Chancellor's Honors Program Projects

Supervised Undergraduate Student Research and Creative Work

5-2011

Defining American Casual: An Examination of the American Woman's Steady Shift toward Informal Attire at Work and on the Streets

Victoria Elizabeth Smith
torielein@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj

Part of the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Defining American Casual

An Examination of the American Woman's Steady Shift toward Informal Attire at Work and on the Streets

Victoria E. Smith

Senior Thesis, Anthropology

The Chancellor's Honors Program

The University of Tennessee

Spring 2011

Table of Contents

Introduction

Culture change often produces a rippling effect that has a profound impact on society. Over the past century, it is undeniable that the American people have undergone a dramatic transformation. Events like the Women's Suffrage Movement of the early 20th century, the era of rationing and intense patriotism that defined World War II, and the materialistic age of the 1980's yuppie, have all in some way contributed to the characteristics that make up American culture as we recognize it today.

In response to recent societal changes, researchers across multiple disciplines have conducted countless studies in attempts to determine what impact ideological and behavioral shifts among Americans have had on a variety of issues. Such research has looked at everything from family values to nutrition and health to the attention spans of children in the modern day. One topic that seems to be underrated by many scholars, however, is that of dress and the effects that culture change have had on our everyday ritual of body adornment.

As much as we may wish otherwise, our appearance continues to play a very important role in the way the world views us. Austrian psychologist Fritz Heider once wrote that humans are naïve social psychologists in that we attempt to use the appearance and actions of others in order to both interpret and explain their current behavior and to also predict their future actions (Kaiser 1997). Clothing and body adornment obviously play a key role in this process. This ultimately supports the assertion that our clothing choices are a critical component when it comes to leaving a desired impression on others.

Despite the fact that dress is so central to everyday interpersonal interactions, America seems to be undergoing a gradual but potentially dramatic cultural change in terms of the clothing its citizens choose to pull from their closets each day. While it cannot be denied that clothing styles are constantly evolving and undergo cyclical trends, or revivals, a recognizable shift has been underway in the past few decades towards more "comfortable" styles. This stands in stark contrast to historical choices in attire which often placed women in particular in clothing meant to distort the female body into very unnatural, exaggerated shapes. This historical trend lasted into the 20th century with women wearing such uncomfortable items as the hobble skirt in

the 1910s and the corset, which remained popular into the early 1920s. Now, items like jeans, flip-flops, and active wear, which once were reserved for leisure purposes only, are ubiquitous among America's youth, and they are even finding their way into church services and cubicles around the country.

Gaining insight into the processes currently propelling the casual wear trend forward will help us to better understand shifts in social values over time. The rapidity in which some items of clothing which were once deemed as inappropriate in any context (e.g. women wearing pants/jeans) have become staple pieces is likely due to underlying shifts in American ideology that have undergone congruent transformations during the past century. Thus, this literature-based thesis will study the changes that have occurred in American women's clothing in both business and informal contexts in recent history, with special attention paid to the rise of casual wear's prevalence in American society. Information will be derived from a variety of resources, including scholarly articles and books, popular magazine articles, and primary sources. Through my research, I hope to draw useful conclusions that will help myself and others better understand the reasons for the new American affinity with casual clothes. In the process, I feel that this thesis will ultimately provide insightful conclusions regarding America's overall ideological transformation in recent history.

Fashion trends tell the story of our nation. Hemlines have traditionally mimicked the economic atmosphere of the time, rising during times of prosperity and falling during financial downturns (Kroeber 1919). Likewise, subdued looks are generally adopted during periods of conservation while flashy ensembles characterize eras of affluence. Therefore, I believe that it is essential that the increasingly informal nature of American clothing receive a critical examination in an effort to seek out its origins and to postulate what this change may suggest about modern American society.

Part I

Of Crinolines, Corsets, and Casual Wear: American Women's Fashions from 1800 to the Present Day

Before we can begin to describe modern-day fashion as a dramatic break from that of previous generations, it is imperative that we first turn our attention to the trends popular in the past in order to provide a context for comparison in the present. The following section will focus on the fashions of Western society in general, and the American woman in particular, from the beginning of the 19th century up to the modern day. This time frame has been chosen because it is considered a major ideological turning point in history, with clothing similarly beginning its steady transition from ostentatious garments meant to signify status and wealth to the more functional (and oftentimes comfort-centric) pieces that are worn today. The purpose of this chapter is not to be totally all encompassing, but rather to provide snapshots of popular daytime dress at various points over the past two hundred years. Thus, the styles discussed will be those that the majority of individuals strove to emulate at any particular time, and they can also be thought of as the defining looks, or the ideals, of the day.

This chapter is arranged in multiple sections devoted to designated time periods and their respective trends. The first section is large in breadth and briefly introduces the fashion changes of the 19th century up through the end of the 1910s. Once the 1920s are reached, however, due to societal changes and technological innovations, clothing styles began to develop shorter lifespans, with new fashions coming into vogue and then falling back out again at a much more accelerate pace than had ever been witnessed before. Therefore, from the 1920s and onward, each decade will receive its own section that will articulate the fashions confined only within that era.

THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

At the beginning of the 19th century, the neoclassical movement was still gripping Western thought and clothing was similarly drawing inspiration from ancient Greece and Rome. Centuries after their likenesses were carved into stone, the classical beauties depicted in Greek and Roman sculptures, oftentimes clad in simple tunics emphasizing vertical lines,[1] were to serve

as muses once again – this time the women, now forever immortalized, would help to inspire new shapes and fits in early 19th century women's clothing. Thus, for roughly two decades, America's wealthier women of the East indulged in the classically-inspired Empire-style dress: a design made of very soft, sheer, lightweight materials like muslin and silk that featured a columnar skirt, puffed sleeves, and waistline that rested just under the bust.[2] The extensive use of muslin, silk, and similar materials proved to be problematic for the 19th century woman, however. Not only were these gauzy fabrics unable to provide much warmth to the wearer, but they also presented potential fire-hazards during a time when open grates were the only source of warmth and candles for

Figure 1. *Portrait of Henriette de Verniac* **by Jacques-Louis David, 1799. In this painting, Mme. De Verniac wears the empire-waist style dress popular in the early 19th century (Bordes, p. 154).**

domestic light.[3] One, admittedly morbid, contemporary satirist "fond of statistics… calculated that in one year eighteen ladies caught fire and eighteen thousand caught cold."[4]

By the 1820s, the waistline had returned to its natural level, and women with narrow midsections became the ideal once again.[5] As both the shoulderlines and hemlines of women's dresses broadened, an hourglass silhouette thus overtook its columnar predecessor of the past two decades in popularity.[6] The introduction of the circular hoop skirt, also known as a crinoline, soon took the diameters of dresses to the extreme, however, and by the mid-19th century, these contraptions made of whalebone or lightweight steel widened skirts to such a state that they made it incredibly difficult for women to perform even day-to-day activities. The inhibiting hoop skirt was a fashion that seemed intent on emphasizing a woman's femininity as well as her physical helplessness.[7] Some hoops were actually so large that they had to be dropped from a hook on the ceiling onto the body because they were impossible to step into.[8] Other, more tragic

stories told of women aboard ships who were caught by strong gusts and swept off the decks to sea, their skirts acting as parachutes.[9]

In the mid-1800s, women who lived in the American West still tried to follow the trends of those dwelling in the East despite the vastly different lifestyles that separated the two. Crinolines proved to be even more problematic for frontier women than her Eastern sister as mud, winds, and the close-quarters of ranches and homesteads out West made freedom of movement quite difficult for hoop-skirted women.[10] Interestingly, wearing impractical Eastern fashions were highly discouraged on the long journey across the frontier for hoops not only took up a great deal of space in covered wagons, but women who continued to wear their fashionable crinolines while out on the trail risked being mistaken for prostitutes.[11] Pioneering women soon learned the importance of proper attire, and they quickly adopted sturdy boots, protective headwear (e.g. sunbonnets), and durable and functional clothing, all suitable for the homesteaders' new environments.[12]

Back in the East, the round hoop skirt was followed by the bustle. Dresses exhibiting this style were flat across the front and sides but lifted over a boned cage at the back.[13] When they

Figure 2. Silhouettes of both the hoop and bustle skirts, pictured at the left and right, respectively (McClellen, p. 199; Baker, p. 123).
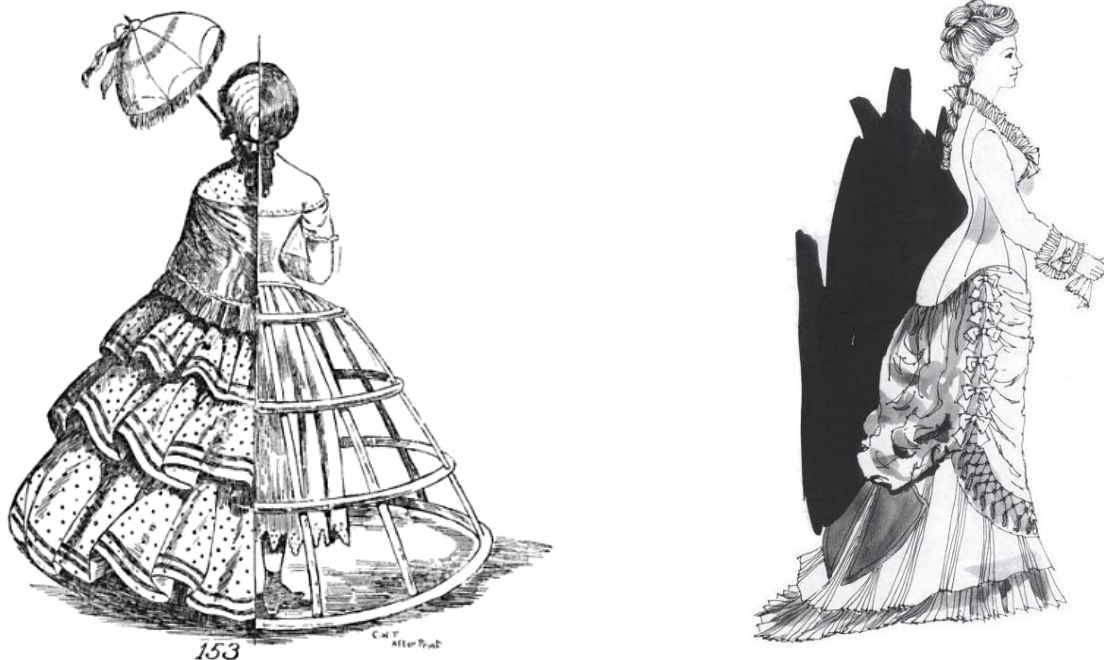
originally became fashionable, bustle skirts sat low and on the hips, with the skirt trailing over the behind; however they soon moved up to the waistline and were set squarely on the buttocks, consequently creating a perpendicular shelf on its wearer's frame and causing her to look as if she had four legs.[14] As for the rest of the body, waists were tightly boned with compressing corsets, and tiny midsections were looked upon most favorably. Textiles used to construct these garments were generally stiff and rigid, and they gave the apparel of the day a heavy feeling. Clothing during the mid to the latter half of the century was similarly decorated with ornamental embellishments like braiding and lace, and deep, rich, and intense colors stained the latest fabrics, a consequence of the recent discoveries of chemical aniline dyes.

Women in the West similarly embraced the bustle as it gained in popularity; however by the last two decades of the nineteenth century they had adopted a style peculiar to the frontier: the Mother Hubbard dress. Named for the nursery rhyme, this full-length utilitarian frock was shapeless in form and featured a square yoke with buttons or ties down its front.[15] The deviation from Eastern fashions in favor of this new style especially adapted to the harsher conditions of the frontier is largely owing to the perfecting of the sewing machine in 1846 which allowed women with at least modest sewing skills to construct their own garments at home. Thus, women began outfitting themselves and their families in practical, long-lasting clothing that would stand up to the West's more demanding environment.

The latter years of the Victorian Era brought with them a more sensible attitude toward clothing.[16] The constricting contraptions of decades before were dispensed with[1] in favor of the "Gibson" girl look. An image first conceived by artist Charles Dana Gibson, the Gibson girl ideal depicted a woman with a tiny waist and massive upswept hair who wore neat, tailored shirts and toe-length skirts.[17] She was the all-American beauty of the late 19th century, and her simple skirt and shirt would later serve as an inspiration for a modern-day American staple: the shirtdress. The last decades of the 19th century also saw increased participation of women in leisure-time activities like bicycling and tennis.[18] The bicycle especially necessitated special clothing for women, and they soon turned to bloomers as their garment of choice when cycling. Because of the ridicule they received from both men and the press for wearing these bifurcated garments in public, on their rides women often carried with them their skirts which they would

---

[1] This excludes the corset which had become a staple of every woman's wardrobe over the 19th century, viewed much in the same way by 18th century women as modern-day women think of their bras.

pull on over their bloomers as soon as they dismounted.[19] For other sports, women wore more traditional outfits comprised of jackets with full upper sleeves, blouses with assorted neckwear, full skirts, and jaunty hats.[20]

Figure 3. Cycling, riding, and golfing: three examples of leisurewear at the turn of the 20th century (Lee, Pp. 51, 222, 224).

With the turn of the 20th century came the "Belle Epoque," or the "Beautiful Time," to Paris, and with it came a heightened sense of sophistication and luxury in Western women's fashions.[21] Wealthy women of this era changed their outfits constantly, sometimes as often as six or seven times a day, with every function needing a specific costume.[22] An S-shape silhouette began to dominate the fashion scene, and women wore corsets that deliberately worked to push out the bosom and compress it into a smooth shape while minimizing the waist and emphasizing the buttocks. It was also during these early years of the 20th century that the ready-to-wear industry began to finally take root among female consumers who had long been resistant to the effort. Popular fashion magazines like *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* were informing their readers of the latest fashion trends, and this piqued interest in new, stylish apparel.[23] As waves of immigrants poured into the country, bringing ample labor for textile factories, American manufacturers began churning out new ready-to-wear fashions to meet growing demand with a fervor never before seen, with the industry growing exponentially as a result.

Figure 4. Suffragettes gathered at Long Beach, New York, in 1912 (Lee, p. 139).

Finally, the outbreak of World War I marked the first time that women abandoned their extravagant and constricting clothing for increasingly tailored looks, as they adopted simpler and more functional garments in order to better perform in factory positions left vacant by men who had gone to fight in the war.[24] By 1915, skirts had risen above the ankle and then, later, further to the mid-calf.[25] A somber mood fell over the country as visits to the wounded and the need to mourn the growing numbers of dead became more frequent, and accordingly, darker colors began to dominate WWI wardrobes.

Another important movement which influenced the progression towards less constricting fashion was the women's dress reform effort. This movement had campaigned throughout the 19th century for more sanitary, comfortable, and convenient clothing for women. Two of their primary complaints were found in the corset, which growing evidence was proving that it had negative, distorting impacts on the human form, and long skirts that trailed on the ground, picking up dust and disease as the wearer moved about. Although it did not have much success

throughout its span, the dress reform movement should rightfully be recognized as the first large-scale effort in America aimed at introducing society to the idea of liberating women from their constraining clothes,[2] a phenomenon which would finally be embraced in the 1920s.

Women of the nineteenth century wore the clothing assigned to their sex by society with few exceptions.[26] They suffered through the inconveniences that contraptions like the hoop and bustle skirts and the corset placed upon them in order to comply with the contemporary ideals of women as feminine, helpless creatures. As the following sections will show in increasing intensity with each subsequent decade, however, the 20th century would shortly stand in stark contrast to this mindset as women became more emboldened to assert their independence in part by freeing themselves from the clothing that had held them back from comfortably engaging in daily life for so long.

AND ALL THAT JAZZ: THE 1920s

As alluded to in the previous section, a clear shift in the customs of dressing is first seen in Western women's fashion during the 1920s. In the wake of WWI and the victories of the Women's Rights Movement, women – who had successfully shouldered the jobs left vacant by soldiers in the war and had finally gained the right of suffrage – were inspired to defiantly depart from the feminine silhouettes of the past and to take on a more masculine look to personify strengthening ideas of gender equality and independence. Corsets were abandoned, hair was bobbed, arms were bared, chests were compressed with the help of "flatteners", and by 1924,[27] women of all ages were striving to achieve a look now often described as one of youth, naivety, and boyishness. This was the age of the flapper, of the bright youth asserting her freedom through her clothing choices, and it did not

Figure 5. Two women dressed for the summertime in the 1920s (Lee, p. 209).

---

[2] The bloomers adopted for cycling wear were actually an invention of social reformer Amelia Bloomer – an avid supporter of dress reform. Introduced in 1851, Bloomer's prescription for appropriate women's wear was an outfit made up of a very short tunic and oriental trousers, dubbed the 'bloomer costume' by the press of the day. (Hall, 19)

take long for the rest of America to follow her lead.[28] It was during this time that the first major modifications in American dress began.

By the 1920s, most Americans owned closets largely consisting of ready-made clothing bought off the rack.[29] The fashions purchased by the average American woman in department stores and from mail-order catalogs often owed their shapes and designs to French couturiers who were gaining recognition on both sides of the Atlantic during this time. Of course, one of the most popular and recognizable figures that emerged from the 1920s was Gabrielle ("Coco") Chanel. Frequently thought of as the "first modern dressmaker," [30] Chanel brought innovative talent to the fashion world, boldly injecting traditionally masculine fabrics (think jersey) and clothing into women's daywear and even sparking a love affair in 1926 that continues to this day between women around the world and Chanel's celebrated LBD, or little black dress.[31] Jean Patou was another influential designer of this time. His clothing, characterized by clean lines and oftentimes aimed at catering to growing interests in outdoor life, represented the first designs of what today would be recognized as modern sportswear.[32]

Figure 6. Blues singer Bessie Smith (LIFE, p. 139).

The decade began with hemlines that were slowly ascending coupled with low waistlines slung about the hips – a look that had been introduced a year earlier in 1919. Besides a brief period spanning 1922 and 1923 during which time skirts actually lengthened, ever-shortening dresses soon became the trend of the decade, with hemlines reaching an unprecedented peak just below the knee in 1927.[33] Dresses themselves could be characterized as simple, loose fitting, and functional. Corsets were being abandoned for underwear consisting of either a girdle,

brassier[3], and panties or an all-in-one foundation piece substituting for the above three.[34] Also, the most fashionable styles during the 1920s were garments virtually free of fastenings, another revolutionary aspect of the day.[35] With the loose-fitting sheath dresses of the '20s came frocks that could simply be pulled over the head. No longer were women reliant on another person (especially not her husband!) to accomplish tasks as simple as donning their clothes for the day. To finish off their looks, women typically slipped their feet into Louis-heeled[4] shoes which featured pointed toes and medium-high, thick heels with a concave curve and outer taper at the bottom.[36]

Figure 7. A flapper displaying her concealed flask during the Prohibition era (LIFE, p. 324).

The cropped hairstyles of the 1920s young woman were another defining feature of the period. While long, flowing hair had previously been considered the epitome of feminine beauty, by the early 1920s, bobbed hair had become a craze indulged in by most young women.[37] To emphasize their new hairdos, the cloche became the hat of choice around the country. Designed to fit tightly around the head, these thin, usually felted hats that swept down to the eyes in front and to the neck in back were constructed in a way that all but required its wearer to sport a streamlined hairstyle underneath.

To go along with her new loose-fitting garments, the young 1920s woman also adopted behaviors that departed more and more from the constraining ideologies of what was considered "proper" conduct held by her foremothers. Now the modern woman indulged in smoking cigarettes and drinking cocktails; she used slang and drove her own car; and now she ostentatiously wore makeup.[38] An act which was never previously indulged in by "respectable" women, except perhaps a discreetly applied lip-salve or

---

[3] During the 1920s, brassieres were usually aimed at flattening the breasts. It was not until the mid- to late-20s that some bras which separated, lifted, and accentuated women's breasts began to be manufactured (Drowne and Huber 2004).

[4] A man of short stature, the French king Louis XIV was fond of wearing heels to increase his diminutive height. The Louis heel appropriately derives its name from the man who first inspired this particular shoe's look.

facial powder, by 1929 American women were spending $700 million a year on powder, lipstick, eyebrow pencils, eye shadow, nail polish and the like.[39] With this coupling of radical new clothing styles and manners of personal conduct, so was the pleasure-seeking Flapper persona born – an image of the rebellious young female that today is still one of the most recognizable symbols of the decadent and innovative Roaring '20s.

CRISIS SPARKS INGENUITY: THE 1930s

By 1929, women's styles were beginning to return to more conservative silhouettes. Hemlines were again dropping, the waistline was rising back to its natural level, and with the stock market crash of the same year that sent America into the economic turmoil that was the Great Depression, women were forced to echo this conservatism in dress in the way that they spent the money in their pocketbooks. Thus began an era plagued by devastation – a decade that began in economic turmoil and ended in war. Despite these difficulties, however, women utilized ingenuity in various ways to keep up appearances. Often left inspired by the ever-glamorous film stars who danced upon the silver screen and provided an escape from reality's troubles, women around the country ensured that, while some craftiness may at times be required, a sense of style could be maintained even in the worst of times.

In respect to designers and their influences on 1930s trends, the stand out character of the decade unquestionably was Madeleine Vionnet. In addition to popularizing the cowl and halter neck, it was Vionnet who first mastered the technique of crafting bias cut garments. Because her elegant dresses were cut along the grain of the fabric (or along the bias), the extra stretch in the material resulting from this method allowed for the fabric to be easily manipulated into graceful drapes and folds.[40] The result was clothing that not only shaped to the curves of the body and complemented the female figure but garments which were also free of fastenings. Vionnet's designs were smooth, flowing, and luxurious, and the style of her glamorous gowns was frequently replicated in the striking dresses that adorned the shapely frames of Old Hollywood's female stars.

In the 1930s, modern science was also developing new fabrics for designers to work with. Nylon, for example, was a product of the thirties.[41] In contrast to this, cotton was reestablished as a fashionable fabric largely through the efforts of Chanel and other designers in an attempt to

bring down the prices of eveningwear during the hard-pressed early 1930s.[42] An additional innovation of this time was the invention of the zipper, which was enthusiastically received by the fashion industry in the mid-thirties.[43]

Figure 8. One of Vionnet's draped designs (Baudot, Pp. 84-85).

As mentioned above, the 1930s ushered in new styles that highlighted a more womanly figure. Gone were the days of compressing and hiding one's curves, and in their place came styles that nipped at the waist and glided over the hips. As they grew longer and longer, eventually grazing the bottom of the calf, daywear skirts also became narrower, gradually flaring out from the body as they reached the hemline. Sleeves became full from the elbow to the wrist where they then tapered and usually cuffed or tied. Bosoms reappeared and shoulders began to broaden, oftentimes with the help of shoulder pads.[44] Colors were often dark and subdued in the early thirties; however, as the decade progressed, colorful clothes gained in popularity. Similarly, during the thirties patterns were introduced onto the market, with floral and abstract prints deemed most fashionable.[45] Women who could not afford the luxury of buying new clothes in

these trendy styles utilized their sewing skills and altered the clothes already in their closets by, for instance, adding lengthening bands of contrasting fabric to the hems of skirts or by simply patching up worn clothing rather than purchasing pricy new outfits.[46]

While up to this point Paris had always been the beacon of the fashion world, in the 1930s women increasingly began looking to the captivating stars of Hollywood for inspiration.[47] The backless dress quickly grew to fame of iconic proportions as filmmakers worked around laws of censorship that banned revealing dresses cut low in the front. Considered a "safe" area by these said laws, starlets'

Figure 9. Three girls dressed in mid-30s fashions (Buckley and Fawcett, p. 91).

backs were revealed in dramatic gowns, with audiences discovering the true nature of a seemingly simple dress once the actress turned her back to the camera.[48]

In a similar vein, during the 1930s, eveningwear became quite distinct from day clothes. In the past when the wealthy had dictated standard clothing styles, there was no real need for affluent women to wear practical clothes during the day and to reserve their more impractical styles for the evening; however, by the thirties, many women were leading active and productive lives outside of the home.[49] This necessitated simpler, shorter fashions for day wear, and consequently resulted in luxurious evening gowns that swept the floor being saved for the evening's outings.[50]

As far as accessories go, the tight economic nature of this era lead to an increased emphasis on supplementary pieces like belts and scarves which could quickly inject new life into old outfits.[51] Costume jewelry finally established its own niche in the market. Gloves were especially important during the thirties, and consumers carefully selected the appropriate pairs to complete their various ensembles. Hats were also virtually universal, and women around the country traded in their cloches for styles like the "Eugenie" of '31, which tilted forward and was

16

trimmed with plumes of flowers; the "back-of-the-pompadour" hat of '36-'37, which sat on the crown of the head; and the draped turban of the late thirties, among others.[52] Shoes also came in a variety of styles, with pumps being most popular for both day and evening.[53] Sandals, which could likewise be found in multiple styles including sling backed, high heeled, and open-toed, were frequently worn both with sundresses and at the beach.

It is also important to note that during the thirties, the popularity of sun tanning and engaging in physical activity was growing at exponential rates.[54] Thus, women's sportswear began to receive a great deal of attention. Designers faced the challenge of creating functional yet still fashionable pieces that could allow active women the freedom of movement they needed.[55] Sportswear consequently became shorter and more revealing as it began catering to a growing "fun-in-the-sun" mentality that underscored physical fitness.[56] Bathing suits likewise abandoned the old-fashioned over-skirts and shirts of earlier periods and developed into one or two-piece styles that offered maximum body exposure and were conducive to obtaining a satisfactory tan, yet were still conservative in cut compared to modern-day counterparts.[57] Furthermore, even if one was not actively engaging in sports, a new category of clothing emerged aimed at fashionable spectators, appropriately dubbed spectator-sports clothes.[58] One textbook published in 1937 that meant to teach high school girls about good sartorial taste recommends wearing linen or silk dresses with a jacket when watching summer sports and durable, tailored outfits that are suited to the weather for fall and winter games.[59] For example, regarding appropriate clothing at a football game, the author offers the following prescription (which may seem rather ridiculous and over-the-top to modern tastes):

> …A football outfit should be warm… An outfit which may get dirty has no place at this type of game when everybody is jumping up and down. Therefore, rough woolen suits and coats which may be fur-collared worn with sporty felt hats are always good. Remember that feet and hands will surely get cold, so wear warm gloves and hose. It will not hurt to add a pair of wool panties to your underwear list."[60]

The sobering events of the 1930s understandably fostered new stylistic tastes among women in America. As she grew out her cropped 1920s haircut and embraced her womanly figure, whether by choice or due to circumstance, a new mature woman surfaced from the

naivety of the twenties who stood poised, ready to take on the difficulties propagated by hard times. Despite (or perhaps because of) the troubles that confronted Americans during this time, a growing emphasis on simpler, leisurely pleasures like sunbathing and physical fitness was gaining momentum. With each woman who traded in her modest day dress for a short tennis skirt when at the courts for the day, or for a bathing suit while at the beach soaking up some sun, the fashion world inched ever nearer to the point when comfortable sportswear would become utterly ubiquitous and the ultra-feminine silhouettes of the past would come to be the exception.

Figure 10. Four women each dressed in a garment representing one of the four allies' flags following the WWII victory (Baudot, p. 131).

FIRST WAR AND THEN A NEW LOOK: THE 1940s

The Great Depression seemed like just a bad, distant memory by the end of the 1930s. In 1939, Parisian designers were again unveiling chic, extravagant creations for their seasonal collections.[61] That autumn, collections showed off day looks dominated by tweed suits that emphasized thin waists and showed off a-line skirts.[62] In eveningwear, excess fabric was everywhere: in puffed sleeves, sweeping skirts, and bustles. Corseted waists were even said to be returning to fashion after an absence of two decades.[63] But as the cloud of war descended upon Europe, these extravagances would quickly be curbed in not only Paris but also in the United States once the fashion world began to face pressure from what would prove to be one of its primary influences over the course of the next few years: government regulation. The war did offer a silver lining for American designers who had long sought credibility in a field dominated by the authority of Paris, however. Once Paris fell to the Nazis and communication between the city and clothing manufacturers in the US had been lost, for the first time in American history, the country began looking to, and having faith in, homegrown designers. Thus, the American fashion industry was born. With the introduction of

18

the Americans on the fashion scene followed by Dior's celebrated New Look in 1947, the forties proved to be quite an interesting decade in the history of 20th century women's wear.

As will be discussed in greater detail later in this section, the 1940s were at times a very challenging period for those in the fashion industry, but for American designers, it was a very ground-breaking one too. Two individuals stand out from the decade – one a well-known French couturier and one an American designer who has received much less attention over the years, but who is essential to this study nonetheless. The first is French designer Christian Dior. With his debut collection of February 1947, Dior instantly launched a trend that would later come to define the following decade's sartorial preferences. His elegant dresses showed off tiny waists, soft shoulders, developed busts, and full, swelling skirts padded in the hips, with the overall aesthetic dubbed the "New Look." American women were quick to embrace his designs, and in fact, during the fifties the House of Dior alone accounted for half of all Paris's couture exports to the United States.[64] In contrast to Dior stood American Claire McCardell. The "pioneer of American ready-to-wear,"[65] McCardell is frequently credited with spearheading the movement toward casual clothing. Fusing function with flair, she rejected the formality of French fashion and "laid the bedrock of today's sportswear,"[66] as Constance C.R. White, now editor-in-chief of *Essence* Magazine, once wrote in a *New York Times* tribute to this revolutionary. In the same article, modern designer Cynthia Rowley adds, "The No. 1 thing is that she took sportswear fabrics that were unexpected and made them into things that were part of every wardrobe, like denim for evening." She introduced the world to such laidback styles as the monastic and popover dresses and ballet flats for everyday wear,[67] and while her name may not be a recognizable one to most these days, McCardell's influences continue to live on in the casual, comfortable clothing of the American woman.

As mentioned above, prior to the start of World War II, the latest trends from Paris emphasized broader shoulders, higher bosoms, tiny waists, full skirts, and eye-catching bustles,[68] and like always, American manufacturers were happy to reproduce them in local factories. The United States had always had a strength in mass production, but despite the fact that its fashion industry was the third largest industry in the nation,[69] America had never before tried to challenge France as the source of style.[70] Rather, up to this point manufacturers had preferred to

simply interpret and/or copy the designs showcased on Parisian catwalks.[71] American designers labored under the names of manufacturers or of department stores and received virtually no individual recognition due to their lack of authority.[72] After Paris's fall in the June of 1940, however, the American fashion industry "found itself with advanced production technologies and promotional capabilities, but without design leadership."[73] Thus began a period that provided American dressmakers an opportunity to begin producing designs for the everyday woman of their home country – and finally gain recognition for their creations in the process. With the help of exposure through mediums like *The New York Times*, by the end of the war, talented American designers had been promoted to something resembling celebrity status. In 1945, America's fashion industry, unwilling to forfeit the successes it had gained during that four-year stretch sans French influences, stood on equal, but different, footing with Paris.[74]

Figure 11. American dirndl skirt printed with white V shapes and the Morse code signal for the letter V – dot-dot-dot-dash – both standing for 'victory,' c. 1942-45 (Walford, p. 78).

The American War Production Board began to impose rationing rules on clothing manufacturers just months after the United States entered into the conflict in December of 1941, and these regulations consequently had a great impact on what women wore during the war.[75]

Nylon, silk, cotton, wool, and leather were all needed to produce solders' uniforms and equipment, and therefore the fashion industry would have to produce garments within the boundaries set forth by the government.[76] In an effort to conserve fabric, women's skirts were to be no wider than 78 inches around and sleeves no more than 14 inches. Stylistic touches like ruffles, pleats, and extra pockets were prohibited and clothing dyes were scarce. Leather shoes, similarly, were limited to three pairs per person per year.[77] It is obvious then that the war necessitated simplified looks that typically consisted of knee-length skirts and unembellished jackets, all of which were oftentimes dark in color.[78] Regulations even dictated the amount of fabric that could be sold in stores as a unit, limiting this to two articles of clothing per ensemble.[79] This meant that additional matching pieces (like coats,

for example) could not be sold as part of the unit – but they could be bought individually. Thus, out of wartime constraints was born an American original: separates. Women now had the novel option of buying individual pieces which she could then mix and match within her closet to create multiple outfits.

Although the overall silhouette of the American woman remained relatively stagnant during the course of the war due to the stipulations placed upon manufacturers, stylistically, clothing and accessories were heavily influenced by military themes. Items and styles like short jackets, narrow skirts, wide shoulders, pantsuits, low-heeled shoes, and berets were extremely popular throughout the war.[80] The letter V and its Morse code signal, dot-dot-dot-dash, both standing for "victory" were everywhere and could be found printed and embroidered onto fabric or molded into pins and broaches [See Fig. 11].[81] Additionally, as women contributed to the war effort through work in the nation's factories, they adopted practical fashions like work boots, coveralls, overalls, pants, and jeans as unofficial uniforms for their daily shifts. [82] In spite of the masculine connotations associated with these items, they were deemed patriotic attire, and so American women wore them with pride.[83] Clothing styles returned to feminine skirts and dresses once the war was over, yet it became no longer uncommon to see trouser-wearing women in public.[84] WWII therefore serves as a major turning point in America's perception of pant-wearing women, although it would still be a few more decades before women in bifurcated clothing were fully accepted (and eventually embraced) by popular American society.

Figure 12. "New Look" by Christian Dior, 1947 (Kyoto, p. 517).

When Dior's New Look, as described above, was introduced in 1947, the excessive amounts of fabric used in the construction of his flowing dresses appealed to a sense of abundance that immediately struck a chord with a generation who had faced rationing and limitations for so long. In all actuality, Dior's design was not new at all as it drew heavily from the fashions of the 1910s and before.[85] Many others had also flirted

21

with the silhouette prior to the war, but the amount of fabric the look required had quickly been curbed by wartime fabric constraints. Dior's timing proved to be the critical factor in the equation of his overwhelming success.

American ready-to-wear manufactures adapted Dior's padded designs (originally made with Parisian waif models in mind) to American frames and preferences. The padding in the hips and bust was dispensed with while shoulder pads were sometimes added in an attempt to round out bodices and obtain the idealized hourglass shape on an average American figure.[86] The trend for the coming ten years was set, and these flattering and feminine dresses soon became the go-to outfit of the modern American housewife.

MORE CONSUMERISM, LESS COUTURE: THE 1950s

For many, the idea of the 1950s in America conjures up images of quiet middle-class suburbs, traditional family values, and gender-defined social roles. After two decades of turbulent times, men and women across the country were attracted to the idea of settling down to comfortable lives outside of the commotion of the cities. The desire for abundance – seen in the fashion world with the popularity of the New Look in the late 1940s – followed Americans into the fifties, with the decade quickly becoming one defined by mass consumerism. As much of a status symbol as the newest Frigidaire or glossy Thunderbird, Americans eagerly indulged in their clothing, following the newest trends the now booming ready-to-wear industry rolled out each year. After all, how could one keep up with the Joneses if she wasn't dressed the part?

The American fashion industry was growing ever-more independent during this time, but French designers still continued to wow the world with their innovative garments. Balenciaga, a Spanish-born designer based in France impressed all with his novel approach to dressing the female figure. A true master of his craft, Balenciaga's forte was in making clothes that were abstract in form. In 1951 he created the "semi-fitted" look, which showed space between the dress and the body and thus gave his garments a relaxed appeal.[87] His subsequent tunic and sack dresses further toyed with this idea of applying a surreal shape to women's bodies and the clothes that adorned them. Although American women clung dearly to their shapelier New Look dresses during the fifties, Balenciaga's designs provided an alternative to form-fitting garments.

The foundation laid by Balenciaga during the 1950s would soon help to inspire some of the sixties' most memorable crazes.

The overall tone of women's clothing in the 1950s was set by the sense of security and stability that society desperately sought during the decade. Americans were tired of hardships and doing without, and pop culture (think Beaver Cleaver and family) appropriately reflected a new longing for idyllic lives backed by conservative values, with the styles seen in the fashion world being no exception. In women's wear, silhouettes mimicked those of the late 1940s, but modifications in its execution were often added to inject some flair to an otherwise consistent aesthetic. As a whole, garments exhibited smooth, well-balanced lines that were clean-cut and elegant in character, but new seasons ushered in fresh trends like dolman sleeves, swing-back coats, and standaway collars. [88] The most fashionable skirts were at least mid-calf in length and they could be found in both full and narrow cuts. Furthermore, fitting with the contemporary mentality that celebrated orderliness, clothing regained the formality of previous generations in the sense that strict social rules governing the what, where, and when of context-appropriate dress were reinstated and vigorously adhered to by well-to-do women and their families.

Figure 13. 1950s casual daywear with hats and gloves (Steele, p. 38).

While the last statement is not to be understated, perhaps paradoxically it is also true that as America became more engaged in leisurely activities during the fifties, society was similarly growing more informal with each passing year.[89] French couture, the long-standing benchmark from which popular Western fashions had derived their inspirations, was fast fading from its previously incontestable levels of authority prior to WWII. American manufacturers, now armed with all the tools necessary to dictate their own trends, forged ahead on a path that was beginning

23

to drastically deviate from the recommendations offered up each year by Parisian houses of couture. For once, America was exporting *its* ideas to Europe, with separates and coordinates, for example, quickly diffusing in the fashion world.

Another American invention that perhaps seems considerably less worthy of admiration than the abovementioned was the "sweater girl" bra, more recognizable to modern ears when referred to by its alternative name, the cone bra, a la Madonna circa 1990. After some of Hollywood's more voluptuous stars were seen sporting this attention-grabbing undergarment in the latest films, sales of these conspicuous garments spiked as emboldened American women sought to replicate the look; however, just as soon as it began, the trend quickly waned in the latter half of the 1950s. Although it may provoke a few blushes when mentioned, the sweater girl bra is significant in that its eventual abandonment represented both the dismissal of fashion's last imposed distortion of the female body as well as the end of Hollywood's influences on popular fashion, the latter primarily a consequence of the declining frequency in which Americans frequented cinemas in decades thereafter.[90]

Additional styles that were popular during the fifties included looks imported from Italy. While France's high-fashion presence may have been dimming, Italian designs like the chunky sweater and the stiletto-heeled shoe were instant hits in the US.[91] These pointy-toed shoes were actually so common that some famous buildings provided special overshoes with ample heels which were to be worn by stiletto-sporting women before they could be granted admission, as these spiky heels were infamous for ruining floors and carpets. One final note which will have greater significance in the next section is that many women (particularly youth) were adopting new hairstyles like the beehive and the pony-tail that were unsuitable for

Figure 14 . The "sack-look," 1957 (Steele, p. 43).

pairing with decorative hats. Thus, although they were still widespread, hats were not as popular as they had been in prior years.

The period ended with the practically simultaneous introduction of the "sack" dress by aforementioned Balenciaga and Frenchman Givenchy in 1957.[92]   In stark contrast to the prevailing shape of the past ten years, this dress offered an unbelted silhouette that looked just as its name sounds, with women's waists being lost somewhere underneath the dress's fabric. Needless to say, while the idea had been a chic one when produced by the couture houses of Balenciaga and Givenchy, the poor execution of cheaper imitations coupled with the shapeless and unflattering profile it gave the everyday woman meant that the sack dress would be abandoned shortly thereafter. Despite its short-lived success, however, the dress was still a landmark of its time as it inspired the designs of an important trend to come: the shift. Never again would tight waists dominate and dictate women's fashions. Yet another period of liberation was fast approaching.

THE YOUTH EXPLOSION, BRITISH INVASION, AND OTHER POP CULTURE COMMOTIONS: THE 1960s

The sixties: the decade that always seems to need no introduction. For much of this period, America was wrapped up in a whirlwind of passions, from anti-war movements to Space Age fever to Beatlemania and the like. America's burgeoning youth was taking center stage during this time and demanding the nation's attention in the process. Not only were they making waves on the political scene in the form of their memorable anti-Vietnam protests, but for the first time in American history, the fashion whims and trends of the country's teenagers and young adults were proving to be quite a lucrative prospect for the fashion industry. The market soon began catering to this growing demographic, and so began a new age in the fashion world in which youth was glorified and the closets of women of all ages were influenced by the styles made popular by the younger crowd. The baby boomer generation was growing up, and boy, were they making an impact!

In the 1960s, the "British Invasion" swept America. While the Beatles were causing girls across the country to swoon, crisp and lively London-inspired designs were likewise causing quite a stir on this side of the pond.[93] Of Britain's up-and-coming designers, Mary Quant is

perhaps the most recognizable of this decade. It was Quant who launched the thigh-baring miniskirt in the sixties and thus began a new fashion revolution reveled in first by the rebellious youth and later adopted by women of various ages and principles.[94] As Dr. Martin Marty of the University of Chicago said in a *Times* article published in 1967, "Girls on the New Left wear them. Young Republican women wear them. Matrons wear them. If [women who wear miniskirts are] rebelling, they're in the majority already, so they've won the battle."[95] Besides the miniskirt, Quant and her designs were also instrumental in the shift from stockings to tights that occurred during the sixties. With both the figurative and literal rise of the miniskirt, the gap created between women's hemlines and the top of their stockings necessitated an alternative: tights.[96] It did not take long for women to throw out their old stockings and girdle for the more comfortable tights with already built-in panty-girdles. By the early seventies, tights were dominating the hosiery market, and they have continued to outsell "old-fashioned" stockings ever since.[97]

Figure 15. An example of the 1960's sky-high miniskirts (LIFE, p. 345).
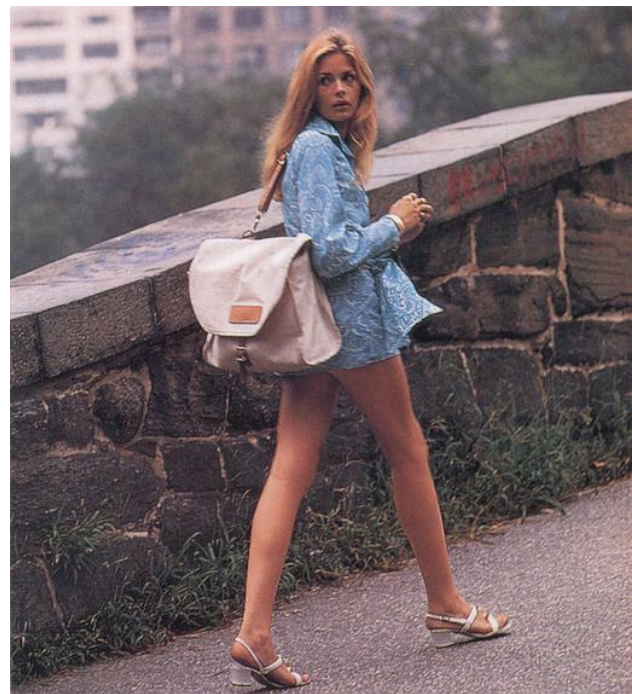
One may wonder how the new, young fashions of the 1960s were any different from the styles of the 1920s which were similarly described in an earlier section as being characterized by youth and naivety. While the trends of the 1920s were youthful in nature, in this case youthful does not mean that garments were exclusively produced with the young consumer in mind.[98] With the youth explosion of the sixties, however, the fashion industry became more and more interested in satisfying this rapidly expanding market. The 1960s girl wanted clothing that expressed her moods and attitudes – and she was beginning to invest a lot of her money in maintaining her closet. In 1967, the age group 15-19 bought 48% of all coats, 60% of all dresses, 42% of knitwear, and 48% of skirts.[99] Similarly, between 1968 and 1979 the total number of young women between 15 and 19

increased by 12.9% and those between 20 and 29 by 4.4%.[100] It is therefore no surprise that clothing manufactures began churning out garments that were designed specifically to appeal to adolescent, trendy fashion tastes. This led to a split in the apparel industry – one which had the teenage girl following the latest fads on the one hand and the older, more mature woman looking for flattering, elegant clothing on the other. Not only were clothing designers focusing their efforts on the up-and-coming generation, but another rising consensus was surfacing in the fashion world. As expressed by Emmanuelle Khanh in 1964, "Haute couture is dead."[101] New looks were being inspired by, and designed for, the woman in the street, and the prominent trends of the day naturally reflected this more casual approach to women's wear.

Figure 16. Jackie Kennedy, May 1960 (Baudot, p. 219).

As for what these prominent trends of the sixties actually were, besides the miniskirt as discussed above, maxi coats, shorts, blousons, and knee- and thigh-high boots were very popular, especially among the youth.[102] Pant ensembles for evening and daywear were also introduced in the early sixties, this being a milestone in that pants were previously confined to leisure wear due to a prevailing taboo which had restricted women from wearing them in any other setting, this including formal environments, the workplace, or even casual daytime outings.[103] For the more sophisticated woman, style icons like Jackie Kennedy led the way in chic outfits, oftentimes comprised of wool suits with wide, rounded collar-lines paired with a smart hat and a pair of gloves.[104] This being said, although hats were still occasionally worn as part of a daytime ensemble (especially the pillbox style made popular by Jackie Kennedy), during the sixties, women largely began reserving their formerly indispensable hats for special occasions, opting instead to alter their hairstyles by means of dying or perming their natural hair or even by wearing wigs.[105] As a result, the decline of the hat began, and by the seventies, virtually all women had parted with their respective fascinators and fedoras.

Besides the British Invasion and the "London Look" it brought to America, several other movements proved to have an influential streak in the fashion world. Born in liberal-thinking California, the hippie movement, like the British Invasion, also inspired its own fashion trends, if perhaps only inadvertently. Floral- and psychedelic-printed tunics, floor-length maxi skirts, ethnic-inspired clothing, headbands, love beads, and most importantly, blue jeans were all proudly worn by the unkempt hippie looking to express her dissatisfaction with popular fashion and mainstream culture.[106] Hippies were furthermore particularly integral in the ushering in of the unisex look, with men adopting long hair and both men and women donning worn out, embellished jeans. Of course, the hippies' Anti-Fashion look, a symbol of the rebellious counterculture movement, did in fact eventually gain in popularity within conventional society, and thus, what once was the exception soon became the norm. Both Op Art and Space Age fever also left their respective marks on the fashion world during this time, with the former inspiring dramatic, trick-optic effects of line and contrasting areas of color in fabric patterns and the latter sparking futuristic and minimalist outfits made from alternative materials like plastic and vinyl.[107] A miniskirt constructed of geometric Op Art-printed fabric, in particular, became the essential outfit for the mod girl.[108]

Figure 17. Pop Art also inspired many looks during the sixties. Paper dress with Warhol's "Campbell's Soup" print (Kyoto, p. 589).

Before the 1960s, not following fashion trends had implied that one was poor; however, from this time onward, as clothing became evermore linked with ideas of personal expression, not following trends was just another way of communicating one's individuality to the rest of the world.[109] Therefore, while clothing still can certainly serve as a status symbol in the modern day, it is not necessarily a marker of wealth to the same degree as it once was. In the times that have followed the sixties, no single dominant style has governed the clothes that women have selected for their closets. Rather, consumers have been offered a kaleidoscope of possibilities to pick from, allowing her the freedom to express her individual personality through the clothing that she chooses for herself.[110]

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME, BABY: THE 1970s

As the "Youthquake" fervor of the sixties gradually died down, seventies fashions drifted away from the loud, flashy outfits of the decade prior and gravitated toward simplified designs and more conservative cuts. In this case, however, conservative did not mean old-fashioned but, rather, modest, for even though American women were abandoning their miniskirts for garments that generally offered them more coverage, this did not mean that they were returning to the formality of older times. On the contrary, seventies fashion was characterized by a new sense of *informality* as leisurewear and jeans became the hottest (and eventually, most beloved) new additions to a modern woman's wardrobe. Going hand-in-hand with this casual nature of clothing, there is no doubt that the headline of the decade, as one fashion historian put it, could be summed up in one word – pants.[111]

A truly American invention, casual clothing, which had been slowly gaining in popularity as early as the late 1920s, finally burst onto the fashion scene in full force during the seventies. In the previous section it was mentioned that by the end of the 1960s, clothing had lost much of its clout as a status symbol, and this was partly due to the fact that by this time, Americans were garnering a new obsession with the maintenance of the body in both its physical and aesthetic appearance. Often labeled the "Me Decade," a clear shift was observed during the 1970s in which what one adorned the body with was not nearly as important as the state of the body itself.[112] Thus a person's ability to stay slim and fit became the new status symbol, a phenomenon that remains firmly in place today. In order to work out efficiently – or at least to make others think that she exercised – a woman had to equip herself with the proper "tools." Athletic shoes, particularly Nike[5] brand styles, quickly became fashion statements, along with sweatsuits that came in a variety of different colors and were usually made of at least 50 percent polyester, this fabric choice allowing them to keep their shape better than had cotton versions of times past.[113] This sporty ensemble was commonly topped off with a coordinating headband.

Another hit of the decade was jeans. In the sixties, the hippies had used these garments as a symbol of rebellion against conventional America. As Beverly Gordon said in her article on the history of American denim, "Jeans were practical, long-lasting, and unchanging; they were

---

[5] The famous Nike "swoosh" itself has its origins in the seventies. It all began in 1972, when Portland State University instructor Phil Knight paid advertising student Caroline Davis $35 to design a logo for the lightweight athletic shoes that he was selling out of his car's trunk. (Sagert, p. 98)

the very antithesis of the mainstream "straight" world where fashion was by its very nature ever-changing and quickly obsolescent."[114] The trend quickly began to catch on among those that the hippies were protesting against, however, and denim eventually was deemed fashionable by the early seventies. The youth coveted bell-bottomed jeans embellished with embroidered designs, sequins, and beads, and they usually paired their denim with a graphic or tie-dyed T-shirt, sleeveless shirt, or other halter-style top along with clogs, earth shoes, or a similar style of footwear.[115] It was not long before jeans were given an upscale makeover, however, as "designer jeans" first hit the market in the early seventies, with designers like Calvin Klein, Gloria Vanderbilt, Sassoon, and the brand Jordache taking the lead.[116] Expensive designer jeans were made to flatter the figure, yet they were also meant to be long-lasting and look newer longer, rather than to age and gradually adopt the curves of the body as the denim worn by hippies had. By 1977 over 500 million pairs of jeans were sold in America alone – more than double the number of the total population, and in the last few years of the seventies, it was difficult to find someone, young or old, rich or poor, who did not wear them.[117] Similarly, once the baby boomer generation took on more mature roles as parents and employees within the work force, eventually the more sophisticated designer jean overtook the defiant, embellished anti-fashion style of the youth in popularity.[118]

Figure 18.   Group of students in the 1970s. Note the diversity in clothing styles within the group (70sJeansGirls.blogspot.com).

Other trends of the seventies included menswear as women's wear, a style beloved of Diane Keaton's character in *Annie Hall*. In contrast to this very masculine look, women could also choose from flowing, romantic dresses reminiscent of 1930s Hollywood.[119] As China and America began to engage in increased political interactions with one another, Asian influences likewise appeared in clothing, with quilted "Mao jackets" becoming quite popular, as an example. Furthermore, platform shoes were worn by teenagers and young adults across the country. The shoes' soles and heels were constructed of cork, wood, plastic, or rubber, with an average pair of platforms in the seventies reaching a towering 5 inches in height.[120] By the mid-70s, platforms were seen in dress shoes, sandals, sneakers, and thigh-high lace-up boots. Another daring trend was found on the beach, as bold women began sporting skimpy string bikinis. As for hair, popular styles of the day included Afros and Farrah Fawcett's feathered look. A final major fashion movement that helped to bridge the seventies into the eighties was punk which originated in England through the work of designer Vivienne Westwood and gained prominence in the States largely through the stage costumes worn by musicians like David Bowie and Boy George. Leather, chains, and heavy belts were staples of punk style, and these looks often featured ripped or slashed clothing pieced together with oversized safety pins or the pairing of clashing items, like fishnets and chunky combat boots. Other memorable characteristic pieces of the punk look included vinyl, black studded leather jackets and bondage trousers, spiked dog collars, and hair dyed bright, obviously unnatural shades and spiked or cut in asymmetrical ways, with the Mohawk serving as a good example of this.[121]

In the 1970s, women finally gained public approval to wear pants at every social occasion her life may require – well, almost every social occasion, as the next section will demonstrate. Regardless of this last postscript, a boundary was nevertheless removed in the seventies which had separated men and women in terms of what was deemed "appropriate" for a woman to wear for centuries. Women were finally beginning to gain an equal footing with men, and this rise in gender-neutral clothing styles set the stage for the decade that followed in which men and women would borrow from similar tastes in their mutual quest to exude a powerful image through commanding, unisex clothing.

DRESSED TO IMPRESS: THE 1980s

The two decades leading up to the eighties had both been ones largely focused on youth culture, yet this attitude quickly changed as the growing number of young urban professionals, also known as yuppies, soon became the new demographic to please.[122] Men and women in their twenties and early thirties were devoting themselves to their high-paying jobs, and they were eager to show off their newfound successes in the clothing and accessories they purchased with their hard-earned wages. Power was the word of the decade as both sexes donned suits that emphasized traditionally masculine angles and exuded a sense of authority. Thus ushered in a penchant for "power dressing" by the working woman who was eager to make strides within the workplace and confident in the fact that she was just as capable as any man.

Two all-star designers seemed to shine brighter than any others in the 1980s: Giorgio Armani and Ralph Lauren. Among the first to offer a "total-look" style of shopping to their consumers that provided busy customers with everything from underwear to overcoats under one designer label,[123] Armani and Lauren and their two distinct styles achieved their success largely through the accessibility of their ready-to-wear lines. First, Giorgio Armani's suits were the quintessential look
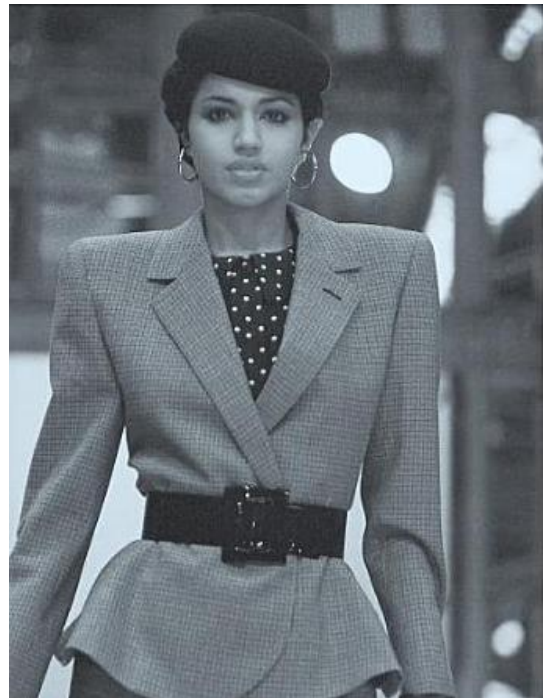
Figure 19. Classic '80s power suits featured shoulders with ample padding (Carnegy, p. 12).

of the '80s professional. The classic Armani's suit for women consisted of a jacket that, owing to its large shoulders, hung loosely on the frame, disguising the waist and narrowed the hips, and was paired with an at or below-knee-length skirt. Armani's garments were younger, sportier, more casual, and cheaper than their predecessors had been, and he quickly became known as *the* designer of the eighties.[124] Ralph Lauren, on the other hand, spoke to a more casual mood, and he offered designs influenced by aristocratic leisure. With his first beginnings as a necktie designer which then later expanded into menswear and subsequently women's wear, by the

eighties, Lauren was selling everything from sportswear to luggage, eyewear to shoes, and linen to rugs.[125] His designs always spoke to an upper-class Anglo-Saxon style of chic, and as his products gained recognition for their quality and affordability, Lauren became the number one American ready-to-wear line.

As mentioned earlier, a "dress for success" mentality overtook the fashion industry in the eighties as prosperous women adopted styles that drew from a traditionally male silhouette. Women donned tailored suits that featured wide shoulders, oftentimes enhanced with the help of shoulder pads, and were usually grey, navy, or blue in color.[126] These exaggerated jackets were paired with conservative pencil skirts that fell at or below the knee. Ironically, wearing pants for the working woman still was advised against by books that offered guidance on what was appropriate office wear. Suggestive clothing was expressly forbidden, however, women were still urged to keep a feminine look to their outfits by pairing their suits with decorative items like neckties, broaches, bows, and discrete jewelry.[127] Image-conscious yuppies similarly placed a high importance on "designer" goods, and so expensive accessories like Gucci handbags and Rolex watches became important status symbols that were often paired with power suits.[128] Interestingly, however, during this time women began to pair something a little less fashionable with their work attire on their early morning commutes. The 1980 New York City transit strike merged informality with business as working women began donning running shoes for their long walk to work. Although it was originally done out of necessity, this is a tendency which has stuck around long after the subways began moving again.[129]

The eighties also continued the trend of increased body awareness that had begun in the decade prior. However, while exercise in the seventies had been engaged in with the goal of remaining slim, now one's trips to the gym were aimed at achieving a firm, muscular body. As Americans indulged in their new infatuation with exercise, active wear pieces, like leotards, for example, suddenly became high fashion, and personal trainers similarly felt the pressure to sport name brand-clothing like Nike or Reebok in order to exude a fashionable image.[130] Lycra was a popular fabric of the day and was commonly used to create form-fitting workout suits.[131] Some sportswear trends were clearly more aesthetic than functional, however, as was the case with legwarmers which were many times worn over jeans rather than to the gym.[132] In a similar vein,

breakdancing and hip-hop were two undercurrents in American society which were beginning to cause waves in the fashion world. Sportswear was the unofficial uniform of hip-hop artists, and breakdancers likewise gravitated toward casual, athletic clothing. After all, one cannot expect to spin on his head if he is not dressed comfortably for the part. By the end of the '80s, hip-hop had grown to become the single biggest influence on youthful street fashion, and it would continue to have reverberating effects into the '90s and beyond.[133]

Figure 20. The brightly-colored fashions of gym wear in the 1980s (Sheff, 2007).

Additional trends of the decade included brightly colored or fluorescent tops, harem pants, and highly-stylized jeans.[134] The eighties were also an important time for clothing which had traditionally been hidden from the common eye – that of undergarments. Jean-Paul Gaultier specifically helped to take undergarments, like the corset and girdle, and transform them into active outerwear for women, obliterating the prevailing negative image of underwear.[135] Gaultier was actually the designer responsible for crafting Madonna's now infamous cone-shaped bra. Finally, the preppie look was particularly popular among women during their downtime, and they paired pearls as everyday accessories with cardigans, long, stylish skirts, and Ray-Ban sunglasses.[136]

Eighties fashion was all about pushing the limits as women pushed their body proportions, hair, and makeup to the extremes.[137] The era of the prosperous yuppie would not last long, however, and the nineties brought with them a more laid-back look, seemingly in retaliation to

the excesses of the decade before. Despite the sartorial backlash that followed, the decadent 1980s remain important in that they not only encouraged women to dress in commanding ways reminiscent of their male counterparts, but these years also helped to established athletic attire as worthy of the label "high fashion."

THE 1990s AND BEYOND

Because the remainder of this thesis will focus primarily on the changes that have occurred over the past two decades, a discussion of the most recent fashion phenomena will be saved for examination at a later time.

The information in this chapter has hopefully demonstrated the great changes that have occurred in women's clothing over the past two hundred years. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries seem to stand in stark opposition to one another. While one insisted firmly that women should wear clothing that embodied a helpless, feminine aesthetic, the other left women further emboldened with each passing decade, encouraging her to discard the impractical fashions of the past in favor of those that allowed freedom of movement and personified her newfound confidence in the idea that she was a man's equal, not his dependent. The 20th century has undoubtedly been a unique one that has revolutionized not only what women adorn their frames with but how they perceive their own bodies and their overall capabilities. Due credit for this must be given to the steady rise in leisure time enjoyed by the average American as well as women's increasing roles outside of the household, both recurring themes which have undoubtedly helped to propel changes in women's wear and societal perceptions forward in the direction of practicality, comfort, and equality.

As we look at the present state of contemporary fashion trends and hypothesize projections for America's sartorial future, it is important to understand the steps that have brought us to the present state. Hopefully this section has given the reader a detailed but concise overview of where popular fashion has come since the start of the eighteenth century. This thesis will now turn to an analytical examination of present-day informality seen in both the workplace and day-to-day activities among modern American women and the larger societal implications that this may have.

Part II

Chapter 1

Dress Theory: The Effects of Lifestyle and Gender on Clothing Selection

Attire serves two purposes: not only are our clothes functional in that they protect us from various environmental factors, but clothing also has deep socio-psychological underpinnings.[138] The personal images that we construct through our clothing choices are often visual medleys of artistic expressions and group membership cues. Just as a person may have fun creatively mixing bold prints and colors to reflect a vibrant personality, the choice of a woman to complete her hairstyle with a decorative headband rather than to don a conservative *hijab* (a head covering traditionally worn by Muslim women) is correlated with the rules of appropriate dress held by her particular social group.

Fashion can be defined as a continuing process of change in the styles of dress that are accepted or followed by substantial groups of people at any given time and place.[139] The following section will examine the theoretical assertions underlying this very human phenomenon, focusing on the characteristics underlying its manifestation within American society, along with its impact on the self and on social groups within the population. Attention will primarily be paid to the psychological and economic forces that drive the selection of attire by members of America's consumerist society.

DRESS ANALYSIS AND ITS FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES

The field of dress analysis as it is recognized today was largely a product of the efforts of pioneering scholars in the 20th century. Of the collection of individuals who helped to develop and strengthen the foundation of this area of study, three researchers in particular have frequently been cited throughout the past century for their now classic perspectives on dress. These three individuals and their works include George Simmel's *Fashion* (1904), Thorstein Veblen's *Dress as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture* (1912), and Edward Sapir's *Fashion* (1931). The

following section will examine the work of these authors and the ideas that each have contributed to dress scholarship.

In Simmel's *Fashion*, an emphasis is placed on the human tendency toward imitation and the way in which this natural inclination affects the lifespan of fashion trends. According to Simmel, fashion is a phenomenon highly dependent upon the structure of a hierarchical social system and is therefore essentially a product of social demands (1904:544). The life of a trend begins when a popular fashion is first introduced to society by those belonging to the upper class. This new style of dress is originally meant to distinguish the aforementioned group from that of subordinate groups. Because these lower classes are constantly striving to emulate the fashions of those of a higher social ranking, they inevitably will begin to pursue the novel trend after it has been introduced. Once the fashion does eventually filter out into the masses and become ubiquitous in nature, whether this be owing to copy-cat versions or a depreciation in the value of the original design, the style is quickly abandoned by the wealthy in favor of a newer, similarly excluding fashion, with this cyclical trend continuing unceasingly into the future. Therefore, because it is ultimately a tool by which the upper class can collectively create their own social markers that signify their wealth and power, excluding all others from indulging in the same clothing styles in the process, fashion can be thought of as simultaneously both unifying and isolating in nature.

Simmel additionally points out the equalizing quality of fashion in that fashion functions at the class level rather than at that of the individual. Therefore, because fashion trends typically characterize a collection of individuals, the whims of the group rather than its members' unique personalities are what dictate the clothing worn by those within the assemblage, and not vice versa (552). This means that although some may inject their own personal qualities into their appearances, these assertions of self never deviate from the norm to the extent that the individual overtly stands out amongst his or her peers. The reason for this self-confinement within the boundaries of class distinctions is owing to the fact that feelings of shame are oftentimes placed upon individuals when they are isolated from their peer groups. "The moment they step into the cenre [sic] of general attention, the moment they make themselves conspicuous in any way, a painful oscillation between emphasis and withdrawal of the ego become manifest" (553). Thus, conformity is favored in society, and it is this idea that has long sustained some of fashion's

more absurd trends like the encumbering hoop skirt or the debilitating corset, for example. In this way, fashion can be thought of as a manifestation of group think, and just as a gang of mobsters who have committed a crime would shrink from the same act of violence should they be charged to commit the offense alone, so too do individuals likewise imitate the trends favored by society at large in order to gain acceptance from the group, regardless of whether this may sometimes mean indulging in somewhat ridiculous styles.

In contrast to Simmel's socio-psychological approach to clothing trends, Veblen's article focuses more on the economic factors that underpin fashion styles. According to Veblen, three norms govern dress in modern society: conspicuous waste, conspicuous leisure, and novelty. He states, "Dress must not only be conspicuously expensive and inconvenient, it must at the same time be up to date" (1912:18). As society continues to place more and more emphasis on the projection of wealth and on social mobility, fashions will continue to shift and change at ever-increasing rates, growing progressively unstable as a result (19). For Veblen dress remains the most obvious indicator of economic success and "social worth" than any other form of consumption (17-18).

Finally, the primary emphasis of Sapir in his article, also entitled *Fashion*, is that fashion must be considered within its cultural context in order to be properly understood. As he reminds the reader, fashion is a historical concept, and it becomes virtually incomprehensible should it be lifted from its position in the sequence of styles that both preceded and succeeded its prominence (1931:24). Despite its ever-varying nature, however, the primary factor that supports the phenomenon of fashion according to Sapir is the stability of custom. While fashion is constantly changing, custom and the types of social behaviors encompassed by this term remain relatively permanent through time (23). As he writes to further explain this point, "In contemporary society it is not a fashion that men wear trousers; it is the custom. Fashion merely dictates such variations as whether trousers are to be so or so long, what colors they are to have and whether they are to have cuffs of not" (26-27). Similarly, Sapir labels fashion as "a custom in the guise of departure from custom" (23). Because most individuals have the urge to break away from what is considered a dogmatic adherence to convention, fashion offers these persons the opportunity to display subtle conflicts with established norms. A person may make slight changes to his or her appearance that oppose popular styles, thus giving the individual a sense of

victory over the conventional; however, the similar revolt by like-minded peers gives the act a feeling of "adventurous safety" (24). Therefore, Sapir does not view fashion an entity based solely on the constructs of society but rather as a sort of mechanism for the reconciliation of individual freedom with social conformity.

Finally, Sapir also highlights the importance of the industrial revolution and the subsequent rise of the middle class on the nature of modern-day fashion. Sapir illustrates this point by saying, "The former increased the mechanical ease with which fashions could be diffused; the latter greatly increased the number of those willing and able to be fashionable" (25). Sapir also dispels the myth that fashion designers alone dictate the trends followed by consumers, pointing instead to the primary requirement of designers that their new creations be manufactured with their profitability in mind (26). Therefore, it is the designer's job to assess the established custom of the day and to conceive of a way in which he or she may depart from the norm and create a new, appealing look while still producing a financially successful product.

AMERICA: HOW A LACK OF INTRA-CLASS COHESION AFFECTS SELF IDENTITY

Although the theories discussed in the previous section were insightful during their time and still today are regarded as classics in the field, it is undeniable that social changes that have occurred in the past forty years have left in their wake a cultural environment entirely different from those on which the previous articles were originally based. While Simmel's top-down diffusion of fashion in particular was long regarded as the central doctrine explaining the dissemination of fashion in Western society prior to the mid-20th century, the first signs of the democratization of clothing seen in the 19th century is not to be ignored. As discussed in Part I of this thesis, the shift to a youth-oriented fashion industry that occurred in the 1960s ushered in the widespread equalization of fashion, with this serving as the turning point that established age as the new catalyst for innovation in attire rather than social status.[140] It was not the wealthy classes who were dictating the styles of the day but rather the adolescents and young adults in the streets who often were members of lower social class levels and whose innovative styles gradually began to inspire the designs adopted by society at large, thereby creating a bottom-up pattern of diffusion – the exact opposite of Simmel's original assertion. When coupled with the

technological advances that have allowed ready-made clothing available at all price levels to flood the market, by the end of the 20th century this change in the constructs of fashion has steadily worked to strip clothing of its previous economic importance, instead placing increased significance on its symbolic connotations.[141]

As mentioned above, the first widespread evidence for the democratization of fashion in the Western world was initially seen in the 19th century when all levels of society began adopting similar styles of clothing. Nowhere was this trend more apparent than in the United States, a country long lauded for its large middle class. Due to America's unique history, the salience of well-defined social stratification previously seen in Old World nations never took root to the same degree in the newly established country. While citizens of European states had long obeyed expectations and even laws that dictated "appropriate" behavior based on one's social status (with this oftentimes including prescriptions concerning dress), immigrants arriving in America found a new homeland free from such constraints. As the country grew in both numbers and area, expanding westward to fulfill its perceived Manifest Destiny, Americans began to develop identities independent of their economic standing. Two examples of the way in which this shift away from an emphasis on social status was seen in relation to attire involve the large influx of immigrants that came into the nation during the 19th century and the hopes they carried with them to distance themselves from the hierarchies of their motherlands, along with the growing levels of Americans migrating with their families to the West during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[142] Regarding the former, as immigrants entered into the country eager to start afresh and to chase the "American Dream," they discarded their traditional dress in an attempt to throw out the old and to establish new, distinctly American identities. Likewise, as the latter group settled into life on the frontier, they began to abandon the popular fashions of the East that often proved unfit for the harsher environment of the West. Thus, as they grew increasingly removed from life back East, individuals began to associate themselves more with the lives they led as homesteaders than they did with fellow Americans still living in eastern regions – or with any particular social class that would have spanned the entire, expansive country for that matter. The identities of these 19th century Americans were forged both from the pursuit of the middle-class American ideal and the lifestyles peculiar to one's home environment within America's sprawling, and sometimes isolating, land area. In the end, this allowed for a

relative dissolution of solidarity among members of distinct social strata and a steady move away from economically-based segregation within the nation. It should be noted, however, that while clothing in society at large may have been growing simpler and more homogenized across the country during the 1800s, workplace attire was becoming more differentiated and hierarchical in nature as uniforms and dress codes seemed to perpetuate the discrepancies in status among individuals of differing social positions that was waning in daywear attire.[143]

If there ever did exist a commonality among Americans from similar economic backgrounds, however, modern times have virtually erased it as recent American studies have found little support for the existence of separate class cultures within the United States.[144] One explanation for this phenomenon discussed by Crane (2000) emphasizes the high rate of interclass and intra class mobility commonly seen within the American population. Accordingly, Kingston (1994) concluded, "class does not significantly affect a whole host of attitudes on social issues, values, and lifestyle tastes."[145] Rather, high levels of fragmentation of cultural interests within social classes have developed to create what Turow (1997) calls a "hypersegmentation" of society in which lifestyle customs are the factors that bind a country's diverse population into cohesive groups, with each lifestyle occupying its own niche within society.[146] Holt (1997), who defines "lifestyles" as collective patterns of consumption practices based on shared cultural frameworks that exist in specific social contexts,[147] further discusses public fragmentation by highlighting the fact that present-day lifestyles based on leisure activities are highly susceptible to change. Because individuals are allowed the choice to pursue any particular lifestyle that they feel embodies the personality they identify with and wish to project to the public, they may move from one to another freely as their preferences and practices change, with this further fueling the diversification of America's social classes.[148]

Bell (1976) also examined the modern construction of self-identity. For Bell, one's identity projected at the workplace differs from that seen during leisure-time activities.[149] Crane (2000) discusses the significance of this idea as detailed below:

[Bell's theory] is significant because the amount of time available to a person for leisure pursuits has greatly increased during the twentieth century while the proportion of the person's lifetime during which he or she is employed has steadily decreased. The

number of years spent in the educational system has risen, periods of unemployment have become more commonplace, and early retirement is acceptable. Time not devoted to gainful employment is considered "leisure," although "leisure" is a global term in which there is a mixture of socially constrained time (family work), socially committed time (volunteer political activity), and time for oneself (leisure) (Dumazedier 1989:155). The increasing availability of time not devoted to paid employment has important social implications. The individual is free from constraints and "institutional norms imposed by work, family obligations, political and religious authority" (158). This implies that leisure is a "liminal" time when one can develop a sense of personal and social identity.[150]

Kingston, Turow, and Bell's theories all support the idea that in contemporary consumerist society, Americans are creating their identities largely through the consumption of cultural goods, like fashionable clothing, while material needs and the imitation of superior classes have become secondary factors in this process. As Bocock (1993) says, "Style, enjoyment, excitement, escape from boredom at work or at play, being attractive to self and others, these become central life-concerns, and affect patterns of consumption in post-modernity, rather than copying the ways of living and consumption patterns of "superior" social status groups."[151] Consumption has transformed into a form of role-playing by which goods purchased are used construct and reinforce one's continually evolving identity.[152]

Market researchers have long recognized that consumers do not make purchases along strict socioeconomic lines, again suggesting that lifestyles are more significant than class status when it comes to consumption habits. Instead, consumer groups are often determined by categorizing individuals according to personal orientations (actions, status, and principles) and resource constraints (income, education, and age).[153] Determining target groups are important in that, as Simmel (1904) suggested, material culture is purchased by individuals with the goal of fitting into their respective identity groups and not necessarily with society as a whole. Market researchers are thus aware that consumers tend to identify with very narrow and specific cultural interests, with this greatly impacting their consumption patterns.[154] New fashions are therefore

manufactured and marketed with a certain consumer population in mind. A style targeted to one particular group may be incomprehensible to those outside this social context.[155]

FASHION AND GENDER ROLES

As American society has become more and more fragmented, the construction of personal identities has received added emphasis in recent decades as it has allowed individuals an avenue by which they can adjust to an increasingly chaotic social and cultural atmosphere.[156] Today, fashion is marketed as a choice to the modern woman rather than a mandate, and with the variety of options available to her, the contemporary consumer is expected to construct for herself an individualized appearance.[157] While the previous section emphasized the selection of clothing according to the maintenance of one's social identity at large, fashion similarly reflects contemporary principles regarding gender roles held by contemporary society.[158]

Social perception of the roles of women in particular has undergone a dramatic upheaval since the beginning of the 1800s. Restriction was the defining word of the nineteenth century for the American woman as fashionable clothing of the day oftentimes prevented her from even just moving about comfortably. The limiting nature of clothing during this time served as a personification of the public's existing opinions on gender which viewed women as overtly feminine, almost childlike creatures unfit to work outside of the home and who were therefore merely signifiers of a family's wealth.[159] A man with a well-dressed wife garbed in an excessively large crinoline, for example, was a living, breathing symbol that told her neighbors of her husband's large salary which kept her indoors and from having to engage in physical labor.

By the late 20th century, these 19th century ideas of fixed gender identities, together with the general intolerance of gender ambiguity, gradually dissolved. [160] New literature emerged that suggested the idea that the self is not inherently masculine or feminine and that gender is merely a social construct. Yet despite these strides made concerning social norms assigned to the sexes, at the close of the first decade in the 21st century, ideals of gender-appropriate behavior and appearance still remain distinctly segregated for males and females. Men are expected to exemplify characteristics that highlighting physical power and control, heterosexuality, occupational achievement, and patriarchal family roles,[161] while the expectations governing the identities of women have gotten a little trickier to pinpoint. Multiple conceptions of female

identity exist in American society, ranging from the traditional feminine, submissive ideal to the androgynous and powerful modern woman.[162] Women's fashion magazines echo this wide assortment of constructs by displaying an equally diverse array of clothing styles in their pages, with some scholars suggesting that this is a clear illustration of the current struggle taking place in American culture to the identity of the 21st century woman.[163]

Crane (2000) puts it succinctly when she states that "fashion has always had a social agenda for women, and clothing behavior is always socially motivated" (19). While women's clothing has gradually shifted away from the conservative garments and conservative ideals of the 19th century, today fashion continues to have several diverse and inconsistent agendas, with the range of clothing available to today's consumers varying from those that have sadomasochistic and pornographic undertones to those that empower women and give her an androgynous appearance (19). Thus, the clothing choices of a woman become complex negotiations between the conflicting views of gender offered by society through images promoted by the media outlets as well as her own understanding of gender differences (18).

The previous sections have shown that fashion can serve as a gauge for the principles and alliances found within a consumerist culture at any given time. While some dress historians have even gone so far as to say that changes in fashion can actually bring about changes in society (e.g. the availability of pants for respectable women subsequently making social change in the workplace possible), whether social change leads to fashion change or vice versa, once deviations in fashion are born and proceed to spread through the various levels of a population, this diffusion can be viewed as the salience of the particular social change since fashion, as Corrigan (2008:6) notes, can bring this modification of attitude "into the realm of the thinkable, the practicable, and the embodiable for the greater public." Therefore, it is important to study the increasing prevalence of casual wear while still remembering clothing's contextual importance within American society.

Chapter 2

The Presence of Casual Wear in the Workplace and on the Streets

This thesis will now turn to literature that has documented the rise of casual clothing in both the workplace and informal environments. The aim of this final section will be to examine the particular changes in women's attire within these two social spheres which have occurred since the early 1990s and to also investigate potential causes for this transition while drawing from both contemporary articles written on the matter as well as fashion guide books published since the 1920s.

CASUAL CLOTHING IN THE WORKPLACE

Business Casual and Its Background

The workplace has traditionally maintained an internal hierarchy consciously recognized and acknowledged by those falling within its ranks. In the past, the most obvious way of exhibiting one's status within the workplace was through dressing in strong, commanding suits that exude a sense of power and prestige to the outside observer. However, in roughly the past twenty years, many have begun to abandon this visually powerful yet sometimes inconvenient and expensive practice of power dressing, choosing instead to don garments that are more informal in nature. It was the early 1990s that first brought change to the world of business attire as American companies began relaxing their dress policies in favor of more casual looks, and although it has generally resulted in a much happier employee, this relaxing of dress codes has not occurred without a few concerns being voiced as well.

Business casual has been defined as "clothes that will allow professionals to represent their organizations if they are called to a last-minute client meeting, without feeling obliged to apologize for their appearance" (Kiddie: 2009:351). Scholars have offered several potential theories to account for this recent, widespread adoption of semi-formal wear among American corporations. One such explanation states that the switch to more accommodating dress codes has provided business owners with an easy tool by which they can foster a spirit of motivation among their employees (Peluchette et al. 2006; Woodard 1998). The economic environment of the past two decades has been characterized by downsizing and restructuring, and this has led

hard-pressed business owners to use low-cost incentives like "Casual Fridays" to encourage high productivity and performance among their staff. A second explanation of this phenomenon points to the high-tech companies of Silicon Valley whose employees have oftentimes either hailed from blue-collar backgrounds or have been relatively young in age, with both of these social groups typically being more accustomed to wearing comfortable, casual clothing than formal business attire (Kiddie 2009). Yet another theory discusses generational differences that have come to light as Generation Y[f] has entered the workforce. Some have cited the generation's "narcissistic" attitude which has led to a steep decline in this age group's need for "social approval" as the cause of their more relaxed and informal attitude towards dress in the workplace, with these young adults appearing at work in flip-flops and capri pants and sporting visible tattoos (Twenge and Campbell 2008; Armour 2005). To what degree these aforementioned factors have each contributed to the casual business wear movement is debatable; nevertheless, all have undoubtedly worked together to collectively create the distinct nature of the trend seen today.

By 1998 it was estimated that more than two-thirds of the approximately 118 million-strong US workforce was employed by a company that had established some form of casual dress.[164] Even the more conservative financial, accounting, and law firms had adopted dress-down days by this time,[165] but soon, the new millennium would bring with it a growing debate that asked whether a relaxing of dress code rules led to declining levels of productivity among employees.[166] Did more comfortable styles invite laziness and sloppy work into the office? Some employees had even begun to take *too* much liberty in their definitions of work-appropriate casualwear, wearing things like grunge jeans, T-shirts, tank tops, shorts, sweatpants, piercings, and flip-flops to the office. Thus, concern was soon noted on both sides of the corporate hierarchy's spectrum – not only were employers worried about workers' efficiency in an environment characterized by lax dress codes, but employees themselves began to question whether they were being passed up for promotions due to their casual appearances.[167] This wariness of informal clothing's psychological effects on the employee eventually pushed many companies to either reinstate business formal dress code policies or to write clearly defined guidelines for casual attire. This movement caused the percentage of American employees

---

[f] Loosely defined as individuals born during the 1980s and early 1990s (Neuborne 1999).

allowed to dress casually to drop from 53% in 2002 to 38% in 2006. [168] Furthermore, a recent study has shown that 41% of employees who dressed more professionally were more likely to be promoted, with this percentage jumping to 55% in certain industries like financial services.[169]

Multiple studies have been conducted with the aim of shedding more light on apparel's underlying effect within the workplace. Peluchette et al. (2006) surveyed graduate students, and after asking their opinion on the subject of workplace dress codes, the researchers found that respondents generally felt that office attire did affect several workplace outcomes, with those who valued their appearance saying that their clothing actually increased their feelings of competency at their jobs. Women especially were more conscious of their appearances' role on their career success. Woodard (1998) likewise concluded that casual clothing can lead to a breakdown of boss/employee lines and can result in a more cohesive team effort among employees, thus resulting in increased levels of productivity. Yet between the sexes, overall, women were found to be less comfortable wearing casual clothing than men. Finally, Cardon and Okoro (2009) asked the opinions of business students regarding dress, finding that the students perceived associations between contrasting professional characteristics and degree of formality in attire. They described this gradient of dressing by saying, "Formal business attire projects authoritativeness and competence, somewhat formal business attire is associated with productivity and trustworthiness, and less formal business attire is associated with creativity and friendliness" (357). Of those surveyed, between 64% and 73% preferred to work for companies at which employees typically wore business casual attire rather than business formal or simply casual apparel (356). Similarly, a majority of students supported the idea of dress codes, with females more in favor of such these policies than their male counterparts.

Attire's Effects on Positions of Authority

Uniforms in the workplace serve as an expression of authority (Adomaitis and Johnson 2005), and as corporate America has largely become more informal in the past two decades, many studies have emerged that have examined just how the abandonment of uniforms can affect the public's perception of individuals working in positions of authority that have traditionally required standard outfits. One area that has received considerable attention in recent years is that of the medical profession.

Today, many are wondering whether the current transition from the clinical white medical coat to more casual garments like scrubs is undermining public respect for doctors and nurses. Reasons explaining this shift vary, with some citing the growing numbers of female doctors entering into the field with no traditionally defined dress code, while others blame television shows that endorse surgical scrubs, and still more point to increased awareness of the uniform's role in transferring infections from patient to patient (Lill and Wilkinson 2005; Parsi and Taub 2002; Shelton, et al. 2010). Whatever the cause, the traditional uniforms of doctors and nurses are being abandoned for more confortable attire, and many are wondering what affect this has on the public's opinion of medical professionals.

One study conducted in New Zealand by Lill and Wilkinson (2005) interestingly found that participants in their research actually preferred doctors dressed in semiformal attire (males wearing dark dress pants with a long-sleeved shirt and tie and females wearing a blouse with a dark colored skirt or dress pants) to doctors in white coats. Casual clothing, however, received the lowest rating in preference, with examples of clothing falling under this category including khaki pants, polo shirts, sleeveless tops, sandals, and short skirts (1524). Also, when the participants were shown pictures of doctors dressed in similar fashions but with different facial expressions, doctors with smiles were rated higher than their more serious counterparts, thereby suggesting that friendliness is perhaps more important than one's outfit. The findings of this study ultimately stand in contrast to those studies conducted just a few years earlier in the late 1990s which had asserted that patients generally preferred their doctors to wear only traditional clothing styles, like white coats, formal suits, and ties, while on duty.

Another study, this time conducted in the United Kingdom, examined the perception of the public regarding doctors following the British Secretary of State for Health's announcement in 2007 of the "bare below the elbows" policy which had aims to diminish the spread of infections at the hand of medical professionals. Shelton et al. (2010) found that there was no difference in patients' perception of the appropriateness of doctors' attire unless casual dress was adopted. Once patients were informed of the risks of contamination associated with certain articles of clothing, however, they began to associate those dress codes that posed greater risks with negative connotations, with this including white coats, stethoscopes, ties, etc. The researchers concluded that the discarding of traditional medical uniforms ultimately will not

jeopardize the "first-impression" between doctor and patient, one of the primary concerns that many doctors' had expressed regarding adopting such attire. Thus, between two studies, it seems as though the medical field has slowly followed the rest of America with a relatively seamless transition into the world of informal dress.

In contrast to the relative success of semi-formal attire within the medical field, other professions that have customarily required uniforms have not made such a smooth changeover, an example of which includes flight attendants. Adomaitis and Johnson (2005) decided to study the role of attire after learning of the short-lived adoption of casual uniforms by *Sun Country* Airlines which was abandoned after only a year. By using an ethnographic approach, after asking flight attendants of their experiences with wearing a formal versus casual uniform, Adomaitis and Johnson found that participants "overwhelmingly responded that their uniform affected their behavior" (94). Formal uniforms often resulted in increased feelings of pride, confidence, importance, and a sense of being in control, and uniforms similarly affected posture and encouraged high levels of personal grooming. Conversely, when wearing informal uniforms, most of the flight attendants recalled feeling self-conscious, unconfident, embarrassed, and unprofessional. Accounts were also given that told of difficult flight attendant-passenger interactions while employees were wearing casual uniforms, this owing to the fact that the flight attendants were not as easily identifiable in these casual clothes, and this resulted in a lack of respect from passengers that the flight attendants felt they deserved (98). Also, the participants in the study recalled being teased and laughed at by flight attendants employed by other airlines. Therefore, after reviewing all of these reports, in the case of flight attendants, an adjustment in the formality of their uniform did in fact affect their professionalism and their feeling of identity as flight attendants. As Adomaitis and Johnson (2005:100) concluded, "Rather than breaking-down barriers, wearing a casual uniform created obstacles and limited the effectiveness with which flight attendants could do their jobs. The casual uniform reduced the flight attendant's authority." Therefore, while the transition to business casual wear has been a relatively unencumbered one in many professional fields, others would be more successful if they simply stuck to their traditionally formal clothing, this applying especially to occupations that require the respect and compliance of strangers.

Prescriptions Regarding Workplace Attire since the 1920s

This focus on workplace attire will end with a brief look at suggestions regarding appropriate women's clothing pulled from fashion handbooks published throughout roughly the past century and how these sartorial recommendations have changed over time. Keeping in mind that these prescriptions are ideals for their era, these suggestions are still useful in that they provide an image to the modern reader of what women were striving to look like at different points in time.

While it has varied in cut and in styling over the years, the two-piece skirted suit was considered the backbone of workplace attire for much of the 20th century. Beginning with the 1920s, a clothing handbook endorsed straight lines and simple designs for a woman's "business clothes."[170] A suit that was reminiscent of masculine styles and made of a durable material like tweed was deemed the most ideal. Suits were furthermore to be paired with collared shirts, plain felt hats, sturdy leather gloves, low-heeled oxfords, hose, and "utility handbags."[171]

The suit is seen mentioned again, this time a decade later in a high-school textbook published in 1937, for example, which similarly asserts that a tailored suit that is dark in color and devoid of trimmings is the best outfit for a working woman. The author furthermore tells her readers that "a trim-looking hat to match the outfit with gloves and bag should always be used."[172] As far as shoes, she adds that work attire should be worn with a cuban heel oxford, one-strap slipper, or pump.

The 1940s likewise brought little alteration to what had become a staple look for the working woman. One textbook advises that the "young business girl or teacher" should own suits or jacket dresses made of gingham or linen-like rayon to wear to the office. As before, gloves were considered a necessity, heels were a given, and pill-box hats or caps were also recommended.[173] Another book published in 1949 on the cusp of the new decade asserts that women should not wear anything that is too casual, athletic, "kiddish," or "old-maidish" saying, "pigtails, socks, slacks, high-heeled dress pumps, sleeveless dresses, printed wash dresses, tight sweaters, too long loose hair, body odor, perfume, and gum chewing are the most frequently mentioned characteristics that cause employers to fire, or never hire, girls."[174]

The prescriptions offered in the 1950s did somewhat deviate from this ongoing trend of the tailored suit, however. Following the widespread sartorial trend of the fifties which had

highlighted femininity and softness, one high school text book suggests that the fashions worn at school can also be easily transferred to the workplace, with this including durable, comfortable skirts and sweaters paired with appropriate headwear and gloves made of cotton or pigskin.[175] As with decades before, medium- to low-heeled shoes were suggested for their perceived comfort. Interestingly, the section on work clothes in this particular textbook was actually miniscule in size as it merely redirected the reader to the section entitled "School" for transferable tips on how to dress appropriately for one's job. In contrast to this tiny section devoted to work attire, however, greater detail was spent discussing the appropriate outfit of the modern housewife, inadvertently acting as a social commentary on the time.

The 1960s bought a renewed interest in the tailored suit and dress. The selection of footwear was becoming more flexible as one textbook published in 1963 encourages readers to combine generally any of their casualwear shoes with their business outfits, with this excluding sandals or other shoes that were a little too casual. Again, hats and gloves are deemed essential; although, the author does concede that young people were beginning to discard their hats. Nevertheless, she asserts that gloves have remained "an essential of correct attire."[176] As the sixties waned on and neared the start of the 1970s, a shift is seen in the way that work attire is addressed in fashion guides. While in all of the previous textbooks reviewed up until this time "work clothing" had generally fallen under a heading that had lumped together work attire and street wear, by the end of the 1960s, business wear was beginning to receive its own specialized attention. This is observed in a book published in 1967 that devotes the first subheading of the book's chapter on the modern woman's clothing essentials to the "Basic Wardrobe for the Working Girl." In it the author discards the "essential" hats and gloves of previous years and instead recommends that every working girl have at least two suits, six tops (blouses, shells, or sweaters), two day dresses (one-piece, two-piece, or jumper-style) and a separate jacket or cardigan, and two skirts.[177] Although this increased attention to women's business attire was a breakthrough itself, notice that dress pants are still absent from the working woman's recommended closet.

By the 1970s, fashion guides for the modern-day business woman were popping up on bookshelves across the country. As always, skirted suits were still regarded as the best choice by style experts. In the original "Dress for Success" book written by John T. Molloy, the woolen,

tweed, or linen "man-tailored" blazer suit was most recommended.[178] Molloy continues by saying that one should be wary that a suit's sleeves are not too long, that the suit is not worn with a vest, that the jacket does not nip in at the waist to create an exaggeration of the bust, and that the skirt falls just below the knee. These conservative suits favored by Molloy were furthermore to be paired with similarly conservative blouses that were simply cut and free of frills, lace, low necklines.

As discussed in Part I of this thesis, the 1980s were all about power dressing and looking the part of a successful business woman. Despite the fact that women were now competing with men for the corner office, taboos still existed regarding women wearing pants to the workplace. One book written on the subject asserted that business suits should always be skirted ones and never pantsuits because "trousers or pants for women are too casual to provide an effective business look."[179] However, not everyone shared this idea. Others were adopting a more progressive attitude toward women wearing pants to the office, with one book that was published a year after the aforementioned including dress pants among the recommended career clothing, therefore providing evidence that ideas were steadily changing during this time regarding what was thought of as appropriate attire for working women.[180] Further, less controversial recommendations during this time primarily focused on exuding a sense of power and authority through one's attire with dark colors most favored for suits along with strong shoulder pads that would exaggerate a woman's frame in order for her to appear almost as broad-shouldered as a man.

In the mid-nineties, Molloy of the *Dress for Success* books released an updated copy of his original work. This time, he listed the most common ways in which women in modern times "dress for failure," one of which included dressing too casually. He emphasized the fact that although some women may be growing lax in their standards for work attire, they must always strive to dress with more formality than their male counterparts, for because of existing societal inequalities, a man will always have the upper hand in terms of perceived authority than a woman of equal capabilities. This, Molloy says, should therefore be avoided by *always* wearing conservative, two-piece suits. In fact, Molloy claims that successful executive women are three times more likely to dress in serious conservative styles than women with similar qualifications who have not reached the executive level. The advice given by Molloy in this 1996 edition of

his bestselling book surely demonstrates that although the standards for workplace attire were undergoing changes across the country throughout the nineties, there was still a push to maintain former degrees of formality within the work setting.

Much has changed in the ten years since Molloy's new edition was released. Today, workplace fashion prescriptions usually recognize that different degrees of formality are appropriate in different occupational contexts. Modern jobs can require/allow different styles of clothing depending on their professional sector. Jobs in technology, media, and entertainment, for example, welcome casual clothing and oftentimes frown on "stuffy" suits while careers in law, finance, accounting, and education virtually require formal clothing like suits, ladylike blouses, and heels with stockings.[181] Differences in appropriate work attire can be further divided into even more categories, with this including creative jobs in fashion, publishing, and media that admire innovation and individuality in clothing; public jobs in medicine, sales, customer service, retail, and transportation which tend to value comfortable attire (e.g. medical scrubs); and even the home office which can include telecommuting, home businesses, or stay-at-home moms, in which case the individual does not even have to get dressed at all![182] With this wide spectrum of occupational environments recognized today, in the right context, sleeveless tops, flowing dresses, flats or open-toed shoes, and even dark-washed jeans are now stigma-free and no longer considered out of place in the modern-day workplace.

CASUAL CLOTHING ON THE STREETS

The following section will discuss the multiple ideas that dress scholars have offered in recent literature on how exactly the informality seen in the contemporary women's clothing has come about.

Perspectives on Modernity's Informality

In contemporary society, one can often go to a public area, like a shopping mall, grocery store, or restaurant, and see individuals dressed in a wide array of clothing, with this ranging from items like tailored dresses and heels to cut-off jeans and tank tops. By far, the favorite outfit of the modern American woman seems to be the classic jeans and T-shirt look, but after

decades – even centuries – of wearing conservative, feminine styles, how has the American woman reached such a relaxed sartorial state?

One idea regarding this shift that is endorsed by fashion historian Susan J. Vincent (2009:162) is that rather than obsessing over the clothes that adorn the body, today, women are devoting more of their attention to the maintenance of the body itself. An increasing number of popular social dialogues in the modern day seem to revolve around the role and rights of the body, with issues like stem cell research, obesity, eating disorders, cloning, and pornography all being hot-button issues that receive a lot of attention in contemporary America's body-centric culture (166).

In the past, the body was largely viewed as a delicate entity that needed protection from its surroundings. Women especially covered themselves with garments that would shield them from the "damaging" effects of the sun, the wind, the cold, etc., much in the same way that infants are still clothed to protect their fragile bodies from their immediate environments. However, modern science has worked to dispel these former ideas of human fragility and instead has promoted the robust nature of the human form, and with the 1920s and 1930s came a new era in which society wished to foster beautiful, healthy bodies.[183] During this time, women across the country began trying to slim up by dieting and engaging in leisure sports. Make up went from being taboo to stylish, and cosmetic sales skyrocketed as young women hoped to hide imperfections and "play up" their natural features by adding a little lipstick here and a dab of rouge there. Additionally, the "glow" that skin gained from sun tanning became the new ideal, gradually overtaking porcelain skin as the model for beauty. Thus, the twenties and thirties marked the start of the body-centric mentality which has gradually grown in strength ever since.

The transition over the 20th century to a more body-conscious outlook has contributed to the current informal state of fashion today in that clothing is no longer the primary concern of modern-day women when it comes to their appearances. This is not to say that women no longer care about what they look like; rather, the role of clothing in crafting one's personal image has diminished at the expense of the size, shape, and characteristics of the body the garments adorn.[184] In contrast to the folds and layers of costumes of the past, comparatively speaking, modern-day women actually cover themselves with minimal amounts of clothing, instead

choosing to wear relatively lightweight, formfitting clothes that essentially reveal the body's shape and oftentimes leave large patches of skin exposed.

According to Vincent, this refocusing from fashion to the state of the body itself has provided justification for at least two social phenomena that have become quite popular in recent decades – plastic surgery and body modification. As she states, "Modern garments, form fitting and adaptive to the wearer's contours, have a reduced capacity to fashion our shape, and we ourselves have a reduced interest in their fashioning possibilities. Because of this, an increasing amount of the work of appearance has been displaced onto skin and flesh and bone" (2009:166-167). Although tattoos and piercings have long existed as group membership markers within a diverse array of human cultures, American society has seen an explosion of individuals engaging in these practices in the past few decades, with individuals now choosing to pierce the body in all places imaginable as a mark of their individuality, from their brows to their bellies to their genitals (167). Similarly, plastic surgery has proliferated in recent times, making the body into a mere commodity in the process. "It is marketed, sold, and sliced up, just like any other object," says Vincent (170), and what's more, the cosmetic industry is devising more and more procedures an individual can undergo all the time. As women have become increasingly bombarded by messages that encourage the modification of their looks as a means of achieving the "perfect body," this has led not only to plastic surgery addicts, but also, many believe, to rising rates of body dysmorphic disorder, a psychological syndrome in which an individual is excessively concerned about or obsessed with a perceived physical flaw (173).

In response to these rising numbers of surgical and nonsurgical procedures conducted in the Western world, Vincent points out an interesting irony: many may look back at the fashions worn by men and women throughout the centuries and laugh at how "unnatural" some of those garments that greatly exaggerated the silhouette may seem (the crinoline skirt being a good example of this), yet somehow society expresses no astonishment at the mention of plastic surgery and other body-modifying techniques (167). Therefore, it is peculiar that the extravagant clothing of generations past is now looked upon with more amazement than the invasive, modern-day alterations executed by the scalpel. In fact, more and more women are beginning to flaunt their surgery, reveling in its artificiality, and viewing it as simply an "improvement on nature" (171).

Hill (2005) similarly laments the informality of modern day clothing and the "sameness" that characterizes contemporary dress. In a society that is supposedly more individualistic than it has ever been in the past, Hill wonders why this individuality remains unexpressed in modern day street wear (70).   One factor that Hill discusses in his analysis of this phenomenon is the effects that cities have on one's clothing choices. The fast-pace and close quarters of cities work against distinctiveness in clothing by forcing their inhabitants to dress in ways that are practical comfortable, and guarded against outward displays.[185] In large urban areas where one is constantly moving throughout the city and in frequent contact with strangers, individuals generally dislike drawing attention to themselves and would rather use their clothing as a means of assimilating into their hectic surroundings. Hill further points out that the casualization of clothing is not an isolated movement. Rather, many sectors of society have been growing increasingly informal in recent generations. As he states, "Older hierarchies, rituals, and formalities have been marginalized as people have turned from them to embrace a casual, laissez-faire attitude to sociality that eclipses (and even derides) these older models" (72). Meanings that were formerly associated with the structuring of society have diminished, and many believe this state of normlessness is generating attitudes of meaninglessness, directionless, and pointlessness among Western populations. This has led many to ask the question "if anything goes, does anything really matter?" (72).   Thus, this perspective brands clothing's informality as a product of a larger social undercurrent that is continuing to influence American culture and will likely persist into the foreseeable future.

Further subjects that have been suggested as factors contributing to the informality of contemporary fashion are ever-improving technological capabilities, the expanding waistbands of the American population, and the influences of certain cultural movements like hip-hop. In regard to technology, the democratization of fashion in the last century was greatly indebted to the rapid modes of communication that came about during the same era (Lynch and Strauss, 2007). Although technology has facilitated changes in fashion by many means, one of which is that that the internet has especially worked to blur the line between the public and private realms, and in this day of little privacy, nothing is left to the imagination. This frame of mind has seemingly carried over into the fashion world as women today are essentially baring (almost) all in their body-hugging clothes.[186] In a similar vein, as the percentage of overweight individuals

in America continues to climb, it seems that this social group will continue to seek out comfortable, unrestrictive clothing in a market that is still producing clothing primarily designed with a trim and svelte consumer in mind. A *Time* magazine article published in 2005 reported that half of all U.S. women wore a size 14 or larger at the time, up three sizes from an 8 in 1985,[187] and in the five years since the article hit newsstands, this number has likely only increased. The plus-size market is continuing to grow and it will undoubtedly begin to exert a great deal of influence on the fashion world in upcoming decades. Finally, many have come to recognize the influences that cultural movements like hip hop have had on society at large and fashion in particular. The styling of classic hip-hop apparel is urban and athletic to the core, and as this genre of music itself has become a mainstay force in America, the culture associated with it has helped to facilitate the spread of such casual trends as loose jeans and oversized shirts.[188] The hip-hop generation acts as merely one social group that is currently fueling the popularity of casual clothing in America.

Many are labeling modernity's informality as a sign that fashion has lost its power to convey meaning within contemporary society. Simply put, according to some, fashion does not really matter anymore. Hill (2005:72) describes this idea by stating, "Casual wear is casual precisely because it is perceived as holding little meaning beyond being practical, comfortable, and relaxed… the very rise of casual wear can be seen, in part, as deriving from the attitude that is doesn't really matter if people want to dress in a casual way, as what people wear doesn't hold much significance anyhow." That being said, this is not to imply that clothing does not retain significance on the personal level, for countless studies (including those discussed in the previous section devoted to business attire) have linked one's clothing with feelings of confidence, capability, etc. However, as Vincent (2009:159) points out, "Collectively, we are no longer upset, challenged, angered, inspired, or captivated by clothes and their appearance on the body." The democratization of fashion over the past century has allowed for almost anything to be deemed appropriate at almost any given social setting (161), and it is because of this that one will see both suits and jeans at the opera, for example, with the sartorial scale seemingly tipping slowly in favor of the latter over time. The following excerpt, taken from Vincent's *Anatomy of Fashion* (2007) succinctly articulates this phenomenon:

… an extreme or unusual appearance more often rais[es] an eyebrow [in the present day] than the blood pressure. Some have found this modern characteristic makes it harder to dress appropriately; when nothing is wrong, what then is right? It explains why – at the theatre [sic], at a restaurant, at church, at the cinema – there is such a variety in registers of dress, ranging from the mindfully elaborate to the simple, shabby, or skimpy. In recent years many of us have felt this shift towards the casual operate in our own clothing choices, and it is certainly evident in comparison with the generation that came before. In the 1960s, hats were worn to church; in the 1970s, television gardener Percy Thrower mulched his herbaceous borders in a collar and tie; and it was only in the 1980s that elderly women in trousers became a common sight. Today there are still events, certainly, that call most to a showier sartorial display – weddings are an example. However, in a world where there are few such elaborated contexts, increasingly the fancy dresses of participants have an aura of just that, of "fancy dress."[189]

Yet despite this notion that the art of fashion has lost its significance, incidents still arise which serve as a reminder that clothing's symbolic potential must not be underrated. A particularly salient example of this idea is demonstrated by a conflict that erupted in South Carolina in 2006 when a student was suspended from her high school after wearing a T-shirt featuring a Confederate flag to class.[190] School board officials had deemed the attire "disruptive" and unfit for the classroom due to the underlying racial sensitivities associated with the emblem; however, the student had argued that this ban on her clothing was a violation of her First Amendment right to free speech. The outrage that grew out of this event and the subsequent court case that followed (which inevitably ruled in favor of the school board) shows that despite ideas that our twenty-first century clothing has virtually lost its meaning, there are still some emotions that can be quickly ignited simply through the donning of certain symbolic emblems.

While the aforementioned list of possible factors that may have contributed to the informal wear trend is by no means exhaustive, it still helps to provide an image of the multi-faceted nature of casual wear's infamous rise to prominence. It would be foolish to believe that any one cause deserves the bulk of credit for this phenomenon, but rather, just as America itself is a melting pot of many cultures, this same mixing of elements has collectively worked to produce the fashion seen today. Since being embraced by society at large over the course of the twenty-first century, it is presently difficult to envision a time in the foreseeable future in which the comfortable, casual clothing that has come to define modern-day sartorial style will lose favor among the American public.

Final Thoughts and Recommended Future Research

No longer simply a medium of protection from the elements, we have seen that dress is a very complex social phenomenon that is influenced by a multitude of different social and psychological factors. Not only is it controlled by cultural codes that govern group membership patterns, but it is also a tool used by individuals to express their own self-identities. As we saw in Part I of this thesis, just as society has changed in its ideological attitude over time, so too has clothing undergone a similar transformation. Over the past two centuries the American women has gone from wearing columnar Empire-style dresses, to encumbering corsets, to feminine dresses fashioned in the style of the "New Look," to brightly-colored Lycra exercise outfits, and now to the much loved jeans and T-shirt style.

Each step along this sartorial path has been the result of not just one single dominant factor but rather a multitude of different influences. While Part I simply documented the changes seen in popular fashion since the start of the 18th century, Part II of this thesis looked at the evolution in American style in the context of its theoretical origins. Early dress historians viewed fashion as essentially a battle between the social classes, with the wealthier strata being the perpetuators of fashion trends, using their clothing as a means of distinguish themselves from the rest of society. Lower classes unendingly tried to emulate the wealthy, yet once a style became popular for all, it was hastily abandoned by the affluent, after which time the style would swiftly lose popularity and be declared outdated shortly thereafter. However, as America entered into the mid-20th century, fashion grew less associated with money and power and more linked with youth and individuality.

Today, modern-day dress scholars recognize that while affluence and prestige may still influence fashion trends to a degree, these days clothing choices and trends among American women can primarily be attributed to a variety of different elements including both societal perceptions of gender roles, along with personal lifestyles. Just as was discussed in an earlier section, fashion has traditionally been a gauge for society's opinion of gender roles. While the restrictive nature of women's clothing in the 18th century suggested that women were perceived as helpless creatures unfit to engage in any real physical activity, the relative freedom enjoyed by the modern-day woman to choose her clothing according to her own disposition demonstrates the

strides that have been made in the past century regarding ideas of equality between the sexes. In addition to this, lifestyle also plays a large role in the nature of fashion in modern times. Because the United States is relatively independent of economic class-based affiliations within its population, Americans have come to define their lives according to their lifestyles rather than as members of upper, middle, or lower classes. Instead, factors like where a person lives, his/her age, occupation, etc., have all helped to form the new apparatus now governing the consumption habits of individuals across the nation.

Finally, we have looked at casual clothing and its effects in both professional and informal environments. Since its first widespread adoption in the early nineties, business casual has received mixed reviews from its critics. While some say that the relaxation of dress codes similarly leads to lax performances by employees, others have argued the opposite – that informal dress codes result in increased productivity and a more cohesive team effort among staff. Thus, over the past two decades, businesses have undergone their own experimentations with their dress code policies in an attempt to capitalize on an inexpensive way to reward their employees without compromising their companies' efficiency. Likewise, casual wear has also proliferated in the informal social sphere in the contemporary era. While the exact causes of this casualization of clothing has yet to be pinpointed, it is undeniable that this trend is likely owing to the new emphasis being placed on the body in our increasingly health-conscious society. Rather than changing our silhouettes using cloth and hardware, women are now undergoing surgical procedures in an attempt to achieve the "perfect" figure, an act that when looked at outside of a modern mindset may prove to be even more unnatural than the "ridiculous" clothing indulged in by our forbearers.

This thesis has aimed to highlight the changes that have occurred in women's clothing in recent times, and in doing so, it has subsequently demonstrated that fashion is, and continues to be, a fluid and ever-evolving process. However, while change in American clothing styles is an inevitable occurrence, it is the direction in which these changes are moving that has incited so much interest as of late. The question on the minds of many is where will the strengthening wave of informality in both dress and behavior eventually lead American society, and what will this casualization ultimately represent?

To answer the question stated above, I offer a few topics for future research that have the potential to yield insightful results. Suggested topics for future studies include 1) correlations between casual clothing and anti-authority sentiments; 2) the Baby Boomer Generation's unique influence on informal wear's growth since the 1960s; 3) African American and hip-hop culture's contribution to athletic wear and urban clothing trends; 4) further investigation of how America's growing problem with obesity is influencing clothing purchasing patterns; 5) the effects of globalization and of the "shrinking world" on attire; 6) the power of symbols as expressed through clothing. Each of these topics seems to have had a hand in informal wear's current popularity, and thus, it would be interesting to see empirical evidence that breaks down their respective contributions.

Rather than being merely a superficial indulgence that possesses nothing deeper than the thickness of the latest *Vogue*, it is important to remember that dress is essentially our window to the undercurrents of contemporary society. Throughout time, clothing has reflected perspectives on everything from gender roles, to economic class distinctions, to the emotional state of society's misfit populations. Because of its vast potential to be used as a gauge for society's ideological state, the current stigma that most scholars have regarding the serious study of dress must be abandoned. If we really want to have a look at what is at the core of the modern day American woman's state of mind, all we need do is simply open her closet.

Notes

[1] Leventon, 174; Johnston, 46.
[2] McClellen, 26; Vincent, 155; Leventon, 172; Hall, 43
[3] Vincent p 155.
[4] McClellen, p 26.
[5] Leventon 180; Kyoto, p 183.
[6] Leventon, 180.
[7] Murray, 143.
[8] Ibid, 86.
[9] Ibid, 89.
[10] Hall, 110.
[11] Ibid, 98.
[12] Ibid, 111.
[13] Murray, 90-91.
[14] Ibid, 91.
[15] Hall, 111.
[16] Murray, 92.
[17] Hall, 55.
[18] Ibid, 51.
[19] Warner, 51.
[20] Hall, 51.
[21] Murray, 96.
[22] Ibid, 99.
[23] Ibid, 100.
[24] Ibid, 102.
[25] Baudot, 60.
[26] Hall, 79.
[27] Moore, 174.
[28] Hall, 207.
[29] Drowne and Huber, 100.
[30] Women's Wear Daily, 2.
[31] Ibid; TIME, Sischy (1998).
[32] Baudot, 70.
[33] Richards, 45; Drowne and Huber, 101.
[34] Wilcox, 162.
[35] Moore (1949), 173.
[36] O'Hara, 163.
[37] Laver, 12.
[38] Ibid, 9; Hall, 207
[39] Blausen, 172; Wilcox, 163.
[40] O'Hara, 41, 257.
[41] Costantino, 7.
[42] Ibid, 6.
[43] Walford, 17.
[44] Costantino, 16.
[45] Craats, 36.
[46] Costantino, 8; Craats, 36
[47] Costantino, 12.
[48] Ibid, 33.
[49] Ibid, 28.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Costantino, 17.

[52] Women's Wear Daily, 15.

[53] Costantino, 16.

[54] Ibid, 52.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid, 53.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid, 52.

[59] Ryan (1937), 179.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Walford, 25.

[62] Ibid, 6.

[63] Walford, 25.

[64] Baudot, 147-48.

[65] Ibid, 126.

[66] White (1998).

[67] Ibid.

[68] Walford, 59.

[69] Buckland and O'Neal, 36.

[70] Walford 59.

[71] Buckland and O'Neal, 33.

[72] Walford 59.

[73] Buckland and O'Neal, 36.

[74] Ibid, 33, 39.

[75] Walford, 67.

[76] Lindop, 96.

[77] Walford, 67.

[78] Lindop, 97.

[79] Walford, 68-69.

[80] Lindop, 97.

[81] Walford 78.

[82] Ibid; Gordon, 32.

[83] Lindop 97.

[84] Kyoto, 494.

[85] Walford, 192.

[86] Ibid, 199.

[87] Kyoto, 542.

[88] Ewing, 167.

[89] Ibid, 168.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ewing, 171-172.

[92] Women's Wear Daily, 5-6; Ewing, 173-175.

[93] Ewing, 180.

[94] Ibid, 181.

[95] *Time* (1967).

[96] Ewing, 182-183.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ewing, 178.

[99] Ibid, 188.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Baudot, 226.

[102] Ibid, 189.

[103] Baudot, 226; Kyoto, 558, 562.
[104] Connikie, 31.
[105] Baudot, 114.
[106] Baudot, 226; Connikie, 22.
[107] Connikie, 37,
[108] Ibid, 41.
[109] Baudot, 188.
[110] Ibid, 186.
[111] Murray, 115.
[112] Sagert, 98.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Gordon, 34.
[115] Sagert, 99.
[116] Gordon, 37.
[117] Ibid, 36.
[118] Ibid, 37.
[119] Sagert, 101; Baudot, 260.
[120] Sagert, 102.
[121] Ibid, 106.
[122] Carnegy, 6.
[123] Ibid, 12.
[124] Baudot, 293; Carnegy, 32.
[125] Baudot, 295.
[126] Ewing, 278; Steele, 227.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Carnegy, 12.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Carnegy, 12.
[131] Ibid, 48
[132] Craats, 37.
[133] Carnegy, 45.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Kyoto, 614.
[136] Craats, 36.
[137] Ibid, 36.
[138] Roach and Eicher, 1973.
[139] Rosencranz, 118.
[140] Crane, 14.
[141] Ibid, 5-6.
[142] Ibid, 5.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid, 9.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid, 10.
[147] Ibid, 24.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid, 11.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid, 12.
[154] Ibid, 14.
[155] Ibid, 15.

[156] Ibid, 13.
[157] Ibid, 15.
[158] Ibid, 16.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid, 17.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid, 18.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Woodard, 303.
[165] Kiddie, 351.
[166] Ibid; Woodard, 303.
[167] Kiddie, 352.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Cardon and Okoro, 355.
[170] Story, 310.
[171] Ibid, 309.
[172] Ryan, 180.
[173] Morton, 376.
[174] Erwin, 81.
[175] Oerke, 102.
[176] McJimsey, 265.
[177] Head, 187.
[178] Malloy, 50.
[179] Bixler, 148.
[180] Cass and Anderson, 40.
[181] Garza and Lupo, 31.
[182] Ibid, 32-33.
[183] Vincent, 166.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid. 70.
[186] Vincent, 164.
[187] Kher et al., 2003
[188] Farley, 1999
[189] Ibid, 162.
[190] SCNow.com, 2010

Bibliography

70sJeansGirl

  2010 Back to the Past of the Seventies. September. http://70sjeansgirls.blogspot.com
    /2010_09_01_archive.html, accessed May 1, 2011.

Adomaitis, Alyssa D., and Kim K. P. Johnson

  2005 Casual versus Formal Uniforms: Flight Attendants' Self-perceptions Clothing and
    Perceived Appraisals by Others. Textiles Research Journal 23(2): 88-101.

Armour, Stephanie

  2007 Generation Y: They've arrived at work with a new attitude. USA Today, June 7.
    http://usatoday.com/money/workplace/2005-11-06-gen-y_x.htm?POE=click-refer, accessed
    January 20, 2011.

Baker, Georgia O.

  2000 A Handbook of Costume Drawing: a guide to drawing the period figure. Boston: Focal
    Press.

Baudot, François

  2006 Fashion: The Twentieth Century. New York: Universe.

Bixler, Susan

  1984 The Professional Image: The Total Program for Marketing Yourself Visually. New York:
    G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Blausen, Whitney

  2010 Cosmetics, Western. *In* The Berg Companion to Fashion. Valerie Steele, ed. Pp. 170-177.
    New York: Berg.

Bordes, Philippe

  2005 Jacques-Louis David: Empire to Exile. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Buckland, Sandra S., and Gwendolyn S. O'Neal.

  1998 "We Publish Fashions Because They are News": *The New York Times* 1940 through 1945.
    Dress 25: 33-41.

Buckley, Cheryl, and Hilary Fawcett

2002 Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siècle to the Present. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cardon, Peter W., and Ephraim A. Okoro

2009 Professional Characteristics Communicated By Formal Versus Casual Workplace Attire. Business Communication Quarterly 72(3): 355-360.

Carnegy, Vicky.

1990 Fashions of a Decade: The 1980s. New York: Facts on File.

Cass, Lee H., and Karen E. Anderson

1985 Look Like a Winner! Why When, and Where to Wear What. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Connikie, Yvonne

1990 Fashions of a Decade: The 1960s. New York: Facts on File.

Corrigan, Peter

2008 The Dressed Society: Clothing, the Body and Some Meanings of the World. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Costantino, Maria

1992 Fashions of a Decade: The 1930s. New York: Facts on File.

Craats, Rennay

2002 History of the 1930s. Mankato, MN: Weigl Publishers.

Craats, Rennay

2002 History of the 1980s. Mankato, MN: Weigl Publishers.

Crane, Diana

2000 Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Dorner, Jane

1973 Fashion in the Twenties and Thirties. London: Ian Allan.

Drowne, Kathleen M., and Patrick Huber

2004 The 1920s. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Erwin, Mabel D.

1949 Clothing for Moderns. New York: Macmillan Company.

Ewing, Elizabeth

  1989 History of 20th Century Fashion. New York: Costume & Fashion Press.

Farley, Christopher J.

  1999 Hip-Hop Nation. Time Magazine, February 8: 153.

Garza, Jesse, and Joe Lupo

  2009 Guide to Your Ultimate Career Wardrobe. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

Gordon, Beverley

  1991 American Denim: Blue Jeans and Their Multiple Layers of Meaning. *In* Dress and
    Popular Culture. Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan V. Lab, eds. Pp. 31-45. Bowling Green,
    Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Hall, Lee

  1992 Common Threads: A Parade of American Clothing. Boston: Bulfinch Press.

Head, Edith

  1967 How to Dress for Success. New York: Random House.

Hill, Andrew

  2005 People Dress so Badly Nowadays: Fashion and Late Modernity. *In* Fashion and
    Modernity. Christopher Breward and Caroline Evans, eds. Pp.67-78. New York: Berg.

Johnston, Lucy

  2005 Nineteenth-Century Fashion in Detail. London: V & A Publications.

Kaiser, Susan B.

  1997 The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context. 2nd edition. New
    York: Fairchild Publications.

Kher, Unmesh

  2003 How to Sell XXXL. Time Magazine, January 27: 161.

Kiddie, Thomas

  2009 Focus on Business Practices: Recent Trends in Business Casual Attire and Their Effects
    on Student Job Seekers. Business Communication Quarterly 72(3): 350-354.

Kroeber, A.

  1919 On the principle of order in civilization as exemplified by changes in fashion. American
    Anthropologist 21: 235-263.

Kyoto Costume Institute

  2002 Fashion: A History from the 18th to the 20th Century. Los Angeles: Taschen.

Laver, James

  1964 Women's Dress in the Jazz Age. London: Hamish Hamilton.

Leventon, Melissa

  2008 What People Worn When: A Complete Illustrative History of Costume from Ancient
     Times to the Nineteenth Century for Every Level of Society. New York: Ivy Press.

LIFE

  2000 Century of Change: America in Pictures, 1900-2000. Richard B. Stolley, ed. New York:
     Little, Brown and Company.

Lill, Marianne M., and Tim J. Wilkinson

  2005 Judging a book by its cover: descriptive survey of patients' preferences for doctors'
     appearance and mode of address. BMJ 331: 1524-1527.

Lindop, Edmund.

  2010 America in the 1940s. Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books.

Lynch, Annette, and Mitchell D. Strauss

  2007 Changing Fashion: A Critical Introduction to Trend Analysis and Meaning. New York:
     Berg.

McClellan, Elisabeth

  1910 Historic Dress in America: 1800-1870. Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Company.

McClellan, Elisabeth

  1969 Historic Dress in America: 1607-1870. New York: Benjamin Blom.

McJimsey, Harriet T.

  1963 Art in Clothing Selection. New York: Harper & Row.

Molloy, John T.

  1977 The Woman's Dress for Success Book. New York: Warner Books.

Molloy, John T.

  1996 New Women's Dress for Success. New York: Business Plus.

Moore, Doris L.

  1949 The Woman in Fashion. New York: B. T. Batsford.

Morton, Grace M.

  1943 The Arts of Costume and Personal Appearance. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Moser, Frances H.

  1934 The American Costume Book. New York: A.S. Barnes and Company.

Murray, Maggie P.

  1989 Changing Styles in Fashion: Who, What, Why. New York: Fairchild Publications.

Neuborne, Ellen

  1999 Generation Y: Today's teens – the biggest bulge since the boomers – may force
     marketers to toss their old tricks. Businessweek, February 15. http://www.businessweek
     .com/1999/99_07/b3616001.htm, accessed April 29, 2011.

Oerke, Bess V.

  1956 Dress. Peoria, Illinois: Chas. A. Bennett Company.

O'Hara, Georgina

  1986 The Encyclopaedia of Fashion: From 1840 to the 1980s. London: Thames and Hudson.

Parsi, Kayhan, and Sara Taub

 2002 The Trend Toward Casual Dress and Address in the Medical Profession. Virtual Mentor
     4(5).

Peluchette, Joy V., and Katherine Karl

 2007 The Impact of Workplace Attire on Employee Self-Perceptions. Human Resource
     Development Quarterly 18(3): 345-360).

Richards, Lynn

 1983 The Rise and Fall of It All: The Hemlines and Hiplines of the 1920s. Clothing and
     Textiles Research Journal 2(42):42-48.

Roach, Mary E., and Joanne B. Eicher

 1973 The Visible Self: Perspectives on Dress. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Rosencranz, Mary Lou

 1972 Clothing Concepts: A Social-Psychological Approach. New York: Macmillian.

Ryan, Mildred G.

 1937 Your Clothes and Personality. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company.

Sagert, Kelly B.

2007 The 1970s. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Sapir, Edward

  1981 [1931] Fashion. *In* Perspectives of Fashion. George B. Sproles, ed. Pp. 23-27.

    Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company.

SCNow.com

  2010 Court hears former Latta student's Confederate clothing case. October 27.

    http://www2.scnow.com/news/2010/oct/27/court-hears-former-latta-students-confederate-

    clot-ar-1019055/, accessed May 14.

Sheff, David

  2007 Whatever Happened to Jane Fonda in Tights? New York Times, February 8.

    http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/08/fashion/08Fitness.html, accessed May 1, 2011.

Shelton, C.L., c. Raistrick, K. Warbusrton, and K.H. Siddiqui

  2010 Can changes in clinical attire reduce likelihood of cross-infection without jeopardizing

    the doctor-patient relationship? Journal of Hospital Infection 74: 22-29.

Simmel, Georg

  1957 [1904] Fashion. *In* American Journal of Sociology 62(6):541-558.

Sischy, Ingrid

  1998 The Designer Coco Chanel. Time Magazine, June 8: 151.

Steele, Valerie

  1997 Fifty Years of Fashion: New Look to Now. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Steele, Valerie

  2010 The Berg Companion to Fashion. New York: Berg.

Story, Margaret

  1924 How to Dress Well: What to Wear to Enhance Personality, Complexion, and Figure, and

    Give Grace and Art to Your Appearance. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.

Time Magazine

  1967 Up, Up, & Away. December 1.

Twenge, Jean M., and Stacy M. Campbell

  2008 Generational differences in psychological traits and their impact on the workplace.

    Journal of Managerial Psychology 23(8): 862-877.

Veblen, Thorstein

  1981 [1912] Dress as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture. *In* Perspectives of Fashion.

    George B. Sproles, ed. Pp. 17-22. Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company.

Vincent, Susan J.

  2009 The Anatomy of Fashion: Dressing the Body from the Renaissance to Today. New York:

    Berg.

Walford, Jonathan

  2008 Forties Fashion: From Siren Suits to the New Look. New York: Thames & Hudson.

Warner, Patricia C.

  1988 Public and Private: Men's Influence on American Women's Dress for Sport and Physical

    Education. Dress 14: 48-55.

White, Constance C.R.

  1998 Celebrating Claire McCardell. New York Times, November 17.

    http://www.nytimes.com/1998/11/17/style/celebrating-claire-mccardell.html?src=pm,

    accessed January 19, 2011.

Wilcox, R. Turner

  1963 Five Centuries of American Costume. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Women's Wear Daily

  1963 Sixty Years of Fashion. New York: Fairchild Publications.

Woodard, Ginger

  1998 Casual Apparel in the Workplace. Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management 3(4):

    301-310.