

Couture

Behind the Trend: THE BIG PICTURE

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a weekly column about stumbling through fashion's trends and understanding why they exist.

I do not fit within the confines of the accepted definition of fashionable. I don't set trends, and I often choose to ignore them. In fact I have perpetuated quite a few bad trends myself. For example, when I was younger, I always made sure the bands on my braces matched my outfit.

This ensured that the frequency of my orthodontist appointments relied on how often my mom wrote new, big events on our calendar. I picked out my outfits way in advance to know what color bands would match it.

And, of course, if I didn't have anything coming up, I stuck with Carolina Blue. In my opinion the Tar Heels are always in fashion. But you don't have to be fashionable to understand the economics of the industry.

People adopt trends because they believe it makes them more fashionable. However, I think trends hurt the fashion industry because they threaten its foundations in creativity. Because we choose to focus a study of fashion on the trends we perpetuate, we have lost a sense of what truly makes the industry so creative and influential: the people behind the trends.

All the people in the fashion industry are entrepreneurs in their own right, and if we focus our study of the industry on their thinking and achievements, we will get the most out of it. We cannot allow ourselves to define the fashion industry along of the lines of how clothes make the people; we must focus on how people make the clothes.

Clothes are nothing more than a material expression of the ways in which individuals provide creative solutions to the problems they face. In ancient Greece athletes often competed in the nude. This was because athletics were seen as a way for individuals to highlight physical perfection through competition and performance. Clothing was nothing more than an object that would inhibit strength, and it often was introduced as a means for certain people to hide their "deformities."

We have been hardwired to doubt ourselves, and trends take advantage of that. Trends occur in every market, but especially in fashion because they are visually pleasing and because everyone has to wear clothes.

The real world corrupts our image of clothing. Advertising plays off the fact that every characteristic you have could be a flaw, and provides us with the idea that trendy clothes can distract from these supposed imperfections. This disproportionately affects girls, as we spend way too much time obsessing over the way we are physically perceived by others.

The idea that clothing provides us with something to hide behind explains why we have come to think of it as a means of making us more beautiful. Many people think if they adopt current fashion trends, they will

be seen as more attractive because clothes provide us with the visible means to make ourselves feel better and trick ourselves into ignoring whatever we define as our flaws.

A trend's popularity is directly proportional to the influence it has over its followers. The economics of trend-setting involves gaining an understanding of how fashion serves to provide the world with a physical display of "coolness" in order to amass a dedicated support base and extend its influence. Some trends have the power to create empires — ranging from that of the social-savvy Kardashian superstars to that of the metaphorical "god of the preps," Lilly Pulitzer.

The most influential people in fashion are those who understand just how persuasive brands can be, and who use them to create patterns of positive change in the world. It's all about the economics of convincing people to feel good about themselves.

Each week I'll share my personal research and anecdote-based explorations of the ins and outs of the fashion industry in an attempt to help people who – like myself – may have worn gauchos until 10th grade and still don't know how to use a hair straightener, to understand fashion in some real way.

WEEKLY COLUMN EXAMPLE

Behind the Trend: How Fashion "Made Fetch Happen"

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Gretchen Wieners can die in peace now that "fetch" has happened — but it wasn't thanks to her. The fashion industry met with our generation's love of irony at the perfect intersection to capitalize on the Mean Girl's catchphrase.

With the recent influx of new social media platforms like Twitter, Vine and Instagram, the expansion of teenage colloquialisms and ideologies has spread further and wider than ever before.

For this reason, millennials have quickly created a language that focuses more on humor than understanding, thus ensuring that the most influential people in our society are those who understand social media and perpetuate wants and needs of the youthful constituency.

Consider Gretchen Wieners in *Mean Girls* — the girl who was always trying to "make fetch happen." The movie's widespread success made it happen, and on an incredibly profitable scale.

In an article in *Entertainment Weekly*, Lacey Chabert, who played Gretchen, said that she receives **thousands of tweets** from fans everyday about the line and is happy that the film has been so well received.

Although *Mean Girls* has a lot of popular lines, ranging from "You go, Glen Coco" to "On Wednesdays we wear pink," Chabert's line has seen the most extended coverage, even being quoted by the White House in a recent tweet:

Bo, stop trying to make fetch happen. pic.twitter.com/Ez6hWGFpFc
— The White House (@WhiteHouse) August 13, 2013

The line has also shot off profits of related apparel since the movie was released in 2004. However, sticking with one of the most popular lines from the film, the clothing companies retained the profits, and there was “none for Gretchen Wieners.”

Chabert's net worth taps out at a mere [\\$3 million](#) while the *Mean Girls* movie grossed [\\$129 million](#) at its original opening alone. This original estimate does not include all the extra profits from apparel, spin offs like *Mean Girls 2* or the upcoming *Mean Girls* Broadway musical.

Phrases with visibility are bound to make a splash as long as they aren't too blatant or confrontational. This innocent phrase has helped elevate *Mean Girls* to its relevant position today, and ensures the profitability of future spinoffs and new apparel.

There are thousands of [“so fetch” shirts on Etsy](#) alone, and larger companies like Target and Walmart sell knockoff apparel as well. Stella & Bow, a jewelry store based in Los Angeles, even created a Mean Girls jewelry line to celebrate the movie's [10th anniversary in April 2014](#).

Stella & Bow's [Burn Book Collection](#) includes necklaces, bracelets and hair clips all featuring some of the movie's most memorable lines and ranging from [\\$23 to \\$110](#). The collection includes one necklace and two bracelets based off Gretchen's famous catch phrase.

Celebrity endorsements of the film also help to expand the brand's profitability, making quoting *Mean Girls* or wearing a “so fetch” shirt incredibly trendy. For example, Jennifer Lawrence mentioned the movie in her [acceptance speech](#) at the People's Choice Awards in 2013.

Just as Lawrence said that she wished she could give all her fans a part of the award, all the actors in *Mean Girls* should share the limelight, profits and relevance that the film has achieved. Now *that* would be “so fetch.”