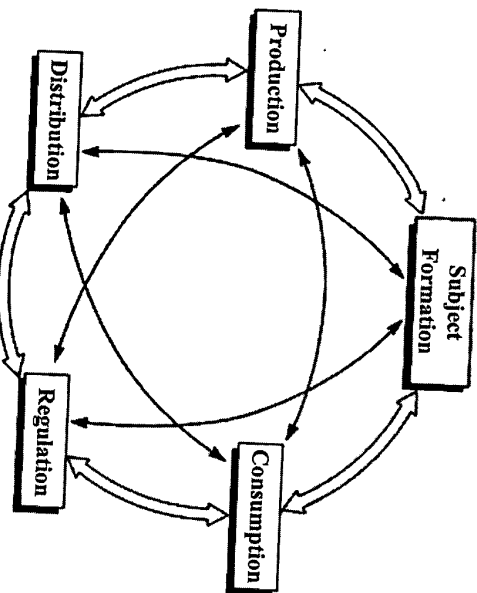


Figure 1.3 . Circuit of style-fashion-dress. Adapted from the cultural studies "circuit of culture" (du Gay et al. 1997: 3) with Kelly Sullivan.

and space will be pursued further in Chapter 8.) Moreover, there are multiple circuits, overlapping in complex ways through diverse cultural histories and practices. Each concept in the circuit is itself a process. Let's consider each of them, beginning with production.

## PRODUCTION

One of fashion's "early relatives" is the Latin root word *facere*, which means to make or to do (Barnard 2002). The French word *faire* (also derived from the Latin word *facere*) has similar meanings. Hence, one important idea underlying the concept of fashion—in some European cultural histories, at least—is the idea of twin processes of making and doing: engaging in a cultural practice. Produced by this practice is a garment, a look, or even social differences among groups of people.

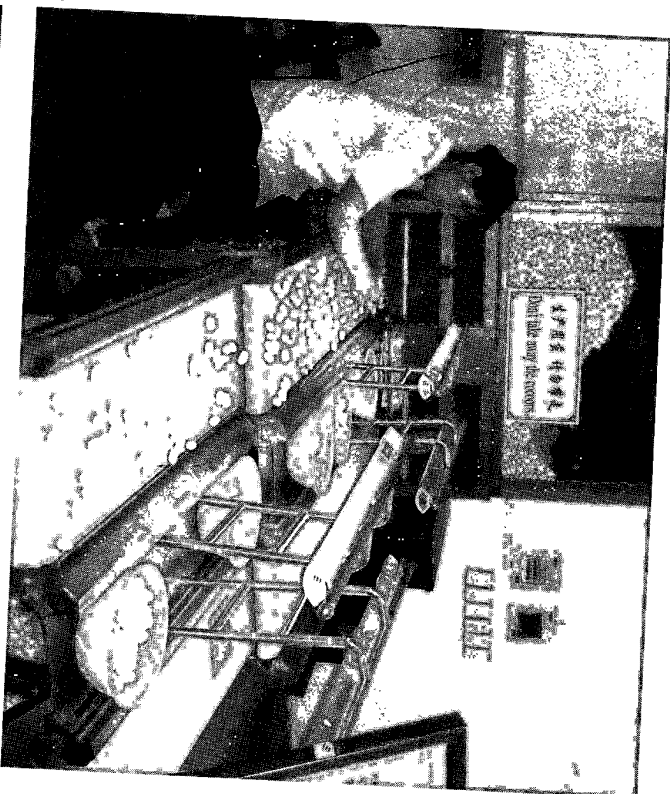
Like the body itself, fashion is material. The circuit of style-fashion-dress helps to materialize culture's circuits. Fashion's materials (e.g., fibers, fabrics, garments) flow, and they are produced by and for bodies. Let's consider production across time and space. For more than 20,000 years, human beings around the world have fashioned their bodies with textiles and other materials (e.g., paints, beads). Archaeologist Elizabeth Barber's (1994) research on cloth/clothing in what is now Europe and parts of Russia led her to identify what she calls the "string revolution": the discovery of the ability

to twist or "spin" fibers from local, native plants (e.g., flax, hemp) into yarns. Women did most of this work; they were the producers. And there is considerable evidence that only women wore the string skirts that they fashioned from plants into garments. They were therefore the consumers or users of their own products. Eventually, in multiple locations around the world, more complex textile materials emerged. There are strong family roots between the words "text" and "textile," both derived from the Latin word *texere*, which means "to weave" (Oxford English Dictionary 2010). Indeed, long before the advent of written languages, textiles told cultural stories around the world. Textiles (and other materials and media) record and represent culture. Hmong (or Miao, as known in China) textiles, traditionally made by women from hill tribes in Southeast Asia, offer a vivid example: reverse appliquéd—a complex technique that involves cutting and stitching through layers of fabric—and embroidered fabrics tell cultural stories that have been passed down from generation to generation. This was a way of recording history through material culture, rather than written language. With the migration since the 1970s of an estimated 180,000 Hmong people to the United States, Australia, and other nations, the traditional mode of storytelling has been challenged by the forces of globalization, as well as some loss of culture-making techniques over time (Wronska-Friend 2010).

Another compelling example of the cultural production of textiles is sericulture: the Chinese art and technology of silk production. Pictorial representations of silkworms, mulberry leaves (that silkworms eat), and silk have convinced scholars that sericulture was a widespread cultural practice in China during the second millennium B.C.E. Sericulture as a cultural production practice remained a guarded Chinese secret until the fourth century C.E. (Vollmer 2010: 20). Figure 1.4 shows how sericulture is practiced in contemporary China.

The Silk Road is more than 2,000 years old; this ancient network of trails extends more than 5,350 miles westward across deserts and mountains, through Central Asia and the Middle East to the Mediterranean. This route was used as a major east-west artery to bring silks, furs, gold, spices, and gems to the Roman and Byzantine empires, keeping the Chinese in contact with other regions of the world. This route was a critical part of international history at least until the sixteenth century, when maritime trade had become more fully developed. It was also a site of conflict, as the Romans, Mongols, and others tried to dominate the route in order to control the traffic and the profits. In addition to a vigorous trading tradition, there was a history of complex ethnic interactions as a result of the Silk Road (Appiah and Gates 1997: 600; Kennett 1995: 112).

Textile production was also an ancient art in India, with some of the most intricate woolen fabrics emerging from the mountains of Kashmir. Various



**Figure 1.4** In the image above, a Chinese worker sorts silkworm cocoons by quality. Below, another Chinese worker sets up the loom to weave silk yarn into a textile fabric. Photos by author.

weaving techniques came to Europe by way of India, through Assyria and Egypt and then from Phoenicia to Egypt. Many of the English names of fabrics relate to their origins: calico from Calicut or Calcutta; cotton muslin from Mosul; chintz from the Hindu *chint* or *chete*; satin from Zaytoun in China; and damask from Damascus, Syria (Kennett 1995). So in many ways, textile material culture has been global for centuries, long before Columbus discovered the Americas when he was looking for a western route to India.

Highly complex and intricate textiles were part of the reason Columbus and other explorers wanted to find new routes to the Orient. Cotton had been domesticated and was being grown in the Indus Valley civilization as early as 4000 B.C.E. Cotton seeds have been found at a Neolithic site near Mehgarh in Northern Baluchistan, and the remains of dyed cotton cloth have been excavated at Mohenjo-dara, dated around 2000 B.C.E. Dyeing cotton with natural dyes is no simple technical matter; it requires mordants (colorless metallic oxides) to help the dye to bind to the cotton fiber. The use of red (madder) and black dyes was most common. These technologies were disseminated by means of interactions with nomadic Indo-European tribes around 2000 B.C.E., contacts with the Chinese, and invasions by Islamic peoples between 7000 and 1200 C.E. (Lynton 1995: 8–9). Moreover, since the time of the Roman Empire, at least, Southern Indian merchants had been trading with the Portuguese and the French (Lynton 1995: 121).

The production of cloth became an industrialized process with the mechanization of spinning and weaving in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The invention of the sewing machine in the nineteenth century made the production of clothing an easier and faster process. However, clothing production is extremely labor intensive; garment construction, (sewing) technology has not changed significantly since the invention of the sewing machine. In the early twentieth century, the public became aware of labor abuses in garment sweatshops in New York City; and at the end of the century, the public became aware of sweatshop conditions in various sites around the world, from Los Angeles to Central America's "Free Trade Zones" to China. (Chapter 5 delves further into garment labor through the discussion of class.) By the 1990s, the "race to the bottom" by manufacturers to seek the lowest labor costs in the world had fostered an increasing disconnect between production and consumption. In particular, there was (and is) a huge gap between (a) consumers wearing heavily branded and marketed "fast fashion," and (b) the workers around the world who would be unlikely to afford to buy the very garments they have made.

College students organizing against sweatshops, together with the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) in Los Angeles, have resulted in some successes in monitoring the production of licensed apparel (e.g., T-shirts and sweats) sold in university bookstores. One success story is the Alta Gracia factory and label in the Dominican Republic:

Every Alta Gracia product carries a tag from the WRC confirming that the product was sewn at a factory that respects workers' rights. The WRC only allows us to use this tag as long as we are in compliance with our labor standards. So when you see the WRC tag on an Alta Gracia t-shirt or sweatshirt, you can be sure it was sewn by workers who are paid a living wage, have a union to represent them, and are treated fairly when they come to work. ([atagraciaparel.com](http://atagraciaparel.com))

The complexity of monitoring even the fairly limited (although meaningful) market of university-licensed apparel in a global economy reveals how complex the disconnect between production and consumption can be. On the other hand, some clothing companies such as Patagonia have voluntarily found ways of making their production footprints and practices transparent. In many ways, the goals of sustainable production pertain not only to the environment but also to labor conditions. Yet as fashion cycles become faster, the flood of materials and garments produced to satisfy consumer demand profitably intensifies. Many companies have developed elaborate systems of contractors and subcontractors to do the actual sewing of the garments, to the extent that it is extremely difficult to foster a system of accountability and transparency. Meanwhile, consumers can buy "fast fashion" cheaply and frequently.

## CONSUMPTION

Before the production of fibers, textiles, and apparel became industrialized, it was intimately connected with the consumption (use, wear) of these materials. Only wealthy people could afford to have many garments, which were often prized possessions. Industrialization changed the dynamic between production (making) and consumption (using, wearing). A binary way of thinking emerged between production—conceptualized as an "orderly, mechanized, and rational process of making good for the purpose of profit"—and consumption, framed as "the opposite of productivity" or as "using ('up') products or goods" (Kaiser 2008). Cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams (1980) discussed how the metaphor of the human stomach and digestive system shaped thinking about consumption as eating. In this way of thinking, applied much more broadly to consumer products beyond food, consumers became perceived as channels "along which the product flows and disappears" (43). In this framework, consumers become "the market, which the system of industrial production has organized" (Williams 1980: 43).

Everyone consumes clothing, but far fewer people actually produce garments in an industrial or postindustrial context. And, resources permitting, many consumers buy far more products than they actually need. Williams (1980) claimed that one important reason for this is the "magical system"

created by advertising and related cultural practices that turn consumption into a process of human desires for promise, pleasure, and power:

You do not only buy an object; you buy social respect, discrimination, health, beauty, success, power to control your environment. The magic obscures its real sources of general satisfaction because their discovery would involve radical change in the whole common way of life. (Williams 1980: 47)

## DISTRIBUTION

Located strategically between production and consumption, the process of distribution has multiple meanings: the physical movement, as well as the marketing, of goods. In theory, distribution is the bridge, or part of the solution to the "disconnect" between production and consumption. In practice, however, distribution can also be seen as the site of rupture between the two material processes, when image making (e.g., advertising, branding) overrides material practice. Distribution is an inherently ambivalent or contradictory concept; it includes both dividing and dispersing (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2010). Synonyms for "distribute" include divide, dispense, dole, deal, and the like; yet "distribute" implies more strategic planning and segmentation than "dispersion" ("scattering in all directions") or "diffusion" ("wide distribution"). Because diffusion, in particular, is an important part of fashion as a process of social influence, and because material movement (e.g., from the factory to the local mall) is fundamental to fashion, the circuit of style-fashion-dress model adapts the cultural studies circuit of culture model by using distribution in place of representation. Distribution has connotations of both material and representational elements. Further, conceptualized as a link rather than a rupture, distribution ties together economy and culture through a kind of (distributive) network. The network metaphor used by science studies scholar Bruno Latour (2005) helps to map how humans (e.g., workers, managers, consumers) and nonhumans (e.g., fabrics, sewing machines, computers) must be considered together, through a "material-semiotic" network. In short, materials matter.

And so does representation. As cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (1997) describes the concept, representation is a process that does not merely represent an idea or reality that already exists. Rather it constitutes (composes or establishes) our understandings of the world. Through cultural media such as advertising (a form of distribution), we experience images, stories, and sound bites that frame our understandings of what is authentic or natural, what we desire, and so on. Fashion branding, for example, strives to add a kind of symbolic value to "real clothes" by fostering or fulfilling fantasies (Hancock 2010). What kinds of fantasies might be represented to sell clothes?

Sexuality, glamour, success, coolness, and happiness are among the core subjects in the cultural imagery that turn pretty ordinary items of clothing into objects of desire.

Fashion studies scholar Joanne Entwistle (2009) refers to the important role of "cultural intermediaries" (i.e., individuals in the business of distribution and representation). Cultural Intermediaries such as retail buyers, photographers, journalists, and fashion models constitute the aesthetic markets that "operate through the careful balancing of 'cultural' and 'economic' calculations" (Entwistle 2009: 167). Part of this balancing act involves the strategic flow of materials as well as images through the spaces in between production and consumption.

Representation, then, is part of distribution (the space between production and consumption). But the use of distribution—the more general term—in the circuit of style-fashion-dress reminds us that materials, as well as images, flow in the spaces "in between." In many ways, however, representation represses the materiality of fashion production because we focus our attention on the image rather than product quality, garment labor, or environmental impacts. We begin to imagine who we can become through the goods that we buy.

### SUBJECT FORMATION

Being and becoming are ongoing processes of subject formation. I use the terms subject and subject formation in the circuit model, rather than identity—the term used in the original "circuit of culture" model (du Gay et al. 1997), for a few different reasons. Although identity is an important concept in everyday life, cultural politics, and academic writing alike, I agree with fashion theorist Efraim Tseëlon (2010) that it has become a bit "shopworn" in its daily usage and has lost some of its critical, analytical edge. The term *subject*—especially with formation—allows both for more precision and more of a process orientation than identity. As a commonly used term, *identity* (for some) has a connotation of being "who I am," as though it is an essence. That is, it can become locked into particular identity politics without considering the complex intersections among identities. Cultural theorist Judith Halberstam (2005) has noted how and why identity politics are critical for organizing and community building around themes of sexuality, as well as gender, race, and so on. However, if identity politics become fixed or fossilized, the critical edge-ness and currency are undermined.

Secondly, subject formation is a process that prioritizes "becoming" over merely "being" as a priority and thus seems especially compatible with processes of style-fashion-dress, as well as the other components (processes) of the circuit model. Third, the term *subject* is the root word of both *subject*

and *subjectivity*; it deals with part-whole relationships. Subject is the root word of both *subject* (which implies being subjected to something—such as a subject position—structured by others) and *subjectivity* (which implies having the agency to assert or articulate one's own ways of being and becoming)—each with its own connotations (Mama 1995).

Subjection refers to the process of power relations being imposed in some way. An individual is subjected to circumstances beyond his or her control. Indeed, one is not only born into his or her body but also into a complex network of power relations. These power relations are embedded in *cultural discourses*: ongoing, systematic cultural "conversations" that are not necessarily on a level playing field (discussed further in Chapter 2 and later chapters). Michel Foucault (1972) theorized how, historically and institutionally, cultural discourses have imposed and shaped certain understandings of subject positions (i.e., family background, gender, nation, race, ethnicity, sexuality). As individuals take up their subject positions, they become subjected to the regulatory power of cultural discourses (Barter 2002: 33). Much fashion imagery of women, for example, perpetuates a cultural discourse of thinness. The standardization of female fashion models' bodies as thin, coupled with digital technologies, functions as a cultural discourse that structures thinking about ideal fashionable bodies. A single fashion ad featuring a skinny model—further airbrushed and photoshopped—is a representation that shapes understandings of beauty and fashion. Yet this single representation is part of a larger cultural discourse on thinness that has become institutionalized historically through visual imagery, as well as other media conversations (e.g., blogs, talk shows, articles in magazines) regarding weight loss, "ethical fashion," eating disorders, and other related issues. How does such a cultural discourse influence one's subject position(s)? It is likely to structure perceptions of gender as a subject position: what it means to have a fashionably beautiful body. Other subject positions such as age, ethnicity, class, and sexuality are likely to be influenced, as well.

Subjection through cultural discourses is part of subject formation, especially in the context of fashion, because discourses themselves change. Yet subject formation is even more dynamic, because individuals generally have some degree of agency: the freedom or ability to exert one's voice and to resist power relations in some way (discussed further in Chapter 2 and later chapters). As Tulloch (2010) suggests through her concept of "style narratives," fashioning the body is one of the ways individuals can represent their momentary sense of who they are becoming. These representations through style allow individuals to combine, or move across, their subject positions with a sense of self-awareness and self-expression: processes of *subjectivity*—the ongoing, changing sense of exploring "who I am" and "who I am becoming."

The metaphor of a Möbius strip, introduced in Figure 1.1, helps to visualize the ways in which multiple subject positions (structure) and subjectivity (agency) become inseparable in the overall process of subject formation through style-fashion-dress. Similarly, processes of imitating others (belonging) and differentiating from others (demarkating) become inseparable; we do both at once. Self-other relations undergird and propel fashion change. As introduced earlier in this chapter, sociologist Georg Simmel (1904) described the dynamic interplay between identifying with and differentiating from others as the very engine of fashion:

Thus fashion represents nothing more than one of the many forms of life by the aid of which we seek to combine in uniform spheres of activity the tendency towards social equalization with the desire for individual differentiation and change . . . . Union and segregation are the two fundamental functions which are here inseparably united . . . . [I]n addition to the element of imitation the element of demarcation constitutes an important factor of fashion . . . . Two social tendencies are essential to the establishment of fashion, namely, the need of union on the one hand and the need of isolation on the other. Should one of these be absent, fashion will not be formed—its sway will abruptly end. (Simmel 1904)

Simmel (1904) argues that so long as imitation (the need of union or similarity) and demarcation (the need for differentiation) both occur, the game of fashion “goes merrily on.” So, subjects, like fashion, are continually in the process of formation and change in relation to other subjects. Fashion theory highlights the interplay between these processes, beginning with both/and thinking and moving further toward more complex, multidimensional models such as intersectionality, to be discussed in Chapter 2. It spotlights, in cultural studies terms, the idea of articulation, which as we have seen involves making connections between, bridging, and joining different ideas, as well as expressing new concepts, in the process of doing so. In particular, consumer thinking about “who I am in my appearance style” is often more difficult to put into words than is “who I am not” or “who I don’t want to look like” (Freitas et al. 1997).

Similarly, in his book *Fashion as Communication*, Malcolm Barnard (2002) analyzed the roots of the word *fashion* and found it relates back to the Latin word *factio* (*factionem*), which means more than making and doing, as we have seen. *Factio* is also related to the word “faction,” which has political implications and suggests how fashion becomes a process of differentiating groups of individuals from one another. By the early seventeenth century, “faction” implied the use of “selfish or mischievous ends or scrupulous methods,” and “fashion had taken on a connotation of contrivance or management” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2010).

Fashion, it seems, plays a role in the ongoing creation, revision, and blurring of “borderlines” between self and other. But it also challenges these borderlines. Whereas Simmel’s (1904) analysis primarily focused on how fashion continually challenges borderlines between social classes, it also does so through other subject positions (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age).

The borderlines that shape subjectivities require ongoing construction and maintenance (Freitas et al. 1997). Borderlines, it turns out, are tenuous, fragile, and elastic; they require ongoing negotiation. The work of subject formation reflects this ongoing negotiation, within cultural discourses that supply limits to personal agency.

## REGULATION

Subject formation is not without its limits. It does not go unchecked. As we have seen, subject positioning, one component of subject formation, includes historical and cultural discourses that may prescribe options for fashion subjectivity (i.e., expression through style). Yet it is often the case that social or legal processes regulate the course of subject formation, as well. The regulation of subject formation may be formal (e.g., labor laws, dress codes, uniforms) or informal (e.g., social pressures, cultural discourses, self-regulating tendencies, and the integration of all of these), but in either case, they can be personally devastating, socially contested, or culturally revealing.

Regulation, whether formal or informal, entails the concept of bringing the production, distribution, and consumption of clothing “under control” and reducing these processes to “adjustments” according to “some principle, standard, or norm” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2010). Principles, standards, and norms are themselves embedded in cultural discourses.

Regulation related to production includes protections for and rights of garment workers, legal agreements regarding world trade, policies that protect the environment and consumer safety, and labeling issues that need to be stitched into the clothes themselves (for example, fiber content, care instructions, the country of origin). Regulations in terms of consumption may involve restrictions (proscriptions: what *not* to wear), prescriptions (what one has to wear, such as a uniform), or ambiguous norms about what to wear or what not to wear.

Individuals often find themselves regulated by multiple cultural discourses that might contradict one another. In recent years, there have been conflicts, for example, between religious discourse and sports discourse regarding appropriate dress. Muslim female athletes wearing *hijab* (i.e., covering their hair with a headscarf) have been prevented from participating in international soccer competitions, for example. The governing body, FIFA (the international football association) prevented the Iranian women’s team from competing in a

2011 qualifying round for the 2012 Olympics, because they wore hijab. Since the Iranian Revolution in the 1970s, Iranian women have been required by law to cover their hair, necks, arms, and legs according to the Iranian nation-state's conservative interpretation of Shiite Islamic tenets of modest dress (Erdbrink 2011). (Not all Muslims interpret "modest dress" in this way. Interpretations vary by nation, community, and individual.) The Iranian female athletes were literally subjected to two different cultural discourses (i.e., Iranian national dress codes and international soccer dress codes), with little space for negotiation. The women's gender and national (and associated religious) subject positions conflicted with the sports-related regulations that also discipline bodies, but in different ways. In July 2012, FIFA overturned its decision about hijab, but it was too late for the Iranian team to compete. Certainly the Iranian soccer women have a sense of agency, but in the context of this confrontation, they had little opportunity to exercise it and were shut down from the prospect of competing at the 2012 Olympics in London (Reuters 2012).

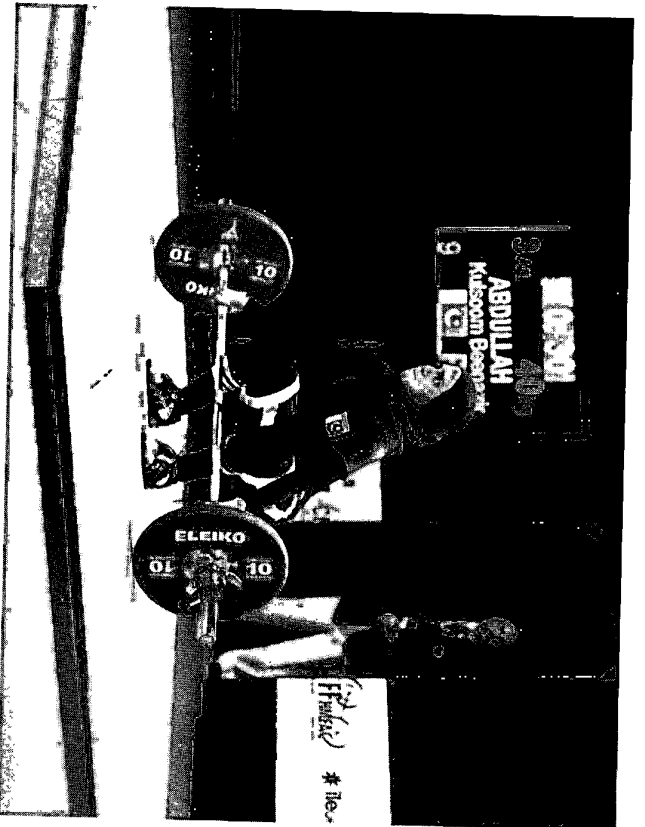
In the United States, a similar conflict between religious and sports-regulatory standards of dress emerged in the case of Kulsom Abdullah, a thirty-five-year-old Muslim female weightlifter with a PhD in electrical computer engineering from Georgia Tech. While cross-training for taekwondo (the Korean martial art), in which she acquired a black belt, Abdullah became enamored with general power weightlifting. After she finished graduate school, she began to train at a gym that taught Olympic weightlifting (not just for Olympic competitors but a sport with its own system of competition). She qualified for a USA national competition, the American Open, in 2010. However, the USA Weightlifting Federation would not allow her to compete unless she wore the standard uniform (a tight-fitting singlet); she was not allowed to cover her arms, legs, or head. She communicated with them in hopes of competing at the next U.S. competition in Iowa in July 2011, but they again refused, indicating that they followed the regulations of the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF). The IWF expressed concern that the judges would not be able to see if her elbows and knees were "properly locked" if they were covered with clothing. Abdullah received a great deal of support in her cause online and from the Council for American-Islam Relations, which issued a press release regarding her dilemma and also contacted the U.S. Olympic Committee, whose international relations director also had ties to the IWF. The IWF agreed to consider modifying its uniform requirements.

Abdullah developed a highly technical PowerPoint presentation, in which she documented how elbows and knees could be covered and yet still allow IWF judges to determine if they were properly locked according to the sports rules for competition. She proposed a modification of the regulations to enable the wearing of a unitard under a looser-fitting singlet, along with a headscarf. As a result of her compelling argument and evidence, the IWF agreed to modify its regulations to accommodate Abdullah's proposed standards.

The IWF announced its ruling just two weeks before the USA Nationals in Iowa in July 2011. Elise Beisecker, a PhD student at Georgia Tech, creatively and quickly fashioned a singlet for Abdullah to wear. She wore the singlet over a unitard that covered her arms and legs, along with her headscarf. Following that competition, Abdullah continued to work on the development of her competitive wardrobe, which can be analyzed via the circuit of style-fashion-dress presented in Figure 1.3. She characterized this process as "a combination of random purchases" in an e-mail to me (February 11, 2012). Let's explore the mixing and matching—the articulation—required to put a "uniform" together in greater depth through the circuit of style-fashion-dress. However, before doing so, let's consider her subjectivity—her agency, which cuts across subject positions and intersects them in meaningful ways through the looks she puts together to navigate, negotiate, and interpellate their interplay with the circuit of style-fashion-dress. In particular, she challenges regulations in the circuit that do not mesh with her subject formation, which can be conceptualized as a Möbius strip of subjectivity and subject positions. Figure 1.5 articulates Abdullah's subject formation through her athletic achievement, her faith, and her style-fashion-dress.

Abdullah negotiates her various subject positions and articulates her subjectivity through her website, which allows her to express her subjectivity in words, as well as through images. As she says on her website, "I am an American who happens to also be Muslim and female . . . I want to be able to compete and follow my faith at the same time" (Abdullah 2011). She wants both/and opportunities; this is her subjectivity, which moves across diverse cultural discourses and subject positions. These subject positions include not only gender and her role as an athlete, but also nation (American), ethnicity (Pakistani American), religion (Muslim), education (doctoral degree in computer engineering), and age (thirty-five years). Through her research on uniform solutions, she navigates between her interpretation of her faith's standards of female modesty, her sport, and other subject positions and cultural discourses. Referring back to the circuit of style-fashion-dress in Figure 1.3, we can move through the various processes in the circuit and analyze their interplay. Abdullah successfully challenges the regulation of her weightlifting attire through her subject formation: the ongoing interplay between her overlapping subject positions (e.g., gender, religion, ethnicity) and her subjectivity as a weightlifter, engineer, blogger, and activist who seeks to expand athletic opportunities for Muslim women. In a speech she delivered at the U.S. State Department, for example, Abdullah talks about "the power of people—individuals—to bring about change" (state.gov/secretary/m/2011/09/171860.htm). She expresses her agency and ability to negotiate conflicting cultural discourses through her style-fashion-dress.

Other processes in the circuit of style-fashion-dress include the production, distribution, and consumption of Abdullah's clothing. She shares much of this



**Figure 1.5** Kulsoom Abdullah wears attire that meets the modified clothing regulations for Olympic weightlifting: a custom-made green singlet fashioned by designer Stephanie Aylworth, worn over a long-sleeved unitard purchased from Capezio, a dancewear brand; together with striped socks from American Apparel and a headscarf. Courtesy of Kulsoom Abdullah. Photographed by Irfan Butt of the Pakistan Weightlifting Federation at the 2011 World Weightlifting Championships at Disneyland Paris.

information on her blog. After the IWF amended the uniform regulations, Stephanie Aylworth, a clothing designer in Georgia, began to custom-make singlets with short sleeves, reaching to Abdullah's knees. Abdullah is also a consumer of long-sleeved unitards from Capezio (a dancewear brand available online) and striped socks from American Apparel (also distributed online as well as through stores). Abdullah wears her headscarf, her custom-made singlet over a unitard, and striped socks, as shown in Figure 1.5.

In the American Open competition in 2011, Abdullah wore a full-body unitard and singlet (in black, maroon, and a dull gold) redesigned by Aylworth. In these scenarios, processes of production, distribution, and consumption are clearly intertwined, with direct input and distribution between producer (Aylworth) and consumer (Abdullah).

For the Worldwide Weightlifting Championships at Disneyland Paris in 2011, Abdullah sports a full-body unitard and singlet in green because she is representing Pakistan; Aylworth sews a patch with flag insignia onto the singlet.

Another supplier of clothing to Abdullah is fringigi Sportswear (fringigi.com), based in Botswana. Fringigi produces sportswear for Muslim women. Their website indicates the following:

We're not just about covering your body. We are well past that. Just like you are. We are about sports and your athletic experience. Just like you.

Abdullah consumes warm up suits and headscarves from fringigi, which distributes active sportswear to Muslim female athletes throughout Africa and the rest of the world. Their distribution system involves online marketing and mail delivery. As the fashion anthropologist Emma Tarlo (2010) notes in her book, *Visibly Muslim*, the production, distribution, and consumption of clothing for Muslim women is a transnational business and community that involves a great deal of communication: blog and e-mail interactions, as well as marketing.

As we can see, the relationship among all of the processes in Figure 1.3 is circuitous. The interaction between regulation and subject formation comes to light in Abdullah's successful articulation of an alternative form of style-fashion-dress, which now meets her sport's regulations and initiates new relations among production, distribution, and consumption. Keeping the context of the circuit of style-fashion-dress in mind, Chapter 2 delves more deeply into the process of subject formation by pursuing the concept of intersectionality as the interplay among subject positions.