Online Case Study

# Chapter 7: The self and personality

## The decadence of Jean-Paul Gaultier

Jean-Paul Gaultier was born in Val de Marne, France, but was brought up in Paris. His grandmother introduced him to the world of fashion, but he never had any formal training: he got his start in fashion by sending sketches to leading fashion houses, eventually being hired by Pierre Cardin when he was only 18.

Gaultier has always been a controversial, non-conforming figure in the fashion industry. His playful, irreverent style has caught the attention of film producers and celebrities as well as the general public: he designed the famous (or infamous) cone bra worn by Madonna, and designed the costumes for many films including *The Fifth Element*, *Bad Education*, *Kika* and *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover.* He pioneered the return of the kilt to fashion, getting his inspiration from the punk era, and has experimented with unisex fashions. His love of the avant-garde has not harmed his career: apart from his own labels, he was artistic and creative director of Hermès from 2003 to 2010, and Hermès now owns a substantial chunk of Gaultier’s own company.

He has not confined himself to fashion design, either. From 1993 to 1997 he co-hosted the anarchic, late-night, magazine-style TV show *Eurotrash* (showcasing a comical review of unusual and quite often erotic topics mainly from Western and Central Europe) with Antoine de Caunes, and he released a record in 1988 entitled ‘How to Do That’. In recent years he has been at the forefront of the perfume industry, pioneering perfumes for men and even a unisex perfume. Perhaps surprisingly, his perfumes for men have been more successful than those for women: Le Mâle, his flagship male perfume, was the number-one male perfume in Europe in 2008, with strong sales in the USA and Australia as well, while his women’s perfume Fragile was discontinued due to poor sales. The distinctive bottles, shaped like human torsos, may have helped a great deal in the success of the products. Some research indicates that the bulk of male perfume and aftershave is actually bought by women, as gifts for their husbands and boyfriends. This may also apply to women’s fragrances, of course.

He is also the only fashion designer to have been appointed as a judge for the Cannes Film Festival, and his fashion designs have been exhibited in art galleries worldwide. His talent for self-publicity has led to a documentary about his life.

Gaultier has also been controversial in his use of models. He frequently uses models who do not fit the standard fashion-model image: older men, full-figured women, heavily tattooed or pierced models, and even transgender models have appeared on his catwalks. This has caused him both criticism and acclaim, the former from the fashion industry who see it as a gimmick, the latter from the public who see it as a breakthrough for ‘normal’ people.

In the world of fashion there are many famous names, yet few famous faces. Pierre Cardin, Christian Dior and Hardy Amies are familiar names yet their faces are largely unknown. Jean Paul Gaultier has one of the best-known faces in fashion, yet people constantly find themselves surprised when they see his designs or film credits. He has had a hugely successful career, mainly from breaking the mould: being the *enfant terrible* of French fashion might have earned him criticism at times, but it has also earned him a great deal of recognition and, of course, money. During the 2015 Spring/Summer Collection Show, Gaultier announced to the world that he was bringing to an end his ready-to-wear range of labels in order to concentrate on haute couture.

## Questions

1. How might the use of atypical models have helped Gaultier’s success?

2. Why might the torso-shaped bottles have been so successful?

3. Why do women buy perfume for men?

4. What needs are served by buying fashion items?

5. What effect might his appearances on *Eurotrash* have had on his customers?