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Fur: has a new generation shrugged off the old stigma?

New statistics from the International Fur Federation suggest a once-reviled industry is thriving. Hannah Betts explores the changing social attitudes to fur

By [Hannah Betts](#)

7:05AM GMT 27 Mar 2015

The fur industry, a phrase that used to have to be uttered sotto voce, has released figures to demonstrate that, far from being an object of collective scorn, fur is now positively a la mode. Not that this should come as much of a surprise.

A celebrity is hardly a celebrity these days without showing some (borrowed) skin, be it Rihanna, Rita Ora or the **Middleton** sisters, Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez, or perennial pelt wearer **Kate Moss**.

Kim Kardashian, her husband Kanye West, and even their toddler wallow in the stuff. **One-year-old North West occupied the front row** in what was believed to be a \$3,500 (£2,300) crystal fox fur coat during February's New York fashion week.

On last year's British catwalks, more than 60% of shows featured fur, while in America the figure was over 70%. Where once fur was confined to a few picketed outlets, today it can be found from haute couture to the high street. Small wonder demand has been pushed into overdrive.

The new statistics come from the International Fur Federation (IFF), the industry's global trade body, and are the first to show a breakdown of different pelts.

The figures are somewhat mind-boggling, revealing, for example, that, in 2013 to 2014, 87.2 million mink pelts were produced around the globe, worth a total of £2.2bn. Research by the IFF last year valued the global trade at more than £26bn. Fur, it would appear, is no longer a **controversial anachronism**, but a flourishing contemporary enterprise.

"This is almost the golden age in fur," Charles Ross of Saga Furs has remarked. What is new in all this is that it is no longer old stalwarts such as octogenarian Karl Lagerfeld's Fendi leading the charge, but younger, edgier creatives. Danish designer

Christian Helmer, 29, tells me: “This feeling of youth and vibrancy around fur has been helped along by the number of street photographers helping to share the message.

Photos of fur adorn social media sites more than ever, which is also changing the perception of how to wear it. No longer is it the clichéd brown mink coat associated with an older consumer.

“For me, what’s so fantastic about fur is how multi-dimensional it is. It’s very 3D compared to cotton, allowing you to combine it with so many other fabrics. Fur is more than a raw material – it’s a texture. And because such incredible strides have been made on the welfare front, young designers now have complete freedom to experiment.”

The CEO of the International Fur Federation is former **Liberal Democrat** MP Mark Oaten, which itself feels terribly new broom (a liberal fur advocate, no less!). Oaten observes: “There’s been a real sea change. Fur is no longer seen as a controversial, exclusive product, but something that is part of the regular fashion mix. And we certainly find the younger generation have less of an issue with fur than that of the 1980s.”

Here in Britain, members of the British Fur Trade Association (BFTA) reported a 20% increase in sales last year. Chief executive Mike Moser agrees that growth is being driven as much by younger generations as foreign millionaires. “It’s hot stuff because fur is being used in a really fun way in fashion now,” he says. “The BFTA runs a competition for students using fur and this year we’ve seen a 50% increase in the number taking part. They just want to use fur in their designs.”

This certainly feels radical. When I was a teenager in the Eighties, fur was the plush symbol of the villainy of Dynasty’s Alexis Colby, but was otherwise left to languish in our grandmothers’ wardrobes. And it was a prerequisite for supermodels to declare they would rather go naked than sport pelts. I was once spat on while clad in what was very obviously teddy bear. Fur was a kneejerk emotional issue, its antagonists frothingly red in tooth and claw.

However, times change and just as today’s youth no longer cluster tribally around political parties, so they appear less swayed by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) hysteria. When I ask a clutch of teens and twentysomethings their thoughts, the response is a collective shrug. “I wear leather. How is fur different?” asks one. “I read that it’s more ecologically sound than fake fur,” muses another.

A couple point approvingly to Lady Gaga’s decision in 2012 to stand up and be counted on the issue, when she defended her right to don animal, asking the PETA-posse: “I respect

your views, please respect mine.” A 19-year-old fashion student provides the final statement on the subject: “My Mum thinks it’s wrong, but she’s so old-fashioned. I really like it.” And there we have it: fur - soft and warm, yet officially cool.