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Controversies about American women's fashion, 1920-1945: through the lens of The New York Times

Yhe-Young Lee
Iowa State University

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**Controversies about American women's fashion, 1920-1945:
Through the lens of *The New York Times***

by

Yhe-Young Lee

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Textiles and Clothing

Program of Study Committee:
Jane Farrell-Beck (Major Professor)
Mary Lynn Damhorst
Jean Parsons
Hamilton Cravens
Richard Kottman

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2003

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Committee Member

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Major Professor

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For the Major Program

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	v
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Research Focus	1
Fashion theories	2
Research questions	7
Research Method and Sources	8
Literature Review	12
CHAPTER 2. CONTROVERSIES ABOUT AMERICAN WOMEN’S FASHION, 1920-1929	25
Body Exposure	25
Changes in American womanhood	26
Body exposure and abbreviation in women’s fashion	32
Resistance to women’s body exposure	42
Defenders of women’s body exposure	54
Femininity versus Masculinity	59
Mainstream fashion	60
Knickerbockers	64
Extravagance versus Thrift and Conservation	69
Bases of Women’s Challenge to Social Conventions	75
CHAPTER 3. CONTROVERSIES ABOUT AMERICAN WOMEN’S FASHION, 1930-1939	93
Body Exposure	93
Bathing suits	94
Shorts and halters	98
Femininity versus Masculinity	103
Corsets	104
Masculine garments	107
Extravagance versus Thrift and Conservation	112
CHAPTER 4. CONTROVERSIES ABOUT AMERICAN WOMEN’S FASHION, 1940-1945	129
Body Exposure	129
Femininity versus Masculinity	133

Thrift and Conservation versus Extravagance	143
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION	153
The 1920s	153
The 1930s	161
The 1940s	166
Conclusion	169
REFERENCES CITED	174
Primary Sources	174
1920-1929	174
1930-1939	178
1940-1945	180
Secondary Sources	182

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1. Evening Dresses from *Vogue*, 1 July 1926, p. 71
- Figure 2. Women's Transparent Dresses from *Vogue*, 15 July 1926, p. 73
- Figure 3. Girls' Knickerbockers from *Vogue*, 15 May 1922, p. 5
- Figure 4. Bathing Suits, Pajamas, and Trouser Suit from *Vogue* 1 June 1935, p. 115
- Figure 5. Two-Piece Bathing Suit from *Vogue* 15 June 1935, p. 7
- Figure 6. Evening Gown from *Vogue* 15 February 1938, p. 15
- Figure 7. Shorts from *Vogue* 15 June 1935, p. 63
- Figure 8. Foundation Garment from *Vogue* 1 April 1935, p. 110
- Figure 9. Suits with Broad Shoulders and Longer Skirts from *Vogue* 1 April 1935, p. 71
- Figure 10. Coveralls from *Bazaar* November 1943, p. 85

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is based on the accounts of controversies about American women's fashion appearing in *The New York Times* and some magazines published between 1920 and 1945. The main focus of this research is to understand social conventions and the changing meanings of fashion reflected in the accounts of controversies in relation to women's lives during the period. Controversial issues are categorized into three themes including body exposure, femininity versus masculinity, and extravagance versus thrift and conservation. Fashion theories are introduced in chapter one to enhance the understanding of fashion adoption and its changing meanings. Chapter two is devoted to the discussions of controversies about women's exposure of calves, arms and necks, the boyish look in mainstream fashion, women's adoption of knickerbockers, and the extravagance in women's fashion appearing in primary sources published between 1920 and 1929. Chapter three focuses on controversial issues such as women's adoption of abbreviated leisure wear including bathing suits, shorts and halters, the tension between femininity and masculinity embedded in women's corsets and trousers, the ironical economic condition not only demanding more consumption but also conservation during the Depression years between 1930 and 1939. The accounts of controversies about the shorter and narrower style of dresses, women's adoption of trousers, and the necessity of thrift and conservation are discussed in relation to World War II in chapter four. The changing meanings of fashions between 1920 and 1945 are reviewed in the conclusion in light of fashion theories, including the collective selection theory, ambivalence theory, and aesthetic perspectives of fashion adoption theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Research Focus

Paul Nystrom, in his book *Economics of Fashion*, defined fashion as “the prevailing style at any given time.”¹ This definition of fashion has been elaborated over time, and fashion today is generally defined as “the style accepted by the majority of a group at a particular time and place.”² However, fashion is not just understood as a phenomenon but often understood as a “process-oriented phenomenon.” According to George Sproles, “the fashion process is a dynamic mechanism of change through which a potential fashion object is transmitted from its point of creation to public introduction, discernible public acceptance, and eventual obsolescence.” He described the life-cycle of fashion in six phases: invention and introduction, fashion leadership, increasing social visibility, conformity within and across social groups, social saturation, and decline and obsolescence.³

As a new style of fashion is introduced to society and moves through the life-cycle of fashion, a variety of opinions and restrictions arises within society. In this dissertation, I will examine the contrasting opinions about and social regulations of American women’s fashion that appeared in *The New York Times* and a variety of magazines published between 1920 and 1945. The change in opinions and restrictions on changing fashions reflects the change in social conventions and the meanings of fashions in relation to women’s lives during the period. First, I will review some major theories on fashion adoption and the change of its meanings, in order to enhance the understanding of fashion change and the controversies during the period.

Fashion theories

One of the classical theories of fashion change is Georg Simmel's trickle-down theory. Simmel recognized imitation and demarcation as two fundamental "psychological tendencies" which serve as underlying motive power in fashion change. According to his explanation, it is an instinctive human desire to attain higher social position, and the desire is often expressed by adopting upper class symbols including its fashion. Therefore, when the highest class establishes a new style of fashion, the succeeding lower class imitates it. The upper class fashion is sequentially copied down the social class ladder until it reaches the lowest class. The highest class then adopts a new fashion in order to differentiate themselves from the succeeding lower classes only to be copied by the succeeding lower class again.⁴

However, Charles King challenged the trickle-down theory and suggested the mass-market or trickle-across theory. He pointed out the fact that the development of mass media brought fast and wide circulation of information on new styles in postindustrial society. Moreover, ample availability of material made it possible for manufacturers to offer new styles of fashion for each class at different price levels. Therefore, a new fashion is introduced to the different social classes almost simultaneously to be diffused across each social class.⁵

On the other hand, subcultural styles can trickle-up to the mass population mainly due to the subcultural group's "creativity, artistic excellence, or relevance to current life-styles."⁶ George Field discussed "the status float phenomenon" with examples such as black American hair styles, African prints, the facial hair and cuffless pants of youth, the colorful suits and coats of lower class, and bell-bottomed pants adopted by white Americans, adults, middle-class, and men. Field regarded these examples as fashions adopted from the lower social class to the upper social class.⁷

Paul Blumberg recognized the problem of the trickle-down theory with the decline of

customary status symbols in post-industrial America. He insisted that social status symbols should be socially desirable and scarce. However, with the increase of material abundance, scarcity of social status symbols declined. He also asserted that people could disguise their social status by occasionally adopting upper class status symbols in the anonymous society. In contrast, he recognized the influence of counterfashion such as long hair, head bands, beads, miscellaneous leather and suede, and faded and neglected dungarees on mainstream fashion.⁸

A good contemporary example of subcultural styles adopted by mainstream fashion is the hip-hop style. The hip-hop culture including the music, clothing, and language of inner-city black teenagers has been promoted to meet the needs of suburban black and white teenagers and even adults in their early twenties wanting to be rebellious against social conventions. Moreover, white teenagers who adopted hip-hop culture were fascinated by the feeling that they joined and overcame the fear against inner-city black culture. MTV contributed to its popularity, and brands including Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein promoted baggy hip-hop jeans.⁹

Herbert Blumer also critiqued the trickle-down theory. He discussed that “the fashion mechanism appears not in response to a need of class differentiation and class emulation but in response to a wish to be in fashion, to be abreast of what has good standing, to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world.” Therefore, consumers collectively select from “competing styles or models those which match developing tastes.” In Blumer’s collective selection theory, “it is not the prestige of the elite which makes the design fashionable but, instead, it is the suitability or potential fashionableness of the design which allows the prestige of the elite to be attached to it.”¹⁰

Charlene Lind and Mary E. Roach-Higgins conducted research on the relationship between college students’ clothing behavior and their social-political attitudes in relation to collective adoption. Students from four different American universities, including two universities with liberal and the other

two with conservative social-political atmosphere, participated in the survey. The results showed that 61 percent of students from liberal universities wore unconventional styles of clothes that were identified as often adopted by people with liberal social-political attitude, while only 43 percent of students from the conservative universities reported they adopted unconventional clothes. The students with conservative social-political attitudes wore conservative clothes in all universities. However, the correlation between clothing styles and the social-political attitude was low in students from liberal universities. In other words, students in liberal universities tended to adopt unconventional styles of clothes, which were more prominent on their campuses, whether they had conservative or liberal social-political attitude. Therefore, the authors concluded that the unconventional clothes, which symbolized the liberal social-political attitude of a group, lost their meanings, as they were adopted by others who did not have liberal attitude.¹¹

George Sproles discussed how a certain style of fashion is adopted by consumers from an aesthetic perspective. He explained that consumers perceive a new style as a whole and its components, when the new style is introduced to them. Consumers are more likely to adopt a new style that is moderately complex – in terms of color, lines, shapes and design details – and moderately different from the present style. As consumers are exposed to the new style repeatedly, they become more familiar with the style and eventually become favorable about adopting it. In this way, a new fashion trend is formed.¹²

Fred Davis emphasized the importance of ambivalence in fashion change. According to Davis, identity is “any aspect of self about which individuals can through symbolic means communicate with others, in the instance of dress through predominantly nondiscursive, visual, tactile, and olfactory symbols.” In other words, identity is any aspect of expressed self. Fashion change occurs with the “contradictory and oscillating subjective states” of identity – identity ambivalence such as tension

between youth and age, masculinity and femininity, androgyny and singularity, and so on.¹³ Identity is expressed in somewhat similar ways among individuals following social conventions, because people within mainstream society experience “similar yearnings, tensions, concerns, and discontents.”¹⁴ Therefore, identity ambivalence also occurs somewhat collectively, and the collective identity ambivalence results in fashion change. Collective identity ambivalence is expressed in new styles of fashion by fashion creators and in eventual adoptions by consumers. By fashion change Davis meant the shifting “relationship between signifiers and the referents, attributes, or values thereby signified,” and, ultimately, implies the change in dress codes.¹⁵ Therefore, collective identity ambivalence results in fashion change which is the change in dress codes.

Susan Kaiser, Richard Nagasawa, and Sandra Hutton proposed the symbolic interaction theory of fashion, based on Blumer’s concept of collective selection, Davis’s concept of identity ambivalence, and Gregory Stone’s concept of appearance and the self. According to Stone, identity expressed in appearance is programmed by the sender and reviewed by the receiver, and negotiation between the sender and the receiver takes place to assign certain meanings to the appearance. The symbolic interaction theory of fashion combined “macro-level cultural forces and micro-level appearance processes.” Following are the five principles of the symbolic interaction theory of fashion.

1. Principle of human ambivalence: ambivalence is a basic human condition.
2. Principle of appearance-modifying commodities in the capitalist marketplace: If human ambivalence exists, then in an open market place new appearance-modifying commodities will emerge to express this ambivalence.
3. Principle of symbolic ambiguity: If new appearance-modifying commodities emerge in the open marketplace to express ambivalence, then appearance styles created by consumers will convey symbolic ambiguity.

4. Principle of meaning negotiation and style adoption: If appearance styles convey symbolic ambiguity, then the meanings of these styles will be collectively negotiated in social interaction, and styles that become meaningful will be adopted by a majority of consumers.
5. Principle of ongoing dialectic: If certain appearance styles are adopted by a majority of consumers but do not resolve ambivalence, then appearance styles will undergo change in an ongoing dialectic between ambivalence and style change.¹⁶

Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton applied these principles to explain fashion change in postmodern society.¹⁷

However, there were a few responses to Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton. Jean Hamilton critiqued their theory in that it did not pay much attention to fashion change in macro-level phenomena. She proposed the continuing four levels of phenomena which influence fashion change: Cultural system arbiters, fashion system arbiters, negotiation with others, negotiation with self. Among these four, the first two are macro-level phenomena which Hamilton argued that the theory based on symbolic interactionism failed to explain.¹⁸ Rita Kean also responded to Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton by emphasizing the influence of industry, rather than consumers, in fashion change. Against Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton's argument that the postmodern society has heterogeneous commodities for consumers to express identity ambivalence, she insisted that there were homogeneous commodities for consumers from which to select.¹⁹ Another respondent, Rachel Pannabecker, critiqued the applicability of the theory to fashion change in the past. She also pointed out that the concept of ambivalence was based on the binary thought of Western philosophy. In addition, she asserted that the concept of appearance-modifying commodities as means for expressing ambivalence was too materialistic; ambivalence can be expressed in spiritual ways. Moreover, ambivalence could also be expressed by adopting other commodities such as houses and cars.²⁰

The complexity of the fashion concept resulted in diverse perspectives on fashion offered by many researchers. Sproles attempted to organize the different perspectives of fashion with a framework composed of six phases of the fashion life-cycle.²¹ My interest is to look at accounts of controversies that appeared in published newspapers and magazines as American women's fashion changed between 1920 and 1945. The changing meanings of fashions reflected in controversies during the period can be understood in light of fashion theories reviewed above and may reveal fashion processes at work during that time frame. The discussions on the changing meanings of fashions in relation to women's lives and in the light of fashion theories would hopefully contribute to the expansion of knowledge about the history of American women's fashion.

Research questions

In order to conduct research on the published accounts of controversies about American women's fashion, I focused on the following research questions.

1. What were the controversial issues about U.S. women's fashion between 1920 and 1945?
2. How were U.S. women's lives during the period related to the controversial issues about U.S. women's fashion?
3. How did the changes in controversies about women's fashion reflect the change in social conventions and the changing meanings of fashion in relation to women's lives during the period?

American women's lives in the 1920s were somewhat different from women previous to this era. More women were working and gained economic power, and they had less conservative attitudes toward issues such as sex, drinking and smoking. The change in American womanhood may not be explained apart from the revolutionary change in women's fashion during the period. Many women cut their hair short and wore abbreviated clothes exposing their legs in the 1920s. Women also actively

adopted knickerbockers as sportswear and resort wear, as more women were interested in and engaged in physical exercise. Women's fashions caused severe controversies, as did changes in American womanhood during the period. Therefore, the 1920s are a good starting point to look at controversies about women's fashions. However, women's lives changed with the change of social-economic situation during the Depression and World War II. More women, especially married women, had to work, while many men lost their jobs. Traditional femininity was somewhat emphasized in American society, as many men lost their authority as the head of household with their loss of jobs. Consumption became an important issue in order to restore economic prosperity, while conservation was necessary to many Americans. On the other hand, even more women had to work during World War II, with the shortage of manpower. Many women took traditional male jobs in industry. In addition, the whole country campaigned for thrift and conservation. Therefore, looking at how the opinions on women's fashion evolved through the Depression era of the 1930s and to World War II era, as fashion changed in relation to the change of women's lives, would contribute to the enhancement of understanding of the twentieth century changes in American women's fashion.

Research Method and Sources

In order to find the controversial issues on American women's fashion between 1920 and 1945, I searched for primary sources in *The New York Times* and in magazines. I started with *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and looked for the magazine articles related to controversies about American women's fashion under topics such as clothing and dress, fashion, ethics, social ethics, and sexual ethics. The articles I found from *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* were mostly about discussions and suggestions on women's fashion and clothing behavior without much factual description, and did not supply a clear picture of controversies which took place during the period. On the other hand, *The New*

York Times reported facts such as women's actual fashions, clothing regulations, the protest against clothing regulations and campaigns related to women's fashion. In addition, the letters to the editor delivered the ideas of the readers on fashion during the period.

Primarily due to the amount of information available in *The New York Times* as a daily newspaper and its reputation as "the best paper in the country" with efforts to deliver news from a neutral stance,²² controversies on American women's fashion reported in *The New York Times* during the period provided the main frame for the research. As a newspaper with a national circulation, *The New York Times* covered the news from all over the country. However, the accounts of controversies about women's fashion were mostly about the East Coast and the Mid-West. The accounts of controversies about women's bathing suits, shorts and halters in the 1930s were especially concentrated in the East Coast. A few articles concerned styles in the South and on the West Coast, which would be one of the limitations of this research. Information from magazines articles found from *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* was integrated to the main picture formed based on *The New York Times*. The articles I referred to in this dissertation were from *The Century Magazine*, *Collier's*, *Consumer Digest*, *Education*, *Forum*, *Golden Book Magazine*, *Harper's Monthly*, *Hygeia*, *Independent Woman*, *Journal of Home Economics*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *Life*, *The Literary Digest*, *The Mentor*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Outlook*, *Outing*, *Recreation*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Scholastic*, *Time* and *Woman's Home Companion*. I also looked at almost every issue of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* in order to find figures which would enhance the understanding of women's fashion between 1920 and 1945.

The primary sources from *The New York Times* and magazines mostly discuss the fashion of urban, white, middle-class women from juvenile to middle age. In addition, most of the sources were popular magazines with a wide range of male and female audiences, except for a few magazines which

mainly had an intellectual audience. Even magazines such as *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Woman's Home Companion* tended to be family magazines for both women and men.²³ I found the discussions and reports in *The Literary Digest*, *The New York Times* and *Time* were somewhat neutral, while the information in *Collier's*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *The New Republic* and *The Saturday Evening Post* generally displayed liberal views on women's fashion. On the other hand, *Journal of Home Economics* and *Woman's Home Companion* displayed conservative views.

I referred to secondary sources from journals such as *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, *Costume, Dress* and *Feminist Studies*, and books on American history and costume history to discuss different views about American women's fashion during the period and to interpret primary sources in relation to women's lives of the time. Some books published during the period were also helpful to the discussions and the interpretations of the controversies about women's fashions.

As I analyzed the primary sources, I classified the sources into three categories according to the characteristics of the controversies: body exposure, femininity versus masculinity, and extravagance versus thrift and conservation. I found some connection between these three categories and the major ambivalences Davis talks about in his book *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*. As I briefly reviewed above, Davis recognizes collective identity ambivalences as the sources of fashion change, and discusses three major categories of ambivalences: ambivalences of gender, ambivalences of status, and ambivalences of sexuality. In the chapter devoted to ambivalences of gender, he talks about the ambivalences of masculinity versus femininity in fashion change. On ambivalences of status, he discusses the "tension of symbolically claiming greater or lesser social status" than one deserves. In the chapter discussing ambivalences of sexuality, he talks about "the dialectic of the erotic and the chaste."²⁴ Controversies may occur when the ambivalences direct fashions from one way to another.

In addition, I identified a relationship between the three categories of controversial issues I

classified and the traditional dress code that was influenced by Judeo-Christian dicta which absorbed dualism from Greek philosophy, including the idea that the human being has components of body and soul.²⁵ Judeo-Christian teachings have had a great influence on Western philosophy and social conventions. Under Judeo-Christian dicta, body and soul are polar opposites. The body, as the origin of sexual and material desire, is an obstacle to the salvation of the soul. Thus, the body was despised and controlled in pursuit of the inner-self. For example, the medieval saints' belief that spiritual enhancement could be achieved through fasting²⁶ is based on the body-soul dualism. Therefore, the body, especially women's bodies, had to be as invisible as possible. Saint Augustine emphasized men's "uncontrollable sexual passion" and the necessity of covering up women's bodies to control that passion.²⁷ Exposure or abbreviation of dress was unacceptable to the early Christians. In addition, Flügel pointed out that body decoration and extravagance in dress were regarded as immoral in Christianity, since these behaviors attract attention to the body.²⁸ It was also emphasized in Christian dictum that men are naturally superior to women. Therefore, the gender difference in dress was to represent men's superiority. Saint Paul criticized the first century men and women wearing the same kind of dress.²⁹ It was a violation of nature for women and men to be indistinguishable.

As a country of many immigrants with Judeo-Christian religion, the dress code in American society tended to be influenced by Judeo-Christian dicta. Therefore, controversies occurred, when there were challenges to the traditional dress code and code modifications were on the way. Women's clothing behavior such as body exposure, adopting masculine clothes, and paying too much attention to appearances caused social controversies, and the accounts of controversies reflect the ambivalence about women's proper way of dressing.

In the following three chapters, I will discuss the controversies about American women's fashion in three separate periods: 1920 to 1929, 1930 to 1939, and 1940 to 1945. The year 1929 is a

good point to separate the chapters, since the mainstream fashion around this year was clearly different from the fashion in the mid-1920s. Moreover, women's lives began to change in 1929 with the start of the Great Depression. I also felt need to separate the chapters between 1939 and 1940, because many women's lives changed again around that period as the United States started to provide weapons to the Allies and enforced the defense programs with the onset of World War II in Europe in 1939. Each chapter will be devoted to each separate period discussing the controversial issues under three categories related to body exposure, femininity versus masculinity, and extravagance versus thrift and conservation. Research findings will be integrated in the final chapter of this dissertation. The fashion theories will be referred to in interpreting the changing meanings of fashions embedded in controversies in the concluding chapter. Before I start the discussion of controversies about American women's fashion in terms of body exposure, femininity versus masculinity, and extravagance versus thrift and conservation between 1920 and 1945, I will briefly review previous studies and discussions related to these three topics in women's fashion. Some of these studies will be discussed further in the main chapters.

Literature Review

While some studies are related to one of the three topics of controversies I will concentrate in this dissertation, some others, like Davis's book, as mentioned above, included discussions related to all three topics of my interest. Aileen Ribeiro in her book, *Dress and Morality*, also covered discussions in relation to the three topics. She said that the history of fashion is "a constant battle against the introduction of new styles, which may be thought of as 'immoral' until their novelty is muted by the passage of time." Ribeiro noted that social customs determined whether dress is proper or improper. She described the issues of immorality in Northwest Europe, especially in England, from the ancient period to the twentieth century. Her book is a historical overview of sumptuary laws, the exposure or

the emphases of sexual areas of the body, men and women adopting the opposite sex clothes, and humanitarian aspects of killing animals for furs and leathers.³⁰

Rebecca Arnold's book, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety*, is also related to the three controversial issues I am going to discuss in this study. While Ribeiro described controversial moral issues from the ancient period to the twentieth century, Arnold's discussions concentrated on the last three decades of the twentieth century with frequent references to the early twentieth century issues of morality. According to her explanation, twentieth century urban life was full of insecurity with rapid changes of social-economic status, and consumption was a way to compensate for the insecurity. She also insisted that women gained power through their eroticized bodies with more body exposure throughout the twentieth century. On the other hand, women had to make constant efforts to meet the idealized body image of the time. In addition, Arnold thought of women's adoption of masculine garments as a process of establishing a new definition of femininity with the change of men's and women's gender roles within the society. She regarded the boyish fashion of the 1920s as a representation of women's "push for freedom" and transcendent definition of femininity. Arnold also found the implication of uncertain definition of femininity in the mannish garments of Hollywood stars such as Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich. She suggested that the juxtaposition of masculinity and femininity looked "strong and assertive yet vulnerable and seductive."³¹

Some scholars focused on women's body exposure. J. C. Flügel, in his book *The Psychology of Clothes*, tried to explain the relationship between women's body exposure and modesty from a psychological perspective. He discussed four bipolar impulses which influenced the exposure of certain parts of women's bodies: social versus sexual, clothes versus naked body, self versus others, desire versus disgust. According to his explanation, the degree to which a person is socially or sexually

oriented, interested in displaying a naked body or clothes, cares about the feeling of self or others, and intends to follow the emotion of desire or disgust of self or others in terms of body exposure, determine whether some parts of the body will be exposed or not. In addition, he suggested that modesty concerned with certain parts of women's bodies changed through time. In other words, certain parts of the body exposure which caused controversies in relation to modesty caused no more controversies once people became accustomed to it. Flügel went on to insist that in primitive societies and Europe, men's clothes were regarded as ornaments, while women's clothes were primarily regarded as media to cover her body in relation to modesty. Among the examples he suggested to verify his statement was the fact that male guests had to take off their hats in terms of etiquette, while female guests had to wear hats unless they are asked to remove them. Flügel also asserted that women exposed more of the body than men did without being conscious of sexual attraction, since women's sexual libido was scattered all over her body while men's sexual libido is concentrated on the genital area. Therefore, men criticized women for exposing body parts, since they themselves were conscious of the sexual attraction of body exposure.³²

James Laver also discussed the difference between men and women's clothing behavior in *Modesty in Dress*. He thought that women dressed to sexually attract men, while men dressed to emphasize their social-economic power. In relation to women's emphases on sexual attractiveness in clothing, he introduced Flügel's theory of shifting erogenous zones. He explained, as Flügel did in *The Psychology of Clothes*, how the area of erotic emphases in women's fashion had changed constantly to sexually stimulate men throughout history.³³ Many scholars including Aileen Ribeiro critiqued Flügel and Laver for indulging in Freudian beliefs and concentrating on finding sexual meanings in dress.³⁴ For example, Elizabeth Wilson pointed out that Laver's argument of women's low-back

dresses of the 1930s as a substitute for the erogenous zone of leg exposure in the 1920s did not take into account the influence of Hollywood films and bathing suits. According to Wilson, dresses were cut low on the back partly due to the film censorship against low cuts in the front, and the low-back bathing suits for sun tanning also influenced the low-cut dresses.³⁵

During the Victorian era, women were perceived as guardians of morals, and were believed to be pure and spiritual. Women were not supposed to attract attention to their bodies, and were covered from neck to toe during the day. Pursuing sexual pleasure was regarded as inappropriate for women and inconsistent with spiritual purity. Moreover, women were expected to restrain their bodies with corsets in order to stay modest. However, Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen pointed out that women were also criticized for being seductive with their molded bodies.³⁶ David Kunzle and Valerie Steele suggested that women during the period were eager to be bound in corsets in order to meet the ideal beauty and stay attractive.³⁷ Moreover, according to Ewen and Ewen, upper and middle class women in the second half of the nineteenth century started to adopt fashion items such as lace underwear, rouge, and silk stockings, which were previously associated with courtesans. Since this trend symbolized women's denial of passiveness and their active pursuit of eroticism, Ewen and Ewen interpreted it as "a move toward greater mobility and worldliness, toward a goal of equal social possibilities for women."³⁸ From a similar perspective, women's increased body exposure throughout the twentieth century can be interpreted as women's gain of power through their eroticized bodies, as Arnold insisted.³⁹

In addition to the studies related to the controversies about women's body exposure, there were many studies related to the controversies about masculinity versus femininity in women's fashions. Laver briefly described the change of acceptable styles of women's sportswear including riding, cycling, tennis, and bathing costume in history, which became subjects of many later studies in terms of a challenge to gender conventions and body exposure.⁴⁰

Shelly Foote discussed the introduction of a short dress and Turkish trousers ensemble in the women's reform paper *The Lily* in 1851. The ensemble was eventually called bloomers, named after the editor of *The Lily*, Amelia Bloomer. The supporters of bloomers emphasized the comfort and practicality of the costume, while society in general was against the costume for various reasons. One of the reasons was that the trousers were deemed "heathenish", since they resembled Turkish pants of Muslim culture. Some people criticized women in bloomers for exposing ankles and legs. Some others referred to the Bible and said it was against the will of God for women to adopt men's clothes. Foote suggested that American society during the period was against bloomers mainly because people were afraid of a shift in conventional gender roles and ultimate the social disruption implied in women's adoption of trousers. Moreover, many women who participated in the women's rights movement adopted bloomers, and many people regarded the acceptance of bloomers and the acceptance of women's rights as a threat to the established relationship between men and women during the period. However, Foote recognized women's adoption of trousers as a process of establishing "a new set of values and beliefs about male and female behavior" within society.⁴¹

Patricia Cunningham also studied the trouser issue in women's fashion from the nineteenth century to the early 1920s. She found that some American women in communal societies adopted trousers with an above ankle-length skirt beginning in the early nineteenth century. As Foote discussed, Cunningham also mentioned various social criticisms of bloomers when the costume was first introduced in *The Lily*. Cunningham explained how women's pursuit of physical freedom and hygiene was often misunderstood as women's intention to compete with men and leave their homes and children unmanaged. The relationship between bloomers and feminism drawn within the society enhanced social resistance against bloomers. Therefore, women who adopted bloomers, including many feminists, stopped wearing bloomers to concentrate on women's rights, while some other feminists and

health reformers continued to promote trousers for women. Even though bloomers almost disappeared on the streets as everyday wear, women continued to wear them as gym suits and for sports such as hiking, boating, bathing and biking throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. However, Cunningham found that women did not collectively organize to promote trousers for everyday wear until 1891. The National Council of Women was formed and its dress committee proposed three styles of dresses with trousers resembling bloomers for women to wear on the streets. One style, called the Syrian costume, was later called "Boston Rational Dress," since many Boston dress reformers adopted it. This style was a divided skirt, with the fullness of the skirt gathered at the ankles. Another style proposed was the gymnasium suit with a narrower bloomer. According to the figure Cunningham presented in her book, the gymnasium suit was without an overskirt. The last style was the American Costume worn with dresses or shirtwaists and a form of trousers including leggings, straight-cut trousers and bloomers. The National Council of Women recommended women to wear these three styles of dress to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and women in trousers were quite visible in the exposition. However, many women were not ready to wear trousers in public places.⁴²

Patricia Campbell Warner studied the development of women's gym suits which resembled bloomers in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. She presented four factors which influenced women's gym suits: children's adoption of straight pants and fashionable women's adoption of underpants in the late eighteenth century, Turkish trousers worn by Muslim women, increased interests in health in Europe and America since the early nineteenth century, and the increased number of women's colleges in the early nineteenth century and their emphases on students' physical exercise.⁴³ Barbara Schreier stated that moderate exercise for women was especially emphasized in the nineteenth century due to the belief that unhealthy women delivered unhealthy babies, which was a threat to the future generations.⁴⁴ According to Warner, most women wore pants under their shortened

dresses as gym suits until the late 1880s, when dresses were so shortened that bloomers were fully shown. However, women still had to wear skirts over their gym suits when they appeared in the public. Warner described women's gym suits around 1900 as follows: "The 'blouse' or 'waist' of the gym suit allowed the arms to move freely in all directions, and buttoned onto the bloomer's waistband. The women wore long black cotton stockings, held under the bloomer with garters and flat, rubber soled shoes." The combination of a middie and a bloomer persisted as a gym suit in most high schools and colleges until about 1930.⁴⁵ However, the bloomer type trousers in the 1920s were narrower and were more like the knickerbockers.* By the mid-1920s, shorts began to appear as women's running costume. Most women wore sleeveless tops and replaced stockings with ankle socks by the early 1930s.⁴⁶

There were some scholars who studied women's riding costume. The upper part of women's riding costume resembled men's costume by the late nineteenth century and was composed of waistcoats, jackets with open collars and lapels, shirts, stock ties and bowler hats or straight hats. However, women wore long flowing skirts to hide their legs and to add a graceful look while they were riding side-saddle. Some women eventually adopted trousers under the shortened skirts for practical reasons, and some discarded the overskirt around 1900. There was a debate on whether women should ride aside or astride from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. While some women rode cross-saddle in divided skirts, most women were hesitant to ride astride and hid their trousers under skirts even until the 1920s.⁴⁷

With the increased interests in physical exercise, bicycling was supported by many authorities for curing various kinds of diseases in the 1890s. Women had to adopt practical clothes with the boom of bicycling during the period. Schreier found four major styles of trousers worn under shortened

* According to *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion: Historic and Modern*, written by Mary Brooks Picken, knickerbockers are loose breeches banded below knee, and often called knickers.

skirts: knickerbockers, divided skirts, baggy trousers gathered at the ankles called “Syrian trousers,” and bloomers. According to Schreier, the last two styles of trousers caused the most social criticisms, “not because they were worn by the majority of cyclists, but because they represented the most radical change.” The public could not accept visible trouser worn under skirts which challenged the gender convention. However, some women appeared in public without the overskirts, while many women continued to hide their trousers under their skirts when they were bicycling, as they did when they were playing other sports in public until the early twentieth century.⁴⁸

A bloomer-type bathing costume was popular among women between 1850 and 1920. However, Maxine James Johns found that more functional swimsuits were available for women swimmers in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the late 1860s, a French-style swim suit composed of knee-length trousers with a short-sleeved jacket was introduced in magazines. Some swimmers even cut their sleeves for practicality. In the 1870s, tight fitting one-piece knit garments of full-length or knee-length were available. While some swimmers wore these tights without any garments over them, most women wore tights under other garments for reasons of modesty. By the end of the nineteenth century, a one-piece sleeveless swim suit with the attached bloomer of above knee-length, often worn with tights, was a typical style of swim suit. However, by the mid-1910s, one-piece knit tank suits or maillots, resembling men’s and children’s swimsuit, did not have sleeves and exposed half of women’s legs.⁴⁹ Warner found that Australian swimming champions in the 1912 Olympics wore sleeveless knit swimsuits resembling tank suits with an extra top underneath or over them.⁵⁰

The women’s swim suits grew more body exposing as time went on. Cunningham found two major styles of swim suits popular in the 1930s. One style was the maillots, and the other was the dressmaker suits which closely fitted to the body and had short skirts. Women preferred the latter style for modesty’s sake and for availability of various patterns, since the dressmaker suits were often made of

woven fabrics instead of knitted fabrics. However, with the introduction of Lastex in 1931, more snug-fitting swim suits were available in the 1930s. Swim suits exposed more parts of bodies with enlarged armholes, high-cut thighs and designs revealing midriffs and backs.⁵¹

As the studies above demonstrate, the standard of appropriateness in clothing behavior changed over a period of time. As more women adopted trousers and exposed more of their bodies, especially in sportswear, new social conventions were on the way to being established. Many women adopted masculine garments and exposed more of their bodies due to functional reasons. Ewen and Ewen explained that women needed to adopt more simple and masculine garments as their social participation increased in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁵² They explained that this, especially the adoption of pants, symbolized women's challenge to gender conventions and the increase of women's mobility. In addition, they stated that the short, simple and tubular styles of dresses in the 1920s did not simply come into fashion, but also reflected the lifestyle needs of women during the period. Upper-class women needed simple styles of dress due to the increased mobility of their city and sports lives, while working-class women needed them due to their wage labor.⁵³ However, many others adopted them as the ideal body image and the fashion styles changed as time went on. Laura Doan observed women's boyish fashion of the 1920s as a style without "masculine power" and a mere imitation of immature masculinity. In addition, she claimed that women's trousers in the 1920s were just a part of "fashion, youth, and the sporting venues of high society" rather than a means to challenge social conventions.⁵⁴ Claudia Brush Kidwell also looked at the change of fashionable styles for men and women in history, and discussed that women's broad shoulders in the 1930s were not to emphasize masculinity but to emphasize slender waists and hips, as ideal fashion images changed over the period.⁵⁵

There also were scholars who paid attention to the extravagance in women's fashion. Long before Simmel proposed the trickle-down theory of fashion, Thorstein Veblen, in his date book *The*

Theory of the Leisure Class, discussed “dress as an expression of the pecuniary culture.” He looked at clothing as a symbol of wearers’ social-economic status, and argued that people preferred expensive, original designer-made clothes. According to his observation, upper class clothing also displayed that the wearer was not engaged in any kind of “productive labor,” with the emphases on cleanliness. For example, men’s patent-leather shoes, spotless linen, cylindrical hat, and walking stick, and women’s high heels, huge bonnets, and drapery dresses served as symbols of leisure. In addition, Veblen recognized the necessity of achieving up-to-date fashion as another symbol of leisure, and he criticized the phenomena for being not achieving a permanent beauty which transcended the time. He also discussed the vicarious consumption of women and servants. To Veblen, the extravagant appearances of women and servants represented the social-economic status of their husbands and masters.⁵⁶ According to Ewen and Ewen, women’s dresses were intended to show off their husbands’ social-economic status, at the same time they were criticized for their extravagance. Simplicity and austerity were emphasized in men’s clothes with the rise of urban bourgeoisies with protestant work ethic in the nineteenth century. However, Ewen and Ewen made it clear that men’s clothing also displayed their social-economic status through the quality of fabrics and the delicacy of tailoring.⁵⁷

On the other hand, Quentin Bell disagreed with Veblen in two aspects. According to Bell, Veblen overemphasized the importance of family individuality in fashion. Bell pointed out that the world of fashion was not composed of individuals trying to display the social-economic status of their families in various styles, but was composed of each individual trying to achieve typical styles of social classes established within the society. In addition, Bell disagreed with Veblen’s criticism on frequent change of fashion and sumptuousness and his emphasis on pursuing eternal beauty in fashion. Bell suggested that there existed a relative aesthetic value in changing styles of fashion.⁵⁸

As I reviewed above, many scholars studied the issue of body exposure, adoption of masculine

garments, and extravagance in women's fashion. However, I intend to look at each controversial issue based on more specific and ample amount of primary sources, concentrating on the period between 1920 and 1945. Scholars including Arnold, Ewen and Ewen, Foote and Cunningham discussed the underlying meanings of women's body exposure and their adoption of masculine garments in relation to changing womanhood and gender roles. These will be referred to in interpreting the changing meanings of fashion embedded in controversies about American women's fashion in relation to women's lives during the period.

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³ George B. Sproles, "Behavioral Science Theories of Fashion," in *The Psychology of Fashion*, ed. Michael R. Solomon (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1985), 55-70.

⁴ Georg Simmel, "Fashion," *American Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 6 (1957): 541-558.

⁵ Charles W. King, "Fashion Adoption: A Rebuttal to the 'Trickle Down' Theory," in *Toward Scientific Marketing*, ed. Stephen A. Greyer (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 1963), 109-125.

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⁷ George A. Field, "The Status Float Phenomenon: The Upward Diffusion of Innovation," *Business Horizons* 13, no. 4 (1970): 45-52.

⁸ Paul Blumberg, "The Decline and Fall of the Status Symbol: Some Thoughts on Status in a Post-Industrial Society," *Social Problems* 21, no. 4 (1974): 480-497.

⁹ Marc Spiegler, "Marketing Street Culture: Bringing Hip-Hop Style to the Mainstream," in *The Meanings of Dress*, ed. Mary Lynn Damhorst, Kimberly A. Miller, and Susan O. Michelman (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1999), 445-450.

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¹³ Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 16.

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¹⁵ Davis, 14-15.

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¹⁹ Rita C. Kean, "The Role of the Fashion System in Fashion Change: A Response to the Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton Model," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 15, no. 3 (1997): 172-177.

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²² Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 71; Benjamin Stolberg, "The Man Behind the *Times*," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1926, in *Highlights in the History of the American Press*, ed. Edwin H. Ford and Edwin Emery (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 362-376.

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²⁴ Davis.

²⁵ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1-5.

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²⁷ Ruth P. Rubinstein, *Dress Codes: Meaning and Messages in American Culture* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1995), 91-92.

²⁸ J. C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London: The Hogarth Press LTD, 1966), 57-58.

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³⁰ Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (New York: Holmes & Meiers Publishers, Inc., 1986).

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³³ James Laver, *Modesty in Dress: An Inquiry into the Fundamentals of Fashion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 1-13, 96-111.

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³⁶ Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 95-115.

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- ⁴⁹ Maxine James Johns, "Women's Functional Swimwear 1860-1920" (Ph.D. diss., Iowa State University, 1997).
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2. CONTROVERSIES ABOUT AMERICAN WOMEN'S FASHION, 1920-1929

In this chapter, I will focus on the controversial issues about American women's fashion appearing in *The New York Times* and magazines published between 1920 and 1929. I will discuss the controversial issues in the order of three separate subchapters: body exposure, femininity versus masculinity, and extravagance versus thrift and conservation. In the last subchapter, I will discuss the opinions on the causes of change in women's fashion and attitudes, which would enhance the understanding of the social context during the period.

Body Exposure

During the 1920s, women's clothes were more body exposing and abbreviated compared with what women wore previously. Many people felt threatened by women wearing fewer undergarments and exposing the parts of their bodies which were conventionally covered up in the past. While there were people who criticized body exposure and abbreviation in women's fashion, there also were defenders who recognized the merits and assigned symbolic meanings to these styles of fashion. In this chapter, I will discuss how women wore body exposing abbreviated clothes between 1920 and 1929, and then will look at the public reactions to women's fashion appearing in newspapers and magazines in two subsections: resistance to women's body exposure and abbreviated fashion and defenders of these styles. I will first introduce how women's attitudes and life styles changed in the 1920s to set the context for the later discussion on controversies about American women's fashion during the period.

Changes in American womanhood

In the 1920s, more American women had economic power compared with the previous period, despite the fact that they faced discrimination in workplaces and received lower wages compared with men. In 1890, the proportion of working women over the age of 16 was 19 percent of the total labor force, and the number of working women increased to fill 23 percent of the total labor force in 1920.¹ Throughout the 1920s, the number of working women did not increase much. However, the number of women who worked as domestic servants decreased from 29.4 percent in 1900 to 16.2 percent in 1920, partly due to the mass availability in electric house keeping appliances such as washing machines, refrigerators, and vacuum cleaners.² On the other hand, there was an increase of jobs in offices and department stores in the 1920s. The total number of women working in offices, industry, public schools and service trades were the greatest in American history up to that time during the 1920s.³ In 1920, 30 percent of wage-earning women were employed in offices and sales departments in stores.⁴

While there were wage-earning women who needed to support their family, there also was an increase of middle-class women who enjoyed economic independence. Most wage-earning women in the 1920s were single and under age 25, and it was more likely that these women gave up their jobs after their marriage. However, office women aged between 25 and 40 increased throughout the 1920s to reach the 43 percent of the total female clerical workers by 1930.⁵ In addition, the number of married women, especially the middle-class married women, in the work force increased throughout the decade. Despite the prominence of a ban on marriage for female office workers in the 1920s, married women in offices increased from about 10 percent to 20 percent of the total women office workers between 1910 and 1930. These women used birth control information to delay having a baby or to have fewer children.⁶ While some older clerical women held the best positions, many married women in offices were criticized for lowering levels of pay and their lesser devotion to work. In other words, married

women usually had the main household income from their husbands, and they were willing to work for lower wages; thus pulling down the average wage among women office workers. Moreover, some single office women who had to compete for jobs with married women had to accept lower wages, due to married women's willingness to work for lower pay.⁷ In general, more women gained economic power either to support their families or to gain economic independence in the 1920s.⁸

In addition, many women had a different attitude toward sexuality in the 1920s. Kathy Peiss reveals in her book, *Cheap Amusements*, that many young working-class women in New York, especially immigrants, had enjoyed drinking and dancing at their dates' expense, and tacitly provided sexual pleasure in return, since the late nineteenth century.⁹ By the 1920s, many middle-class women, including teenagers, indulged in jazz dancing, which was criticized by the public because of men and women holding each other close and "stimulating the sexual instinct."¹⁰ After Sigmund Freud's visit to Clark University in 1909, many young men and women started to believe that sexuality was "a pervasive force in human life," and, therefore, it was natural to express sexual desire in order to maintain mental health.¹¹ Men and women openly talked about sex, and petting parties were prominent among the youth in the 1920s. Paula Fass found that petting was "commonly accepted behavior" among college students in the 1920s, and one had to be involved in petting to some extent in order to "remain respectable to peers." However, it was still regarded as desirable to keep one's virginity, while there was an increase of premarital sex among a minority of students. Moreover, Fass presumed that the premarital sex was more likely to be confined to engaged couples.¹²

Increased sales of closed automobiles provided men and women more privacy, increasing the chance of having sexual relationships.¹³ According to Rober Lynd and Helen Lynd's book, *Middletown*, two out of three families in Muncie, Indiana, owned an automobile, and boys and girls went unchaperoned to out-of-town parties in the automobiles, staying out until late at night. According

to the Lynds' survey, half of the students in the upper three grades of high schools reported that they stayed home less than four evenings a week. Mothers who tried to restrict their children from staying out late were perceived to be "cruel" or "old-fashioned" by their teenaged children. Parents were worried about their children staying out late at night, especially in automobiles. Among the 30 girls brought to the juvenile court charged with sex crimes from September 1923 to August 1924, 19 of their offenses took place in automobiles. The juvenile court judge even commented that "the automobile has become a house of prostitution on wheels."¹⁴

Many young women in the 1920s were more frank about their feelings and were not bound to the social custom.¹⁵ Some comments of Middletown – Muncie, Indiana – mothers of girls were quoted in the Lynds' study: "Girls are far more aggressive today. They call the boys up to try to make dates with them as they never would have when I was a girl." "Last summer six girls organized a party and invited six boys and they never got home until three in the morning. Girls are always calling my boys up trying to make dates with them." "Girls are bolder than they used to be. It used to be that if a girl called up and asked a boy to take her somewhere she meant something bad by it, but now they all do it." "My son has been asked to a dance by three different girls and there is no living with him."¹⁶ Women's frankness in expressing their emotional needs is also represented in wide adoption and approval of birth control, especially among the middle-class, since contraception enabled women to enjoy sexual pleasure without worrying about pregnancy. According to Fass, all her primary sources on sexual surveys showed the results that more than 70 percent of men and women – mostly middle-class or college students – were using or planning to use birth control methods. She found the partial reason for rise in marriage between the ages of 20 and 24 in 1920, compared with 1890, in the increased adoption of birth control. Fass discussed that more young couples were able to get married earlier in their age, since they could postpone having children.¹⁷ Birth control freed men and women from the traditional

responsibilities of procreation and contributed to building an emotional companionship between the two.¹⁸

Drinking in defiance of the Eighteenth Amendment grew more and more popular throughout the 1920s. In the early 1920s, drinking was mainly a masculine problem. However, men and women drinking together in dance halls and parties was taken for granted by the mid-1920s. According to one survey conducted at the end of the decade, approximately two out of three Americans had the experience of drinking.¹⁹

Smoking also became a widely adopted behavior among women in the 1920s. Women were smoking in dance halls and department stores, not to mention dinner parties.²⁰ Cigarette advertisers actively started to feature women as potential consumers of cigarettes in the mid-1920s. Since smoking women caused social controversies, European female artists and high society women's testimonials were used in the advertisements.²¹ College women adopted the cigarette as "a symbol of liberation and as a means of proclaiming their equal rights with men." Women smokers were more visible on non-denominational co-educational universities. Smoking grew popular among women first in the East and then on the West Coast. Later, the habit spread to the Midwest and even to the conservative South. By the end of the decade, smoking lost its symbolism as women's liberation, even though it continued to provoke social criticism.²²

American women gained political power by winning suffrage in 1920. Politicians feared that women would organize themselves to cast a bloc vote. Therefore, women could find enough political supporters to pass the Sheppard-Towner Federal Maternity and Infancy Act in 1921. The Sheppard-Towner Act was the first federally funded welfare program passed after women won suffrage. The Sheppard-Towner bill was proposed to lower the infant mortality rate by providing education to pregnant women and mothers on nutrition, hygiene, and prenatal and child care practices, without providing direct

medical care. When the bill was proposed, the Children's Bureau was to be in charge of its administration. However, the American Medical Association (AMA), which is primarily composed of male physicians, was on the forefront to attack the bill. The AMA insisted that "lay women" in the Children's Bureau would not be qualified to provide medical information and advice, despite the fact that female physicians were in charge of the Maternity and Infancy Division of the Children's Bureau. Moreover, the AMA did not want federally funded programs to erode their income. Therefore, when the bill was passed, the administrative authority was given to the Federal Board of Maternity and Infant Hygiene which was newly created to be headed by the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, the U. S. Commissioner of Education, and the Children's Bureau chief. The Sheppard-Towner Act was also accused of being related to Bolshevism within the fervent atmosphere of the Red Scare during the period. The federally funded welfare program reminded conservatives of Communism. By the time the Sheppard-Towner Act was to be renewed in 1926, opponents of the program gained much more power and the fund was extended only for two more years. Politicians were no longer afraid of the women's vote as the decade went on, since women did not exercise a bloc vote. Moreover, the Sheppard-Towner Act brought improvement in private medical care of prenatal mothers and babies. Since the Sheppard-Towner Act mainly benefited rural women, it was not an important concern to the urban women with improved medical care by the end of the decade.²³

After the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, the force which united women behind the political issue of suffrage somewhat waned, as can partly be observed in the loss of the Sheppard-Towner Act in 1929. After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, some women turned their political effort to world peace, while the National American Woman Suffrage Association changed its name to the National League of Women Voters to educate women to become responsible citizens of democracy. Some other women formed the National Women's Party (NWP) which advocated the

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The NWP wanted to secure equal opportunities for women to compete with men in the job market. However, most women were against the ERA, since many working-class women needed protective legislation for their livelihood. Since the NWP was mostly composed of professional middle-class women, the NWP was criticized for its selfish pursuit of securing wider opportunities for their professional advancement. Women were somewhat divided in their political interests in the 1920s.²⁴

Some doctors and physical educators paid attention to “moderate exercise” for women in the late nineteenth century. Against arguments that women’s participation in sports would harm women’s reproductive system and that passionate competition would drive women’s sexual desire out of control, the physical educators of women’s exercise emphasized “moderation.” These physical educators insisted that moderate physical activities would make women healthy and emotionally controlled without causing damages to women’s reproduction systems or inciting sexual promiscuity.²⁵

By the turn of the century, more women were enjoying sports. Upper class women enjoyed sports such as gymnasium, swimming, bowling and fencing in country clubs, while social reformers began to promote sports among working-class children for physical and emotional healthiness. Many middle-class women participated in college sports, and women physical educators met resistance from students who preferred competitive sports to moderate exercise. To restrain women’s demand for more competitive sports, women physical educators established women’s departments of physical education and tried to ban intercollegiate sports competition. Behind these efforts lay the women physical educators’ intention to secure their professional positions.²⁶

However, many women enjoyed playing and speculating on sports in the 1920s. As a result, many female sports stars including Helen Wills, Sybil Bauer, and Gertrude Ederle received public attention. Helen Wills won eight championship in Wimbledon tennis tournaments starting in 1927,

Sybil Bauer broke the world record in backstroke in 1924, and the Olympic medalist Gertrude Ederle swam across the English Channel breaking the record of previous five swimmers – who were men – by two hours. According to Susan Cahn, the women sport celebrities contributed to setting the standard of new American womanhood with their healthy and attractive appearance. However, some female physical educators protested against the exploitation of women athletes in terms of overexertion for victory and sexual attention on women's body and abbreviated sport uniforms. These physical educators continued to suppress competitive sports among women and emphasized the necessity of women coaching staffs to protect women athletes. As a result, female sport competitions between colleges and high schools remained rare. However, there were vital tournaments outside the school to fill the women's demand for competitive sports. The published media hailed active American womanhood during the period. However, they often ridiculed women players who were "too good," because they felt threats from women who dared to advance in traditionally male-oriented domain such as sports.²⁷

In the 1920s, more women gained economic power compared with the previous period. Many American women, especially younger women, actively expressed their needs, and were frank about their feelings. The challenge to social customs such as drinking, smoking, petting and active participation in sports provoked social criticism. In addition, women continued to make efforts to gain political justice after winning suffrage, even though their main interests were somewhat divided.

Body exposure and abbreviation in women's fashion

Women's fashion in the 1920s was criticized for being more body exposing and brief. Women's dresses not only exposed their calves but also necks and arms during the period. Women's underwear also grew lighter, since many women discarded petticoats and body constricting corsets. In

addition, knickerbockers worn by some women attracted public attention for exposing the wearers' legs. Bathing suits were also growing briefer and more body revealing in the 1920s. In this part of the chapter, I will introduce the body exposure and abbreviation in women's fashion in the historical context.

Body exposure in dresses

Women exposed their ankles before the twentieth century. In the eighteenth century, Marie Antoinette enjoyed playing milkmaids and shepherdesses with her ladies. They wore short skirts exposing ankles when they were playing, and these country style skirts became a fad.²⁸ Around the 1820s, short robes exposing ankles were also popular among women in Europe and America.²⁹ In 1896, a small group of American women led by an actress, Mrs. Bertha Welby, started to promote skirts four inches from the floor. This group was called the Rainy Day Club, since it protested against sweeping skirts which caught germs, dust and rain. Rainy Daisies, the club members, were ridiculed by the public in the early years of their campaign. However, doctors gradually approved the hygienic merits of the Rainy Daisies' skirts, and manufacturers produced the skirts.³⁰ By the mid-1910s, hemlines started to rise in women's mainstream fashion. French designers contributed to introducing shorter skirts in order to conserve material during the war.³¹ By the end of World War I, many women actively started to show their calves.

Tubular dresses with low waistlines and skirts showing calves became popular among women in the 1920s. Lynne Richards measured hemlines and waist/hip lines of women's daytime dress in the issues of *Good Housekeeping* magazine published from 1920 to 1929. Richards selected *Good Housekeeping*, since she assumed that this magazine well reflected what middle-class women wore at the time, based on its wide circulation among the middle-class women. According to her results, the average hemline slightly rose between 1920 and 1921, and then it dropped in 1922 and 1923. The

average hemline started to rise again in 1924 until it reached below the knee in 1927. In 1928 and 1929, hemlines started to drop again.³²

Richards' result parallels many reports and debates that appear in *The New York Times* between 1921 and 1923, and 1929 and 1930. In 1921, *Vogue* announced that skirts would be longer in the coming fall, referring to Paris fashion arbiters. *Vogue* predicted that daytime dress would be eight inches from the ground, and evening dress would be two inches from the ground.³³ Mr. Harry Collins, First Lady Mrs. Harding's costume designer, recognized the Paris fashion influence, and recommended daytime dress eight and a half inches from the ground and evening dress three inches from the ground.³⁴ According to a sidewalk census in Paris, women preferred new long skirts down to ankles and women rarely wore knee-length skirts in September of 1921.³⁵ Following this trend from Paris, some American women started to adopt long evening gowns down to the ankles.³⁶ By October, the Associated Dress Industries of America officially recognized the longer skirt trend. However, the Executive Director, Mr. Mosesshon also recognized the merits of short skirts by mentioning "A skirt 10 to 15 inches from the floor has been modest, attractive, comfortable and sanitary."³⁷ A few letters opposing a longer skirt trend appeared in *The New York Times* in the same season. The letters objected to the tyranny of Paris fashion and urged American women to stay free from the slavery of long skirts.³⁸ However, an abrupt lengthening of hemlines did not seem to occur and it must have taken some time for American women to adopt longer skirts on the streets in 1921.

Skirts were prominently lengthened in 1922, and this accords with Richards' result. In the National Women's Apparel Association exhibit in February 1922, skirts for the year were two inches longer than the previous year.³⁹ By June of the same year, American designers, department stores and buyers agreed that the days of the flapper look would be over soon.⁴⁰ Long skirt fervor even penetrated the State Reformatory for Women at Bedford. The inmates of the reformatory demanded long skirts.

Due to the lower cost of making short skirts, prisoners' demands were denied.⁴¹ In October of 1922, it was estimated in *The Outlook* that in uptown – presumably in New York City – “long skirts outnumbered short skirts six to one.”⁴²

Many women with changed attitudes and life styles would not easily give up shorter skirts which must have matched the image of active womanhood in the 1920s. Therefore, the protest against longer skirts intensified in 1922. In the protest, American women were expected to be independent of the tyranny of fashion, and not to give up the comforts and beauty of short skirts.⁴³ Some believed in working women's sensibility of keeping “practical and comfortable frocks.”⁴⁴ The Executive Director of the Associated Dress Industries of America, seems to have been conscious of some women's protest against long skirts. He recommended a dress hemline 8 inches from the floor, for it was not too long to hamper movements and also enabled wearers to be in fashion.⁴⁵ The City Federation of Women's Clubs in New York decided to bar skirts longer than seven inches from the ground.⁴⁶ On the other hand, women's club members near New Jersey asked to lower the steps of trolley cars, because it became increasingly inconvenient for women to get on the cars with their longer skirts on. A letter to *The New York Times* ridiculed the plea, and recommended banning long skirts as the New York women's club members did.⁴⁷ For these protesters, short dresses definitely meant something more than just a style of passing fashion. They not only recognized the convenience and practicality of short and simple skirts, but, as Ewen and Ewen discussed, also the symbolic meaning of women's mobility during the period.⁴⁸ On the other hand, returning to long skirts must have meant a return to the Victorian women's passivity, and confinement to the private sphere to them. Some women's intension to bar long skirts represents how desperate some women were about the symbolic meaning of increased freedom and mobility in women's short skirts during the period.

Despite the protest against longer skirts, the average hemline dropped in 1922 and 1923.

Some women's protest against longer skirt trend could not resist the changing collective tastes toward longer skirts during the period. According to Blumer's fashion theory, many women must have adopted longer skirts which met the "developing tastes" of the time.⁴⁹ Designer Jacques Sourine hailed the arrival of long skirts in America in 1923. He insisted that long skirts would bring back personality to American women who used to wear identical designs of "sacks" – the tubular style of dresses.⁵⁰ However, the longer skirt trend did not last long. Hemlines abruptly rose in 1924 and reached the highest point in 1927. Evening gowns in 1926 ended below the knee, as we can observe in Figure 1.

After 1928, hemlines dropped again.⁵¹ Paris fashion designers introduced elaborate designs of floor sweeping dresses. New designs featured a mature image of women with natural body curves, which contrasted with the previous immature boyish look with the tubular silhouette.⁵² This time, many women protested more fervently, since the new design not only lengthened the skirts but attempted to popularize corsets and girdles which constricted waists and hips. American women, who enjoyed freedom in comfortable hygienic dress for about a decade, would not easily go back to unsanitary and constrictive costume. People who were against the floor sweeping skirts and corsets tried to remind American women of the discomfort of Victorian costume. Many women urged other Americans to revolt against the new style.⁵³ There was someone who even suggested a boycott of the new style of dress.⁵⁴ Some others suggested wearing long flowing skirts in the evening, and to wear slightly lengthened skirts during the day.⁵⁵ Actually, women bought long sweeping skirts, but these did not appear much during the daytime. It was inferred that women saved them for the evening.⁵⁶ Wellesley women wore the length of skirts which reached four to seven inches below the knee during the day and wore ankle length skirts in the evening. On the other hand, Radcliffe women raised waistlines but did not lengthen their skirts.⁵⁷ Therefore an abrupt drop of average hemline length did not take place in 1929. Mr. J. J. Goldman, the founder of Associated Dress Industries, predicted the

increase of long skirt sales by the spring of 1930.⁵⁸

With the rise of the hemline, more attention was paid to stockings and shoes in the mid-1920s. Flesh-colored silk stockings were popular among women. However, many women wore cotton and rayon stockings for everyday wear. Young women rolled down their stockings to attract attention when they were sitting down. Some women awed the public by even showing off fancy garters while they were sitting.⁵⁹ In 1925, four girls stood in front of a police judge for fighting over a pair of fancy garters in Orange, New Jersey. One of the girls remarked on another's garters, and the fighting produced one black eye. The girls were sent home, but the judge notified the Board of Education of the extreme fashion among schoolgirls.⁶⁰

Many women not only exposed their calves but also their necks and arms in the 1920s. Dresses without sleeves or with sleeves made of transparent material, and showing larger parts of the front and back of women's necklines, were popular. In extreme cases, necklines came down to show cleavage, and some evening dresses were backless. Low necklines and exposure of backs and arms can be observed in Figure 1 and 2. Figure 2 also displays women's dresses made with transparent material.

Toward briefer underwear

Women's dress became lighter and more abbreviated not only in outerwear but also in underwear during this period. During the Victorian era, many doctors argued that corsets caused disease and body deformations. However, Valerie Steele, in her recent book, *The Corset*, points out that most of the claims made by Victorian doctors regarding corsets cannot be verified or were proved to be wrong according to modern scientific experimental results. For example, reduced lung capacity caused by corsets was believed to be dangerous, and even would result in death. For this reason,

women were “forced to give up everything that was worthy of the name of exercise.” However, shallow breathing is not a “life-threatening condition,” because it also happens to people who are overweighted or pregnant. Victorian doctors’ arguments in favor of corsets as back supports are not also absolutely true, since corsets provide back supports only in the short term. Women who wore corsets for a long time suffered from back-pain due to the weakening of back and abdominal muscles, and had to rely on corsets continuously. The rib deformation also would not have been caused by corsets, unless women wore their corsets to bed. However, women rarely wore their corsets at night in the nineteenth century, and contracted ribs would have returned to the normal position when the wearers took off their corsets. The corset as the cause of tuberculosis, breast cancer, chlorosis (hypochromatic iron deficiency), gallstones and scoliosis (the lateral curvature of the spine) also cannot be proven by modern science. Ironically, scoliosis patients have been prescribed to wear medical corsets even at present. Victorian doctors’ insistence on corsets causing “blood congestion” and other diseases as a consequence cannot be verified either. Nineteenth century doctors were more likely to attack corsets for causing a variety of disease without scientific evidence, since most doctors lacked proper training during the period.⁶¹ However, women’s dress reformers during the period believed in doctors’ assertion on corsets, in addition to the impracticality they felt in cumbersome petticoats. Therefore, dress reformers since the mid-nineteenth century introduced healthy undergarments which reduced the burden of the heavy petticoats and the compaction of organs.⁶²

While the Victorian corset was often regarded as a symbol of women’s physical and emotional oppression, historians including David Kunzle and Valerie Steele interpreted the meaning of corsets in terms of women’s erotic expression of sexuality. According to their explanation, many women wore corsets to meet the ideal beauty of the time and ultimately to look attractive. Steele also pointed out that the corset had positive meanings such as “social status, self-discipline, artistry, and respectability.

Moreover, it was presumed that most women would not have corseted themselves tightly as to attain small waists. Most women seem to have reduced their waists by two to three inches, and not tightly laced themselves so as to reduce four inches. The waists of corsets in the Leicestershire Museum and Art Gallery which were worn between 1856 and 1910 in England measured from 18 to 40 inches, with most of them measured between 20 and 26 inches. Based on Steele's assumption that women's fashion in France, England and the United States were not very different during the Victorian era, it can be argued that small waists must have been also "fantasies" among Americans.⁶³

At the end of the nineteenth century, French couture houses such as Drecoll and Beer, the House of Doucet, and Lanvin began to introduce the empire silhouette. Around 1905 the popular S-silhouette waned and the trend toward a tubular silhouette accelerated with the introduction of dresses such as Paul Poiret's hobble skirt in 1908. With the popularity of the tubular silhouette, women discarded petticoats and adopted corsets which de-emphasized waists and restrained hips. Many women wore brassieres with longer corsets which even came down to cover the thigh to attain the straighter figure. However, many women, especially with slim figure, began to adopt soft, elastic corsets called "girdles" by the time World War I began. The shortage of metal material somewhat contributed to the trend toward "less constricting and even boneless corsets."⁶⁴

However, it was not until the 1920s that women were largely freed from corsets. Many young women with slim figures wore brief, slip type, one-piece undergarments called step-ins instead of corsets. Jill Field found reasons such as "dissipation of muscular strength, injury to internal organs, corruption of standards of beauty, damage to moral fiber, contamination of race pride and purity, and destruction of American sovereignty" that appeared in trade journal articles against the "corsetless craze." Reacting against the corsetless trend, many corset manufacturers introduced softer and lighter corsets under the name of girdle which were used to attain slimmer figures. In addition, the concept of

figure type classification was introduced in corset production. Department stores had trained corsetieres to define each customer's figure type and matching corsets. Corset manufacturers even cultivated the "junior market" to allure those young women whose bodies were slim and still in the process of development. Therefore, women in the 1920s were not absolutely freed from body constricting under garments, if they did not wear stiff metal-binding corsets.

Knickerbockers exposure of legs

As I reviewed in the introduction, women's first pants, called Bloomers – named after the promoter Amelia Jenks Bloomer – appeared in public in the early 1850s. Bloomers resembled Turkish pants and were worn with knee-length robes. Bloomers were abandoned shortly after their introduction, since many women could not withstand the public criticism.⁶⁵ However, according to previous studies, women continued to wear Bloomers, when they were at home doing house chores or when they were playing sports such as gymnasium, bicycling, skating and horseback riding.⁶⁶ Some women even ventured to wear Bloomers without skirts in the late nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, many women wore knickerbockers when they were hiking or camping. In the first place, women had to cover their calves with cloth gaiters or stockings, since knickerbockers came down just below the knee.⁶⁷ However, women went barefoot not only on beaches and in camping areas but also in other public places by the late 1920s. Figure 3 shows the knickerbockers for camp girls.

Briefer bathing suits

In the beginning of the 1920s, many women still wore bathing suits composed of loose one-piece dresses and underpants in public. Most of the designs were without collars and sleeves. Women wore stockings or socks with the bathing suits. However, knee-length tight fitting wool knit

swimsuits called tank suits, with built-in undershorts, were widespread among women bathers by the mid-1920s. Many people began to recognize the practicality of wearing simple suits in the water.

The nineteenth and early twentieth century women's bathing costume was often composed of blouse, bloomers, over skirt, cap, stockings, and shoes. However, Maxine James Johns found that women swimmers wore more functional swim suits in the second half of the nineteenth century. Some women wore short-sleeved or sleeveless swim suits, and some others adopted tight fitting one-piece knit garments of full-length or knee-length by the 1870s.⁶⁸ The tight fitting knit swim suit was similar to what an Australian swimmer, Annette Kellerman, wore. She shocked the American public in 1910 in her two-piece body revealing knit swimsuit, even though it covered her body from neck to foot. In the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, some women swimmers also wore above- the-knee length knit swimsuits without sleeves and stockings, while the conservative U.S. Olympic Committee did not even permit American women to attend Olympics until 1920. However, the Women's Swimming Association of New York was founded in 1917, and many women Olympic contestants were trained in the Association. Until that time, knit swimsuits and bare feet were not allowed in public in the United States. However, American women contestants adopted knit swimsuits which were the same styles worn by the previous Olympic contestants, with their legs completely exposed.⁶⁹ The practicality of such brief swimsuits was approved by other American women and began to replace cumbersome bathing suits of the previous period throughout the 1920s.

Overall, women's fashion in the 1920s was simple and loose. Women's dress became lighter and more body revealing, and the tubular silhouette of women's fashion was far from emphasizing women's natural contours. Breasts, waists, and hips were not significant in women's dresses. A skinny woman with flat breasts resembling an immature boy was the stereotype of a fashionable woman. Women bobbed or even cropped their hair and wore small cloches, enhancing the simple boyish look.

Rolled-down stockings and cosmetics such as powders and rouges increased the excitement in women's fashion. The mainstream fashion along with the knickerbockers and skin-tight bathing suits caused the controversies of body exposure in women's fashion.

Resistance to women's body exposure

Abbreviation in women's dress in the 1920s was a great shock and a threat to the public. The way women dressed was not only a private concern but also a public concern. Throughout the decade, people criticized body exposure in women's fashion, and tried to impose regulations on the way women dressed, not only through family supervision but also through social institutions.

Local and state government intervention

The local and state governments tried to restrict body exposure in women's fashion. In the winter of 1920, overseers of low-neck dresses waited in front of the Zion Tabernacle with woolen shawls in Zion City, Illinois. Women with low necks were passed over to the police from the overseers. Zion women were not allowed to wear dresses "without collars, skirts more than three inches above the ankle, 'X-ray' sleeves or transparent blouses" in the tabernacle. Open work stockings were also forbidden in the tabernacle.⁷⁰ Moreover, Zion City announced a law to ban openwork stockings, peek-a-boo waists*, short skirts, and bare necks and arms in public places in 1921. Police fined those who violated the law from 10 to 200 dollars.⁷¹ Women who continued to violate this law after several warnings were put to road repair work unless proper fines were paid.⁷² The police arrested not only the residents of the city but also visitors to the city. A woman who visited Zion City wearing a dress made of transparent

* According to *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion: Historic and Modern*, written by Mary Brooks

material that exposed the collarbones and more than a half of her forearms was arrested at the train station.⁷³ Zion City was somewhat conservative during the period, since the community was founded as the headquarters of the Christian Catholic Church, which is a protestant denomination, and had a theocratic government until the mid-1930s. In the same year, skirts shorter than 4 inches below the knee were regulated on the streets in Sunbury, Pennsylvania. The Sunbury police received “a dozen or more telephone calls” from the neighbors complaining about two women on the street with skirts which seemed too short to the neighbor.⁷⁴

In Ohio, a décolletage deeper than two inches, ** transparent material, garment displaying women’s contours, and skirts shorter than the instep length were regulated. Similar regulations were also discussed in New Jersey, South Carolina, Kansas, Iowa, Pennsylvania, Utah, and in other states by 1921.⁷⁵ In West Virginia, a committee representing the Logan and Lincoln County Welfare League, was sent to the State Legislature to propose a regulation on women’s dress in 1927, when the skirt length reached the shortest point. Women wearing skirts shorter than four inches below the knee and sleeves above the elbow were to be fined, as well as girls above six years of age wearing boys’ clothes.⁷⁶

In 1921, several restrictions were imposed on women bathers in beach areas. Women shopping in their bathing suits were barred by a police matron in Muskegon, Michigan. Women had to wear bathrobes over the bathing suits on the streets.⁷⁷ In Hamilton, Long Island, a woman wearing a bathing suit under her garments disrobed on the shore. A couple who witnessed the scene called police, and the court found the woman guilty of disrobing in a public place, even though she only took off the garments which she wore over her bathing suit.⁷⁸ In the same year, women bathers without stockings

Picken, a peek-a-boo waist is a shirtwaist of eyelet or shear fabric.

** The article, in which the regulation was introduced, did not specify how a décolletage depth was measured in Ohio. However, the depth of décolletage was presumably measured from the collarbone to the neckline.

or wearing socks were banned in Rockaway Beach in New York.⁷⁹

In 1926, a person living in Carmel, New York, near Putnam County, demanded that the local government should ban girl campers from wearing short skirts and going around without their stockings, on the Jewish Sabbath and on Sundays.⁸⁰ In the same year, immodest exposure was banned in Palm Beach, Florida, and two women bathers who wore kimonos and carried their bathing suits were caught by the police.⁸¹ They seemed to have intended to put on their bathing suits under their kimonos out on the beach.⁸² The next year, in Middletown, New York, short skirts and bathing suits were regulated on the streets. The Middletown police decided to enforce the ordinance which had been written much earlier.⁸³ In addition, the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Liberty wanted an additional law regulating women's summer time dress in 1928. However, the village board declared that there was no need of an additional ordinance.⁸⁴ In Port Jervis, and Beacon in New York, women campers were forbidden to walk around on the streets with their "rolled up knickers" in 1927.⁸⁵

With the popularity of bare legs among women in the late 1920s during the summer, the prospect of banning stockingless women in public places became a social issue. In Ellingwood, Kansas, the city council tried to ban bare legs in public places, but failed to pass the ordinance, because a few council men were not wearing their socks.⁸⁶ In some beach areas in the state of New York, women promenading in their bathing suits without their stockings were criticized by the town authorities and warned by the police.⁸⁷ In the Kansas State Reformatory, women visitors without their stockings were barred, due to convicts' staring at women's bare legs.⁸⁸

Restrictions on women employees' clothes

Women's fashion was regulated in work places as well. In 1921, several articles in *The New York Times* reported regulations imposed on employees in work places. In a large railroad company in

Chicago, short skirts, rouge, peek-a-boo waists and rolled stockings were banned in offices, due to the reason pointed out by the officers that male workers were embarrassed with women's fashion which harmed "the working morale."⁸⁹ In Marshall Field & Co., also in Chicago, women employees were not allowed to wear dresses trimmed with spangles or embroideries, rouge and extreme powder, rolled-down stockings, or bobbed hair without nets.⁹⁰ In addition, in Baltimore, employers were against women wearing knickers in offices, since they were worried that male clerks would be distracted by women's exposed legs.⁹¹

In 1922, at the State House in New Jersey, women secretaries were ordered to attract as little attention as possible with their dresses, face powder and rouge, so people at the offices could concentrate on their work. However, women continued to wear short skirts and silk stockings in the State House, after a talk with their chief.⁹² In the same year, the president of the National Cash Register Company in Dayton, Ohio, clarified that he banned short skirts and bobbed hair to restrict extravagant dresses rather than to restrict women's fashion itself.⁹³ However, in my opinion, it does not seem to be reasonable to ban short skirts and bobbed hair in order to eliminate extravagance. In the next year, the People's Gaslight and Coke Company banned sleeveless dresses and extreme cosmetics, and ordered female employees to wear hats on the streets in order to avoid dismissal.⁹⁴ However, it was pointed out in *The New Republic* that office girls did not have enough money to buy different dresses for the work and for the evening. The office girls were expected to wear clothes that were not too feminine in the business sector and had to be as feminine as possible in the evenings.⁹⁵

Most of the regulations above were placed on office women. Office women were mostly single women in their twenties during the period. Employers generally preferred young women with attractive appearance, even though there were some exceptions, especially for professional office women. Employers – mostly men – wanted the attractiveness of women to be a part of the atmosphere of their

offices. For this reason, employers preferred single women over married women whose attitudes toward men in the office was usually “casual” and uninterested. Even though employers wanted women’s sexuality in their offices, they did not want it to be too “explicit.” Sharon Strom explains this dilemma in relation to clothing: “the clerical worker was supposed to be attractive, but not too sexy. She was not supposed to dress drably, but she also had to avoid flashiness. She should ‘look like a woman’ but not attract untoward attention by her appearance.”⁹⁶ Many office women during the period were regulated in their way of dressing, in order to be adjusted to the needs of male-centered atmosphere of the working environment.

Religious intervention

Churches, priests, and rabbis also advocated restricting body exposure. In a Catholic church in Phoenix, women with low-neck dresses were forbidden to enter the church in 1920.⁹⁷ In the same year in New Orleans, the Catholic priest sent the bride back home in order to make her change to modest bridal wear.⁹⁸

In 1921, a pastor in New York City preached that women should wear sanitary dresses that would not sacrifice modesty. He warned his listeners with a well known rhyme which sings “Mary had a little skirt, / The latest style, no doubt, / But every time she got inside, / She was more than half way out!”⁹⁹ In Chattanooga, Tennessee, Christ Episcopal Church issued rules for the dresses of brides and wedding attendants. Low-necked dresses were not allowed even in evening dresses. Tight and short skirts exposing calves, and sleeves above the elbow were also banned. Women had to cover their heads with hats or veils. Sufficient linings were to be used in dresses made of transparent or semi-transparent material.¹⁰⁰ Church assemblies also criticized the immodesty in women’s dress. The young men and women of the Evanston Congregational Church in Chicago condemned short skirts and

low necklines in women's dress, and young men who attended this assembly pledged not to speak to women in such attire.¹⁰¹ In Missouri, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church assembly was to opposed women's immodest dresses.¹⁰²

In 1922, the skirts of the Salvation Army workers were ordered to be no shorter than seven inches above the street level. The commissioner of the Salvation Army pointed out the immodesty of women's dress as the reason for the order.¹⁰³ A Rabbi of the Free Synagogue in New York condemned "the competition in nudity."¹⁰⁴ A priest urged the Colonial Dames of New York to "ostracize young people of indecent dress and improper speech and behavior." He also insisted that new immigrants should be separated from society and educated in American culture, before letting them immerse in American society.¹⁰⁵ A Catholic bishop also criticized the modern dress of women for causing "the turmoil in the world today." He said that women lost respect from men, and modest women would be respected by men and their children.¹⁰⁶

In 1924, the Catholic Women's Diocesan Clubs held a contest demonstrating the silliness of modern dress and for designing modest dress, in order to fight the indecent style of the day. Pope Pius XI praised the campaign and offered medals for the contest.¹⁰⁷ In the same year, the National Council of Catholic Women campaigned against immodest dresses. However, Cardinal Hayes was hesitant to approve of any "formal orders," since he thought "the matter of dress was such a personal one."¹⁰⁸ A person praised the campaign against immodest dress led by the National Council of Catholic Women in a letter sent to *The New York Times*. The immodesty of women's one-piece bathing suits was mentioned. According to the opinion, a charming woman would "not care to attract the unwholesome and unhealthy attentions of men."¹⁰⁹

A pastor in New Jersey delivered a sermon criticizing women's immodest fashion in 1925. He tried to support his main point with the cliché that bare knees were very dangerous for women who

were “the weaker vessels.” He added that “such undue exposure is against nature and does violence to that inherent sense of modesty so native to the heart of every woman.”¹¹⁰ In the same year, the Jewish Orthodox Congregation decided to urge women to attire properly in the synogogue, after a hot debate on whether the Church should regulate clothes or not.¹¹¹ At the last annual convention of the National Council of Catholic Women in 1925, Catholic women were urged to participate in regulating immodest dresses.¹¹² The same issue was also mentioned at the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae Mass in New York metropolitan area.¹¹³

In 1927, women wearing sleeveless and low-neck dresses and using facial cosmetics were ordered to stay away from communion rails in Catholic churches of the Belleville Diocese in Illinois.¹¹⁴ In the same year, a pastor in Los Angeles regarded women’s dress of the time as “a hindrance to the attainment of cleanliness of the mind.”¹¹⁵

Resistant force in schools

Starting in the nineteenth century, the number of women in secondary schools and colleges were increasing. The number of girls who graduated from secondary schools even outnumbered boys through the mid-twentieth century. The existing figure shows that 9,000 girls graduated from high school in 1870, while the figure for boys was 7,000. The number of graduates increased to 57,000 and 38,000 for girls and boys in 1900. The figures increased rapidly during the 1920s.¹¹⁶ The number of women enrolled in colleges also increased from 11,000 to 283,000 between 1870 and 1920.¹¹⁷ These female college graduates entered female dominant professions such as nursing and teaching. With the increasing number of women students and teachers, it was a matter of course that some felt the need to regulate women’s fashion in schools.

The force of resistance to the new style of dress also existed in schools. Hood College, one

of the largest higher institutions for women in Maryland, banned evening gowns with low necklines and dresses without sleeves, and urged new students to wear simple modest dresses in 1920.¹¹⁸ A school board member in Newark criticized girls' bare knees in a high school in 1922. Girls defended themselves stating that their knees were exposed only when the wind blew and when they were getting on trolley cars. The board member who accused girls of exposing bare knees was not appointed to the office again.¹¹⁹ Around the same period, the Chicago Board of Education investigated high school girls who indulged in "the shimmy dance, jazz music, short skirts, low necks, joy riding and cigarettes." The superintendent emphasized the importance of a mother's role in recognizing the importance of "modesty and simplicity" in girls' clothes.¹²⁰ In the same year, there was "a dispute over skirt length," in Vineland, Kansas. Two girls were brought to the local court for violating the school board rule of banning skirts shorter than three inches below the knee. At the first trial, the girls were not found guilty. However, the school board filed against the judgement, and the judge "sustained his ruling."¹²¹ In addition, a person supporting the rule of banning skirts shorter than three inches below the knee was reelected to the school board in Vineland, Kansas, winning over a candidate who supported individual freedom to wear short skirts in 1922.¹²² In the same year, Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania warned against women applicants wearing "extreme or eccentric style of dresses." Swarthmore insisted that they must maintain their tradition.¹²³ In 1926, in Arcadia, Kansas, the school board tried to ban cosmetics and skirts shorter than 6 inches below the knee. However, the County Attorney curtailed the rights of the school board.¹²⁴ In 1927, the college of St. Elizabeth, a Catholic institution in New Jersey, banned rolled stockings, lipstick, skirts shorter than 12 to 15 inches from the ground, and sleeveless daytime dresses.¹²⁵

Regulations on dress were not only imposed by adults but also by the student themselves.

The Brown University student body decided to bar extreme dresses and dances in 1921.¹²⁶ In the same

year, The Federation of University Women at the University of Chicago forbade skirts shorter than 15 inches from the ground. However, this regulation implied that there were women wearing skirts even shorter than hemlines over 15 inches from the floor.¹²⁷ In addition, according to a survey conducted by *The Literary Digest* in 1921, the student editors at the larger colleges felt less alarm from the women's fashion of the time than did the editors at the smaller institutions.¹²⁸

Not only was the dress of students regulated in schools, but the female teachers also had to submit to certain restrictions. In 1921, the school board of the Public Schools in Lyndhurst, New Jersey demanded that female teachers wear long skirts and discard colorful and elaborate dresses and stockings. Teachers protested against the demand, and some even said that they would resign if their clothes would be regulated by the school board.¹²⁹ The Eastern Teachers' Agency declared that the superintendents would not want women teachers with short skirts and rouge or lipstick on their faces in 1922.¹³⁰ However, in 1922, in Santa Rosa, California, a woman principal who was forced to resign by the school trustees for her powdered nose and skirts shorter than eight inches above the floor refused to resign. She demanded parents' vote for her resignation, and most of the parents wanted her to stay.¹³¹

However, parents often joined the force of resistance against the new style in women's fashion. At the conference of the Massachusetts Parent-Teacher Association, which was held in 1921, ironical definitions were given to women's fashion items: "Dress – a way not to cover; hat – a way to smother the head; blouses – a way to expose, often indecently, the most characteristically feminine portion of woman's anatomy; shoes – a way to make cripples."¹³² The Parents League of Brooklyn established a set of edicts to enforce in their homes, hoping the movement would extend to other families in Brooklyn in the early 1920s. The blue law comprised a provision suggesting a vague outline for proper dress: "Simple, refined clothes are to be worn at all times."¹³³ In 1923, the Parent Teachers Association in Somerset, Pennsylvania decided to ask the School Board to adopt a rule banning "silk stockings, short

skirts, bobbed hair, and low neck, sleeveless dresses.” However, the flappers objected to the decision reciting “I can show my shoulders, / I can show my knees; / I’m a free-born American / And can show what I please.”¹³⁴

Women’s fashion was restricted in other public places such as law courts and jails. In 1920, an Ohio judge warned the would-be divorcees to wear more clothes of longer length and without peek-a-boo waists.¹³⁵ In 1922, rules consisted of such restrictions on cosmetics, skirts shorter than 12 inches from the ground, rolled down stockings, the exposure of stockings, and wearing bloomers when there was no hard physical work were announced in the State Reformatory for Women in Bedford, New York.¹³⁶

As we considered above, the American public during the period not only criticized women’s fashion for challenging the social custom, but also exercised restrictions upon women through authorized social institutions. The public discussion on women’s body exposing dresses during the period tried to legitimate the necessity of social regulations on women’s dress. Two main points emerged from the public opinions on why women’s body exposing dresses should be regulated.

First, people criticized women for paying attention to their bodies by following the fashion of the time. Women following up-to-date styles of fashion and concentrating on their outer looks were regarded as showing a decline in emphasis on spirit, or the inner-selves.¹³⁷ This idea was based on the Judeo-Christian teachings that the soul can be saved by keeping away physical desires in the pursuit of ascetic lives. Moreover, traditionally, women were assumed to be the guardians of morals. Therefore, all the women’s material pursuits related to the body were regarded as immoral by the conservative opponents who emphasized the spirit. The editor of the *Presbyterian* pointed out young women’s “inability to grasp the significance of the higher things in human life,” and “the absence of sufficient courage and determination to resist the dictates of what is known as Fashion.”¹³⁸ However, as more

wage-earning women gained economic power and grew independent in spending money on their choice of clothes, they were more likely to pay attention to up-to-date fashion with more body exposure.

Second, ancient Judeo-Christian beliefs insisted that men could not control their sexual passions. It was women's responsibility to cover up their bodies in order not to evoke men's sexual desire.¹³⁹ This is why women should not have worn abbreviated clothes or exposed their bodies in public places according to Judeo-Christian dicta. In a male-centered society such as in America during the period, women's body exposure was regarded as seducing men under the assumption that men cannot control their sexual desires.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, women could be banned from exposing their bodies and wearing abbreviated clothes in public places, especially in work places, to let men concentrate on their work, even though women's sexuality was occasionally exploited. In addition, women were urged to wear more clothes in coeducational universities than in women's universities.¹⁴¹ Women were restricted to wear more clothes covering up their bodies, in order to avoid the presumed social chaos which would not be caused by body exposure in women's fashion itself, but by men who were apt to be tempted by women's exposure of their bodies. To prevent social disruption, women's fashion had to be regulated in public places, "to make this world safe for masculinity."¹⁴² Women were not allowed to wear what they wanted in work places, law courts, schools and in other places. Women who violated the restrictions were accused of having seductive intentions and of brainlessly pursuing material pleasure.

However, it is an irony that the first annual Miss America Pageant begun in September, 1921 included a bathing suit contest. Promoted by a hotel businessman named H. Conrad Eckholm in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for economic profit, women in the contest were to parade in their bathing suits in front of the public, while women's body exposure in public was restricted in many other place at the time. For example, woman named Louise Rosine was arrested in Atlantic City for her exposure of knees, a day before the first Miss America was crowned. Women's sexuality was exploited for

commercial reasons by putting them up for “public auction.”¹⁴³ Exploitation of women’s bodies was also found in advertisements. Roland Marchand also found that “the slim, youthful, and sophisticated” women depicted in advertisements in the 1920s were sexually alluring. Women’s bodies were often elongated and drawn in dramatic poses in advertisement illustrations. He suggested that women’s bodies were objectified in the advertisement during the period.¹⁴⁴

However, the regulations and criticisms could not be fully justified within the society where there was a change in women’s attitudes and life styles. Therefore, bare-legged women could not be regulated in the presence of sockless men in Kansas,¹⁴⁵ and Cardinal Hayes was hesitant to approve of any formal restrictions on women’s fashion which he believed was “such a personal matter.”¹⁴⁶ In addition, women teachers protested against regulations imposed on their dresses,¹⁴⁷ and a female principal who powdered her nose and wore up-to-date dresses was approved by the parents and did not have to resign in California.¹⁴⁸ Flappers in Somerset, Pennsylvania could protest against the Parent Teachers Association’s decision to regulate abbreviated attire, emphasizing themselves as “free-born Americans,”¹⁴⁹ which connoted their rights of expressing personal taste in fashion as a citizen with the gain of suffrage. A lady who was arrested at the Zion City train station was brave enough to tell the police “When you pay for my clothes you can tell me what to wear.”¹⁵⁰ These were clear evidence of women’s challenge to social conventions regarding body exposure and abbreviation in women’s fashion, along with the fact that women in general continued to wear the popular style of the time. However, a candidate who supported individual freedom in clothes could not be elected to the school board in Kansas. The public backed the candidate who insisted on the necessity of regulations on women’s clothes. Many Americans during the period thought women’s body exposing clothes should be regulated.

American society in the 1920s was going through rapid urbanization and technological

development along with the change in women's life styles and attitudes. According to Marchand, the rapid social change during the period created "deep anxiety about social disorder" such as the corruption of traditional moral standards and patriarchal family life.¹⁵¹ The social resistance against women's body exposure can be understood as one of the phenomena that resulted from the societal fear of change and disorder. As Ewen and Ewen suggested, women's body exposure represented changes in women's life styles and their challenge to social conventions.¹⁵² Therefore resisters did not fear women's body exposure itself, but changing womanhood, which might cause social change and disorder. However, American society was beginning to pay attention to women's needs and social justice during the period. In the following section, I will look at the public opinions that approved or defended women's rights to wear body exposing, abbreviated clothes.

Defenders of women's body exposure

The primary reason given by defenders for the necessity of women to adopt the new style of fashion was the healthiness and practicality of it. Women could enjoy physical freedom by getting rid of heavy petticoats and constrictive corsets. The full skirts which swept the dirty streets were unsanitary compared with the shorter dresses which were newly introduced. The convenience in repairing the simple dresses also was pointed out by the supporters of new fashion.¹⁵³ As women's social participated increased – and more people paid attention to exercise and sports – practicality and healthfulness rather than social conventions in women fashion must have seemed more important to its defenders.

Mrs. Elizabeth Q. Middleton, the Director of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union in Kansas City, praised the hygienic benefits of short skirts and unrestricted waists, to an audience of high school girls in 1921.¹⁵⁴ In the same year, Mayor Peter of Boston approved the sensibleness of

the one-piece bathing suit, after seeing girls bathing in “heavy skirted suits.”¹⁵⁵ In the American Designers’ Association’s convention in 1922, the merits of short skirts in avoiding accidents caused by being swathed in long skirts was pointed out.¹⁵⁶ In 1926, Sylvia Bayard of the Child Health Division of the New York Board of Education emphasized the importance of exercising in loose and light clothes which enabled women to breathe properly and deliver oxygen to the muscles and arteries.¹⁵⁷ Even the Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago area also approved the healthiness in women’s new style of dress in 1927.¹⁵⁸

A contributor to *The Saturday Evening Post* hailed women’s dress reform, sarcastically comparing women’s new style of dress with men’s dress, saying

... women are getting mighty sensible about their clothes – almost as sensible as modern man, who outside of wearing hot, germ-collecting woolen suits all summer, and a type of straw hat that is only fit for use as a letter basket on his desk; who voluntarily fastens a cast-linen band around his tortured throat, calling it a collar, and puts on his heaviest suit to dance in –well, outside of those and a few other things, we still admit he is sensible, and that modern woman is a very little more foolish.¹⁵⁹

The healthiness of the lightness in women’s clothes was recognized inside and outside of the United States, especially in the mid-1920s, and men were also urged to wear lighter clothes. A German doctor’s advice to wear short trousers, light suits, and to discard vests, collars and ties was reported in *The New York Times* in 1925. He insisted that women gained resistance to cold by “exposing their bodies to the air and sunlight.”¹⁶⁰ British doctors favored women’s short skirts and even stockingless legs, and urged men to wear short trousers to gain benefits from “ventilation and ultra-violet rays in sunlight.”¹⁶¹ This assertion was revived by a Boston doctor in 1929.¹⁶² In the same year, high school boys in Michigan demonstrated against the school rule that they should wear ties and button their collars. They

demanded that girls should also stop rolling down their stockings.¹⁶³ Not only women's clothes were getting lighter but also men's clothes were going through changes.

However, the low-necked and sleeveless dresses with sheer stockings caused other medical concerns. A famous surgeon in London suggested a connection between the increase in goiter and the popularity of bare-neck and chest exposure in fashion,¹⁶⁴ while others mentioned the increased possibilities of getting pneumonia and tuberculosis.¹⁶⁵ In 1927, when the daytime skirt was the shortest in the 1920s, 20 sanatoria in Wisconsin were full of tuberculosis patients. A doctor found one of the reasons in the abbreviation of women's fashion which "lowered the resistance."¹⁶⁶ Some 1920s doctors still found the consequences of some diseases in women's fashion as the Victorian doctors often did, even though there were opinions which disagreed with the idea that the nakedness in women's dress was the reason for the spread of influenza with the idea that "the savages used to wear very little clothing" without much problem.¹⁶⁷

However, some defenders of women's fashion observed the change in the younger generation's way of thinking and attitudes. These observers responded to those who worried about the decline of morality reflected in younger women's fashion with the opinion that morality was not declining but only the manners were changing.¹⁶⁸ C. R. Smith, editor of the *Kansas State Collegian*, observed that "Young people to-day are just as home loving and just as moral as their parents were, but they object most strenuously to abiding by the superficial conventionalities under which their parents labored."¹⁶⁹ Henry F. Cope, a general secretary of the Religious Education Association, also pointed out that the younger generation expressed their feelings candidly and "acted with intelligent choice", while the older generation concealed their feelings and "acted under control, by authority, or according to some fixt tradition."¹⁷⁰ Many women were believed to be "tired of mysterious-feminine-charm stuff."¹⁷¹ These defenders recognized the change in many young women's way of thinking which was

reflected in the way these women dressed. Many women enjoyed the freedom of making their own choices in dress regardless of the forces that attempted to restrict women's new style of fashion.¹⁷²

According to some opinions, many young women did not select their clothes depending on conventional standards anymore. Instead, the aesthetic consideration became a crucial factor in women's dress selections,¹⁷³ while some others saw the decline of aesthetic components in women's short skirts.¹⁷⁴ Even though it is not clear what these people mean by aesthetic values in women's fashion, it can be inferred that they understood the change in women's tastes in fashion along with their change in attitudes and values during the period. These defenders of women's fashion tried to find merits in new womanhood reflected in women's fashion, while some others emphasized traditional social conventions and criticized women's body exposure.

Some others even insisted that the morality of young men and women had increased. Dr. Woods Hutchinson, a "physician-lecturer-author" was one of the defenders who pointed toward the better moral behavior of youth. He also asserted that men were afraid of women being freed from their house drudgeries, taking away men's jobs and competing with them in businesses. For Dr. Hutchinson, short skirts reflected women's improved social status and increased activeness, while the resisters of women's short skirts were those who struggled to protect their positions from the invasions of women.¹⁷⁵ He recognized the burgeoning changes of woman's social status and the force which was there to maintain the patriarchal system in American society.

Some defenders of women's fashion insisted that dressing according to recent trend was another regular pursuit of fashion without any intention to challenge social conventions. Franklin H. Giddings, author and professor at Columbia University declared that "whether girls wear their skirts long or short makes as much difference as whether a man part his hair in the middle or on the side."¹⁷⁶

Some people asserted that "much of the alarm over our young people's behavior was a result of

sensational and wholly groundless reports in the newspapers.”¹⁷⁷ Make-up was regarded as “silly and objectionable” but not “immoral,” and the prevalence of smoking as well as the immorality of smoking itself was questioned.¹⁷⁸ In their general opinions, the new mode in women’s fashion was just a temporary phenomenon which would pass.

On the other hand, some predicted the possibility of changes in social norms which would result from the changes in manners. The tolerance toward new style of dress was mentioned suggesting that something different attracts attention only when it is first introduced.¹⁷⁹ A contributor to *Forum* suggested that the mysteriousness of women’s flesh would disappear when the public becomes familiar with it.¹⁸⁰ Some contributors to *The New York Times* also pointed out that the matter of modesty in women’s fashion was “a matter of custom” and just “a habit.”¹⁸¹ Another contributor to *The Ladies’ Home Journal* said that if one could “think of the human form without any left-over Puritanic inhibitions and complexes there would be no such thing as immodesty or vulgarity.”¹⁸² These people recognize the possibilities of changes in societal expectations for the proper way of dressing in women’s fashion. These defenders’ idea of change in social conventions and fashion trend somewhat parallels Sproles’s discussion of customers’ initial aesthetic perception and adoption of new fashion after repeated exposure to it.¹⁸³ It was believed that women’s body exposure in fashion would be taken for granted, once the society becomes familiar with the style.

Overall, the healthiness and practicality in women’s new fashion was the primary reason for the defenders of the new mode to encourage women to continue wearing the new style of fashion. In addition, the defenders recognized the change in women’s attitudes and thought reflected in women’s clothing choice. Some of the defenders pointed out that the public fear of moral decline in women’s fashion during the period was a means to maintain the patriarchal society. However, some others regarded the new style of clothing as a fad, while others recognized the possibility of the change in

societal expectation of women's proper way of dressing. Many defenders believed that women's fashion during the period was just a change in manners and not a decline in morality.

As many women's life styles and attitudes changed, they must have felt what Davis called "collective identity ambivalence."¹⁸⁴ As Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton explained, women's body exposing fashions of the time could be understood as a representation of women's identity ambivalence. The coexistence of resisters and defenders of the style suggests that the ambiguous meanings of the style were going through a process of social negotiation.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, an establishment of new dress code was on the way with the change in social conventions about women's body exposure. Other controversial issues that I am going to discuss in this dissertation also can be understood in terms of social negotiation in meanings of women's fashion with the change in women's life styles, attitudes and gender roles.

Femininity versus Masculinity

Women's mainstream fashion in the 1920s de-emphasized traditional feminine characteristics. The short tubular dresses concealed women's contours, and women bobbed or cropped their hair. A skinny woman with flat breasts resembling an immature boy was the stereotype of a fashionable woman. Coco Chanel contributed to the boyish look of the 1920s by introducing designs that were inspired by men's clothing items and made of fabrics such as jersey, customarily used in men's clothes.¹⁸⁶ Many women enjoyed the fashion of the time, but there were people who preferred feminine characteristics in women's fashion and designers who promoted a more traditionally feminine silhouette. For example, Jeane Lanvin designed dresses with full skirts, and Madeleine Vionnet was famous for her bias cut dresses which were more likely to disclose women's body contours.¹⁸⁷

In addition, the popularity of knickerbockers increased among some women. These women

wore knickerbockers for exercise and in resorts, and some women even wore them on the streets and in offices. The public felt it deviant for women to wear knickers, which originally belonged to men, on the streets and in offices, and wanted women to confine their use to climbing or camping.

Therefore, in this part of the chapter, I will focus on the tension between femininity and masculinity in women's fashion reflected in the public reaction. I will discuss the change in traditional image of femininity in two parts: women's mainstream fashion and knickerbockers.

Mainstream fashion

The tubular and loose style of women's dress in the early 1920s was far from emphasizing the typical body features of women. Breast, waist, and hips were not significant in women's dress. With the disappearance of wasp waists, tightly laced corsets almost disappeared and many women hailed the healthiness of it. Doctor Katheryn Corcoran, Medical Director of the Women's Catholic Order of Foresters, remarked that "the modern woman is too busy working and exercising to have time to think about her heart and her stomach and their ills."¹⁸⁸ Women doctors in Baltimore also pointed out that corsetless women were much sturdier, more active and healthier than corseted women.¹⁸⁹ A Director of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union in Kansas City also agreed that "unrestricted waists are boon to the girls," for health reasons.¹⁹⁰ Women enjoyed physical freedom in boyish style dresses. As previously mentioned, Ewen and Ewen recognized women's increased mobility reflected in women's simple boyish fashion in the 1920s.¹⁹¹ John Simon also regarded the boyish look of the period as a reflection of women's increased freedom in the public sphere and their desire for sexual equality.¹⁹²

Women's short hairstyle was a part of boyish fashion in the 1920s. Women bobbed or cropped their hair and wore small hats called cloches. Bobbed hair also was often banned, along with

the low-necked, sleeveless dresses, and short skirts. The Eastern Teachers' Agency in Boston declared that they did not want female teachers with bobbed hair.¹⁹³ In Atlantic City, New Jersey, a superintendent announced that bobbed hair was not proper for teachers. Teachers were surprised and a conference was held to settle the matter.¹⁹⁴ In a company in Dayton, Ohio, bobbed hair was also banned among women employees.¹⁹⁵ Fass found the reason for the attack on bobbed hair during the period in its explicit expression of women's sexuality. Traditionally, women had to tie their long hair into buns or chignons to avoid informality and for the active day. Comparatively loose hair represented untidiness and sexual allure. Freely worn bobbed hair during the period might have seemed improper for its implication of "liberation and a renunciation of sexual stereotypes."¹⁹⁶

While the boyish look of the time represented women's increased physical freedom, there still were many limitations in women's freedom in American society. The social system which preferred men to women in the public sphere still dominated American society in the 1920s. The proper places for women to stay after marriage were their homes. Even though the number of married working women increased in the 1920s, most women's life goal was to get married and have a fine home. These women were more than willing to quit their education or profession over marriage.¹⁹⁷ Marchand pointed out that "Most social tableau advertisements of the 1920s and 1930s perpetuated the notion of polarized sexual spheres." According to his explanation, advertisement copy during the period hailed the women's role as a scientific "manager" or "executive" who adopts modern products for her home, while women were rarely depicted as company heads or executives.¹⁹⁸ Therefore, it was believed that women should pay attention to their bodies in order to be eligible and attract a suitable marriage partner, even though they were criticized for attracting attention to their bodies in public places. To be attractive was to be fashionable, and achieving the popular slim figure was crucial. An article in *The New York Times* sarcastically tells in 1927 that "cows, calves, lambs, pigs and poultry will have to follow the vogue

for slim figures and exercise or diet until no fat is left in their anatomies.”¹⁹⁹ Another article in *The New York Times* indicated that make-up and elaborate accessories of “the older feminine tradition” contrasted with “mannish dress and boyish hair.”²⁰⁰ Laura Doan pointed out that women in boyish fashion primarily wanted to be attractive to men. Therefore, these boyish women never tried to be more than boyish *females*.²⁰¹

The importance of women’s physical attractiveness in up-to date fashion is well reflected in the advertisements during the period. Advertisements of undergarments guaranteed to reduce women’s flesh and to achieve a slim figure. For example, a rubber undergarment was introduced by a woman doctor with lines, saying “You can quickly dissolve superfluous flesh easily and safely.”²⁰² Another elastic undergarment advertisement emphasized that the undergarment could take care of a full diaphragm, especially of the medium stout woman.²⁰³ A company which produced clothes for women with full figures emphasized that their up-to-date designs could achieve “height and slenderness.”²⁰⁴ A weight-loss program which came in phonograph records guaranteed slenderness to women “no matter how stout they are.”²⁰⁵

In addition, with the popularity of a boyish look, it was important for women to look younger. The youthful look could not be achieved just by adopting the tubular style of short dresses. The ways to maintain a youthful appearance became a major issue among women as they grew older. The advertisements during the period displayed the importance of keeping women’s skin younger. For example, a cosmetic advertisement lured consumers, saying “Youth no longer holds imperious sway among the smart women of the world. The school girl no longer has monopoly on the peaches-and-cream complexion. Today forty may win from seventeen. . . . A marvelous discovery has robbed the teens of their deadliest weapon. Today the woman of charm no longer goes into the discard at forty. She can face her mirror with the assurance of a debutante.”²⁰⁶ Another advertisement guaranteed that

their ‘Facial Exercises’ would ‘remove lines, ‘crow’s feet’ and wrinkles; fill up hollows; give roundness to scrawny necks; lift up sagging corners of the mouth and clear up muddy or sallow skins.’²⁰⁷

Women enjoyed physical freedom in their boyish fashions during the period. However, the eligibility and appearance of women was still important. Therefore, women consistently had to mold and care for their bodies to meet the fashion ideals of the time. Therefore, Arnold discussed the active womanhood and the limitation in women’s social freedom implied in women’s boyish styles of fashion in the 1920s as follows:

Since the 1920s androgyny has been associated with the search for greater independence for women, the merging of genders signifying a desire to inscribe masculine power upon the female body. The mystery and seductive potential of the androgynous body, slim and youthful yet knowing and self-aware, was emblematic of the inter-war period and of the search for the ‘modern’ woman, who could encapsulate the shift towards a public dynamic femininity. The boyish silhouette spoke of adolescence, both in its push for freedom and its ambiguous status between definitions.²⁰⁸

As the boyish fashion waned and a mature look with longer skirts and women’s contours began to be popular in the late 1920s, many people demonstrated against the new mode introduced in Paris. The primary reason for the opposition was that the body constriction and long skirts were unhealthy and unsanitary. In addition, the opponents recognized the psychological effect and “the symbolic value” of clothing styles. Some of them were concerned that constricted waists and long skirts would make women passive and “destroy a good deal of camaraderie” between men and women,²⁰⁹ since many women who talked, smoked, danced and worked with men in public places built intimacy with men throughout the 1920s. To others, constricted bodies and long skirts represented the wearers’ restricted social status.²¹⁰ The opponents would not want women to submit to the tyranny of

fashion at the sacrifice of their health and improved social position. However, an opponent to the new mode insisted that “Short skirts are honest and healthful, and that does not mean any lack of femininity.”²¹¹ This opponent seems to have recognized that women in the boyish fashion of the 1920s rarely intend to become muscular.

However, some others hailed the mature look for its femininity. Mary Garden, an opera singer, thought that the short skirts “robbed woman of her most fascinating attribute – mystery.”²¹² At a debate on long and short skirts, Gertrude Lawrence, an actress, insisted that “long skirts make women more free.” According to her explanation, “long skirts emphasize women’s femininity. And, every woman knows that the way to get things she wants is to be feminine and her husband will let her have her own way.”²¹³ For these people, short skirts de-emphasized femininity.

Longer dress styles with breasts, waists and hips continued to be popular throughout the 1930s. In some aspects, women gave up the physical freedom they achieved. However, women would not endanger their lives with tight lacing, and would not sweep the streets with the trailing skirts during the day anymore. Tight lacing was not a necessity to the fashionable women in the late 1920s. *Collier’s* told women who wanted to attain the slim figure that they do not have to wear body-constricting girdles “despite the knowledge that all Patou’s mannequins wore corsets this year.” Instead, it recommended women to do “exercise of the bending and stretching type.”²¹⁴ Women were somewhat freed from the traditional definition and trappings of femininity by the late 1920s.

Knickerbockers

As the Senate approved the Nineteenth Amendment on June 4, 1919, following the House of Representatives, women were ready to live as citizens. One of the movements that rose among women in the early 1920s was to adopt standardized dresses. Helen Louise Johnson lectured at Columbia

University in 1920 that “now that women were citizens, they would not have time to spend ‘chasing the fashions’ and that the way to save their tempers, time, and money was to have a standardized dress.”²¹⁵

One of the styles she introduced was composed of knee length trousers, or knickerbockers. Many women wanted to know the address of the costumer who made it in New York. However, Johnson told women that the short trousers were “the ideal dress for a woman chauffeur” or for gardening.²¹⁶

On one hand, some women welcomed knickerbockers as street wear. On the other hand, many people opposed the knickerbockers on the streets, and believed their proper place was home and the resort areas. Women were even urged to wear long jackets or blouses over the knickerbockers, and to wear belts low on the hips, in order to make their legs inconspicuous as possible, while they were “climbing or tramping.”²¹⁷ As more women adopted knickerbockers, the public criticism and restrictions on knickerbockers intensified.

There were promoters of knickerbockers for women in the early 1920s. The American Dress League, a new organization to promote “decent, pretty, inexpensive, and practical” dress for women, introduced a “knickerbockers gown” in its first meeting in 1921. It was composed of a blouse, knickerbockers, and a cape. Women at the meeting applauded its practicality.²¹⁸ In the same year, a large wholesale clothing house for men in Chicago also promoted knickerbockers for women by advertising their practicality on the streets and in offices.²¹⁹ In 1922, the American Designers’ Association showed a “knickerbocker suit,” and expected that it would soon become popular on the streets. However, the Association announced that the suit was not to make women “unwomanly.”²²⁰ Women had to remember to be feminine even in the practical clothes such as knickerbockers.

Perhaps partly due to the active promotion by organizations and manufacturers and the practical merits of knickerbockers, these seemed to have gained popularity among some women, especially young women. According to an article in a 1922 issue of *Woman’s Home Companion*, the

Smith College student body decided that the Smith students should not wear knickerbockers on the streets until the town citizens adopt knickerbockers as street wear.²²¹ It can be inferred that knickerbockers were quite visible on the Smith College campus. In the same year, a couple in Massachusetts even married in knickerbockers.²²² The president of the Men's Apparel Club expected an increase of knickerbocker sales for both men and women in 1923. He added that the women's knickerbockers sales even increased in southern winter resorts – the conservative part of the country.²²³ In the same year, a vice president of the New Jersey Retail Clothiers' Association announced that he would encourage his female office workers to wear knickerbockers instead of skirts, because it would take less time to get dressed in knickerbockers. He believed that male workers would soon get used to the exposed "limbs."²²⁴

While more women adopted knickerbockers, the resistance against the trend also grew. Employers in Baltimore said in 1921 that they would not employ girls in knickerbockers, because they feared that male employees would be distracted by the exposed limbs.²²⁵ Their reason for banning knickerbockers in their companies seems to be a poor excuse, because women's skirts of the time would expose the calves anyway. In 1922, knickerbockers were forbidden in Vassar college campus, and the students protested against the rule.²²⁶ The Connecticut College student body barred women's knickers not only on campus but also on the town streets.²²⁷ Girls' High School in Brooklyn also banned girls from wearing knickerbockers to the school.²²⁸ Bedford State Reformatory for women allowed the inmates to wear bloomers, which must have looked more like knickerbockers, only when they were doing "rough work."²²⁹ In Traverse City, Michigan, the mayor of the city banned women's knickerbockers, and the city women protested against the mayor's order by parading on the streets.²³⁰

The tension between women wearing knickers and the resistance against them seems to have intensified as the time went on. In 1925, in New Orleans, a young woman's father was even attacked

by the neighbors who were upset by his daughter's white cycling knickers.²³¹ In 1926, a man who criticized all women who wore knickerbockers was shot to death by another man who had a sister wearing knickerbockers.²³² In Pittsfield, Massachusetts, knickerbockers were banned for women, after a few female campers from New York and New Jersey appeared on the streets with their knickers rolled up and the stockings rolled down.²³³ In Indiana, a nine-year-old girl was forbidden to attend school with her knickers, and the case was settled in the local court. The girl's mother, who believed that knickerbockers were proper to wear in classes, won the case in 1927.²³⁴ On the other hand, a girl refused to take gymnasium class, due to her father's opposition against the gym suit which was composed of bloomers. There were only girls in the gym class; nevertheless her father, who believed that the bloomers were "inherently corrupting," objected to his daughter attending the gym class.²³⁵ In Collingswood, New Jersey, women's knickerbockers were banned on the streets, under a "new 'vice and immorality' ordinance" which was to "preserve public peace and good order" based on the Old Testament.²³⁶ Rolled up knickers were also banned in Port Jervis and Beacon, in New York.²³⁷

There were women who wanted to wear practical clothes such as knickerbockers in the 1920s. However, many people thought it was improper for women to adopt masculine garments. The public became tolerant of women wearing knickerbockers only for sports and vacation, while some others even disapproved of it. Many people feared women's denial of traditional femininity during the period. Unfortunately, why the knickerbockers were criticized and opposed rarely appeared in the primary sources. According to Shelly Foote, many people in the past felt threatened when men and women adopted the clothing symbols of the opposite sex, since they believed that it "would blur the lines between the sexes" and "threatened the established relationship between men and women," which might cause the disruption of the existing social order.²³⁸ As it was announced in Collingwood, New Jersey, that women's knickerbockers were banned to "preserve public peace and good order," many opponents

against women's knickerbockers during the period must have regarded women's adoption of knickerbockers on streets as a challenge to the social order.²³⁹ In addition, the Victorian notion of natural difference between the two sexes and the separate spheres for men and women still dominated American society, even though the United States in the 1920s was going through rapid modernization with the economic boom and urbanization. Therefore, it was believed that women were naturally pure, submissive, emotional and domestic, while men were corruptible, aggressive, rational and social.²⁴⁰ Women's adoption of knickerbockers must have seemed against women's natural character and domesticity to many opponents. The father who commented that his daughter's gymnasium bloomers were "inherently corrupting" must have thought that her daughter will acquire male characteristics if she adopted male clothes.²⁴¹ Moreover, many people during the period, consciously or unconsciously, might have been aware of the male authority represented in bifurcated garments.²⁴² With the rapid change of American society and the change of American womanhood which I discussed earlier in this chapter, it can be inferred that women in knickerbockers were more than women in practical clothes to many people. Since many feminists participated in dress reform adopting trousers in the past,²⁴³ trousers appear to have reminded people of feminism, especially during the period when women acquired the right to vote. Therefore, it is possible that some people even regarded women's knickerbockers as a representation of women's rights movement or erosion to male authority in the social order. As discussed in controversies about women's body exposure in referring to Marchand, "deep anxiety about social disorder" such as the corruption of traditional moral standards and patriarchal family life were somewhat reflected in the controversies about women's knickerbockers.²⁴⁴

The tension between the importance of a traditional image of femininity and women's demand for practicality seems to be represented in the trousers-skirt mode introduced by Paris designers in 1927. The new mode called the "culotte skirt" was the skirt length with pleats disguising the trousers as skirts.

However, Parisienne women were hesitant to wear the new mode.²⁴⁵ The culotte skirt did not gain much popularity, but women continued to adopt a variety of bifurcated garments. Knickerbockers gradually went out of fashion by the late 1920s, and other styles of trousers such as pajamas and overalls caught more attention in resorts.²⁴⁶ When *Collier's* introduced a few styles of summer resort trousers in 1929, it did not forget to emphasize that: "We're still feminine enough to contradict ourselves, even if we do wear trousers," and "Trousers, you see, are no threat to femininity."²⁴⁷ Women still had to be feminine. However, the social expectation regarding feminine images was slowly changing with women adopting more formerly masculine garments in the later period. As scholars including Foote, and Ewen and Ewen suggested, the change in feminine images with women's adoption of trousers can partly be understood as a byproduct of change in women's life styles, attitudes and gender roles.²⁴⁸ The controversies about women's trousers also reflected the social negotiation of meanings in women's fashion in the process of establishing a new convention in women's dress.

Extravagance versus Thrift and Conservation

After World War I was over, there was a short depression in the American economy. Then, American society experienced great prosperity from 1922 to 1929, even though there was a slight recession in 1928. During this period, national wealth and income increased prominently. Total national income adjusted for the cost of living was \$620 per capita in 1919, but increased to \$681 per capita in 1929. While farmers were going through hard times, industrial workers enjoyed shorter working hours and increased wages with the industrial expansion. However, workers' wage increase was small compared with the increase in corporate profits. Between 1923 and 1929, workers' wage increased 11 percent. On the other hand, the corporate profits showed 62 percent increase. Moreover, national wealth was confined to a small proportion of the total population. The total income of 36,000

families was almost the same as the total income of 11.6 million families which had an annual income under \$1,500. Despite the maladjustment of the economic growth in the 1920s, Americans in general enjoyed economic progress.²⁴⁹

America in the 1920s went through technological and managerial progress. Machines – especially electronically powered machines – were widely adopted in factories. The moving assembly line, which Henry Ford introduced during World War I, contributed to the effective and rapid production of goods, along with the concept of scientific management including “shop organization, task analysis, worker motivation, and engineering control.” A large volume of consumer goods could be produced for the masses at the lower price. Potential consumers with increased economic power were allured to buy mass produced goods. The development of consumer credit contributed to the enhancement of buying power.²⁵⁰ Advertisers regarded women as the “purchasing agents” of each household, and emphasized that advertisements should appeal to women’s emotion and whimsicality.²⁵¹

The great economic prosperity in the 1920s improved living standards, and enabled women to spend more money on their clothes. Women could easily buy clothes from the wide range of ready-to-wear available at each price level. In addition, the number of women in industries, offices, and schools increased prominently, even though there still was discrimination against women.²⁵² More women gained economic power to purchase their own clothes in the 1920s. Especially the number of working women living apart from their families was growing, and these women were more likely to spend a larger proportion of their income on their own.²⁵³ According to an address made in 1928 by one of the leading textile merchants in London, Sir Edwin Stockton, American women were “the most extravagantly dressed” in the world. He estimated the clothing expense of American business women as 46 percent of their total income, and this was four times as much as the expenditure of English

business women. He found the reason for American women's extravagant clothing* in the economic prosperity of the country.²⁵⁴

As the same styles were copied down the price-level, the exclusiveness of a style with higher price, rather than the quality, served as important factors in purchasing clothes among women. In addition, many women preferred silk dresses and hosiery. As a result, a huge amount of silk was imported from Asia. The steamers loaded with silk from Japan arrived in Vancouver, and each train delivered 28 tons of silk to New York from Vancouver twice a month in 1928.²⁵⁵

With the popularity of silk dresses and stockings, the extravagance in women's fashion became a social issue in the 1920s. A heated dress competition took place even among the girls in high schools in the 1920s. For example, some schools banned silk dresses due to the extreme fashion competition practiced among female students in Muncie, Indiana – Middletown. A few girls even dropped out of school, because of their inability to keep up with other students in fashion. One of the mothers in Middletown said, "No girl can wear cotton stockings to high school. Even in winter my children wear silk stockings with lisle or imitations underneath." Another mother also explained that "The dresses girls wear to school now used to be considered party dresses. My daughter would consider herself terribly abused if she had to wear the same dress to school two successive days." A fifteen-year-old son in high school complained to his mother on his sister's clothes, saying "Well, if you don't let her wear silk ones next term when she goes to high school, none of the boys will like her or have anything to do with her."²⁵⁶ A regulation on dresses was also imposed on students in the Menominee County Agricultural School in Michigan. Several students dropped out of school, due to extreme dress competition. That school permitted girls to wear plain dresses made from inexpensive

* In this research, extravagance in women's fashion not only refers to the amount of clothes purchased by women but also their preference of higher priced, elaborate clothes of up-to-date styles and clothes made

materials only, and silk dresses were banned.²⁵⁷

However, the tradition of frugality had been deeply ingrained in American culture. Benjamin Franklin, one of the American founding fathers, is often referred to in discussing the bases of American tradition of frugality. As a self-educated man of bourgeois background, he emphasized the importance of individual frugality and industriousness along with other virtues in order to accomplish social success. His emphasis on frugality and diligence was based on urban middle class ideals which were influenced by Protestant ethics.²⁵⁸ As I mentioned in the first chapter, Ewen and Ewen explained how the urban bourgeois ideals of frugality influenced the simplicity in men's fashion in the nineteenth century.²⁵⁹

In contrast, Americans in the 1920s seemed to be unconcerned with the tradition of frugality. According to a survey conducted in 1925, college students majoring in ethics were asked to list worst practices. According to the survey result, extravagance ranked 14, and Sabbath-breaking and swearing ranked eight and nine. Sex irregularity, stealing, cheating, and lying ranked at the top.²⁶⁰ This result partly represents the atmosphere of the time. A contributor to *Education* criticized the contemporary trend of evaluating a person depending on "the amount of money that the individual man manages to get for an income."²⁶¹ Lynd and Lynd also found in Middletown that one's social status was positioned according to one's financial status represented in "where one lives, how one lives, the kind of car one drives, and similar externals." Middletown foremen complained that young working-class men in Middletown preferred reaching the "maximum wage" quickly to becoming "skilled workers."²⁶² The philosopher, John Dewey, also insisted mass production encouraged Americans to purchase goods rather than to be thrifty.²⁶³

However, there were apprehensive voices which criticized extravagance, and conservatism and simplicity were emphasized in women's fashion. Harry Collins, a designer for the First Lady, Mrs.

of expensive materials such as silk.

Harding, suggested that a woman could wear the same gown for two or three seasons by slightly changing details.²⁶⁴ At the University of Chicago, the Federation of University women decided to forbid “fancy hosiery, silk dresses, beaded and satin dresses, elaborate fur wraps, and hats trimmed with fancy plumes or flowers.”²⁶⁵ Swarthmore College, a coeducation school in Pennsylvania, emphasized in letters to the students and their parents that women applicants to the institution should wear simple and modest dresses.²⁶⁶ Lady Astor, a representative in the House of Commons in England and a left-leaning figure, urged American girls to put emphasis on the mind rather than on physical attractiveness. She introduced the simple modest garments that she wore to American girls.²⁶⁷ *The Ladies’ Home Journal* recommended to female college freshmen that simplicity, smartness, and good materials were the crucial factors to look for in an ideal college wardrobe.²⁶⁸ A supervisor of Home Economics in Cleveland, Ohio, pointed out that garment remodeling went out of fashion with the disappearance of piece bags – the bags of fabric scraps - and limited storage space for the piece bags. She emphasized the need to educate girls that new dresses with poor materials were no better than the remodeled dresses of good quality.²⁶⁹ When the first lady, Mrs. Coolidge, bought dresses at the total of \$1,000 on the spot, *The New York Times* reported sarcastically that “the first lady of the land wastes little time in haggling over styles or prices.”

The extravagance in women’s fashion might be related to the religious sentiment of the time, since the tradition of frugality was based on bourgeois protestant ethic. Moreover, the United States was a country of many immigrants with Judeo-Christian religion which condemned paying too much attention to appearances and material things in everyday life. As the country modernized with scientific development and urbanization, the status of churches and clergy was declining in the 1920s. While antievolutionists’ organizations were formed and laws were passed to ban professors and teachers from introducing evolution theories – mainly in the South – many priests attempted to explain the Bible

by adopting the concept of evolution. Moreover, churches became social centers, while the importance of spiritual experience declined and the church membership grew faster than the increase of population in the 1920s.²⁷⁰ Fass pointed out “the erosion of church discipline,” especially among young people during the period. According to her explanation, “the young had transferred their allegiance from the churches, broad or narrow, to a different sort of God, as they invested a kind of religious devotion to their leisure pursuits, to sports, dating, and song,” while the most religious ones turned their interest to “social reform and politics.”²⁷¹ In Middletown, marriages officiated by the clergy fell from 85 percent in 1890 to 63 percent in 1923, while marriages witnessed by civil servants increased from 13 to 34 percent between those years.²⁷² The lives of Americans, especially of younger Americans, were becoming more secular in the 1920s.

The secularization of American life could be partly observed in a survey which was conducted to “inspect moral anarchy” in 1926. The researcher asked 500 adults aged between 20 and 60 “to rate the Ten Commandments in the order of moral importance.” The King James version of the Ten Commandments was used in the survey. The subjects were described as “of superior intelligence, education, and social background.” The researcher explained that the first four Commandments – Thou shalt have no other gods before me; Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image; Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain; Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy – are the religious mandates, the next five – Honor thy father and mother; Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not bear false witness – are social mandates, and the last one – Thou shalt not covet – is a psychological mandate. The result showed that 151 people could not rate the religious mandates, and 102 people said that they could not find moral value in the first four Commandments. The researcher inferred that the urban life style “made for sophistication and godlessness.”²⁷³

As early as 1899, Veblen discussed that the leisure class tried to display their social and economic success through expensive, elaborate, and up-to-date fashion.²⁷⁴ In this research, there was no evidence of women displaying their families,' especially husbands' social-economic status, as Veblen insisted. However, as more women gained economic power and were away from their homes to work in the cities, these women were less likely to display the social-economic status of their families. In addition, the rapid modernization and booming economic development of American society along with the secularization of American life in the early twentieth century enabled women in social classes other than the leisure class to also pursue extravagance in fashion during the 1920s. Many American women enjoyed selecting their wardrobes from the ample amount of apparel produced in mechanized factories in the 1920s. They had more money than ever in previous American history to spend on fashion. However, modern America did not completely forget the tradition of thrift and conservation against extravagance and worldly pursuits. Therefore, some people criticized women for their extravagance in fashion, even though American society necessitated women to pay attention to their appearances. Many women continuously wanted to look attractive as possible in up-to-date fashion of higher price and unique style, many made from silks. As the Great Depression started after the stock market crash in October, 1929, many Americans welcomed the increase of consumption and extravagance in order to bring back economic prosperity.

Bases of Women's Challenge to Social Conventions

Many American women in the 1920s challenged social conventions in fashion causing controversies. Women exposed body parts that were traditionally covered up and disposed of underwear such as waist constricting corsets and petticoats. The boyish style of fashion and knickerbockers were against the traditional image of femininity. Women's increased expenditure on

fashion was far from the custom of thrift and conservation. Overall, women were challenging social conventions not only in terms of fashion, but also in overall life styles and their attitudes, as I introduced in the early part of this chapter. These changes and challenges shocked or provoked worries among some people in the society. Different opinions concerning the bases of their shock and worries were discussed, in the process of seeking remedies to their problems.

Some pointed out World War I as a base of change in women's fashion. In *The Mentor*, a writer argued that women's clothes turned "daring and scanty" after the war, due to the competition among women looking for husbands from "the depleted man-power."²⁷⁵ Others considered "relaxation from the nervous tension during the war" as another cause of fashion change, which led to seeking pleasure in life responding to the physical desire through body revealing clothes of the time.²⁷⁶ These opinions of war's influence on women's body exposing fashion do not seem logical and persuasive, since they did not present any actual evidences to support their insistence.

Some others thought of the new style of fashion as a product of consumerism. Under rapid industrialization and urbanization, consumerism advanced as an important characteristic of modern America in the 1920s. An article in *The New Republic* pointed out that demand was created and promoted through "advertisements, shop windows and dress shows, the theatrical stage, and the printed word."²⁷⁷ Marketing strategy during the period concentrated on promoting sales through the rapid change of styles and models.²⁷⁸ The new style of women's fashion was often advertised by referring to "Parisian authorities."²⁷⁹ Thyosa W. Amos, Dean of Women at the University of Pittsburgh, criticized commercialism created by elders as responsible for tempting younger people:

No student invented jazz; no student wrote the sex play; no student wrote the present vulgar obscene songs; no student photographed the immoral film; and no student created coarse fashions in dress for men and women. All these are the gracious gifts of a commercialized

society.²⁸⁰

However, the consumerism has limitations in forcing the public to adopt certain styles of clothes. Cotton manufacturers tried to promote the sales of cotton products such as cotton stockings, longer cotton skirts, and petticoats, due to the depression of the cotton industry during the period.²⁸¹ A letter to *The New York Times* responded to this idea, saying “Of all the absurd suggestions that are promulgated from time to time none is more ridiculous than that emanating from conventions of the National Cotton Manufacturers’ Association that women shall be urged to return to the burden of long skirts and petticoats in order to help the cotton trade.”²⁸² The introduction of long skirts in 1921 could not deprive women of short skirts. Skirts lengthened for a year or two, but hemlines began to rise again in 1924. Manufacturers and retailers could not easily manipulate consumers. Women during the 1920s were not just passive adopters of fashion. As Blumer suggested, the new style had to meet the growing tastes and the needs of consumers in order to be widely adopted.²⁸³

Some others who were against women’s challenge to social conventions found faults in the change in family lives. These people criticized parents’ indifference to their children’s lives and behaviors. Youngsters’ clothing behavior was regarded as a responsibility of parents, especially of mothers. A high school girl blamed mothers, saying “Where are the mothers? Why don’t the mothers take care of their daughters as the mothers of old times did?”²⁸⁴ The President of Agnes Scott College in Georgia asked

I am informed that in many places parents themselves indulge in modern dances. What can be expected of their daughters but to follow their example? I am also informed that frequently mothers approve of the way in which their daughters dress. Can we not secure the cooperation and influence of the home in correcting these deplorable evils?²⁸⁵

A harsh proposal such as taking girls away from irresponsible parents and placing them in appropriate

environments was also suggested.²⁸⁶ Some pointed out the early departure of youngsters from home in order to attend colleges and to work in remote places as obstacles for parents to supervise their children.²⁸⁷ Parents' refusal to open their houses for their children's party was another problem discussed. A wife of an Eastern university student suggested that

In the five years between my school-days and my marriage I could count on my fingers the number of home parties that were given by my friends, and my husband's experience was the same. We were asked to go to dances at clubs, movies, theaters, etc., but never to a party that would cause the parents and the house to be disturbed. Open your homes and save your children and your neighbor's children.²⁸⁸

The American family, especially the middle-class family, in the nineteenth century was based on parental control, centered around father-husband as a family head. However, the family in the 1920s was somewhat different from the traditional nineteenth century family. Especially in urban middle-class families, parental authority declined with the emphasis on "affection" among family members, with the shrinking size of families. The relationship among family members became more companionate and democratic. The advertisements in the 1920s also depicted "family conferences" in which children were also present.²⁸⁹ The free exchange of ideas between children and parents were also increasing in Middletown.²⁹⁰ Children in small size families were less involved in responsibilities of helping with housework and taking care of younger siblings. Consequently, they had more time to spend on extra-family activities, being more independent from parental control. Children in high schools and colleges were more likely to spend their evenings with their peers.²⁹¹ There were people who recognized the change in family characteristics during the period, and disapproved less parental control and children's increased independence in the family as discussed above. This, again, comes back to Marchand's discussion of Americans' fear of change in social order in the 1920s.²⁹²

However, the research results reported at the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection which was held in the mid-1930s approved “non-authoritarian, affectional, intimate relationship” among family members of urban middle-class. According to the research result, rural families with more physical interaction had less interests and “psychological unity” among family members, compared with urban children. Families with children who had less family responsibilities and more independence seemed more harmonious.²⁹³ Therefore, the attack on less parental-control and interest in children did not seem to have recognized the affectionate relationship lying behind the children’s increased independence during the period. Moreover, middle-class parents in the 1920s were more interested in child rearing, seeking professional advice in books and magazines, compared with parents in the previous period.²⁹⁴ The fear of change in social order must have influenced those who blamed the change in family lives during the period.

Feminism and women’s suffrage were also mentioned as the bases of change in women’s fashion and attitudes. After the attainment of suffrage, women’s challenge to social conventions was often considered as an outcome of women’s political victory during the period. A Dean at the University of Maine, a very conservative state, argued that “Having been heartily opposed to the extension of suffrage to women, I am perhaps overinclined to hold this responsible for the immodest and immoral behavior which is characterizing the present era. It seems to be necessary for women to imitate the vices of man in order to prove actual equality with him.” Another Dean in the College of Law at the University of Nebraska also insisted that “Political and economic liberty has come to women, who, retaining their sex instincts and not yet knowing how to use their freedom, are apt to claim the virtues and ape the vices of men.”²⁹⁵ In addition, feminism was accused of leading the fashion trend “toward elimination of essential apparel.”²⁹⁶ People who felt threats from the change in women’s social status must have attacked feminism and suffrage in relation to women’s challenge to social

conventions.

Overall, those who blamed women's fashion during the period found the bases of women's challenge to social conventions in consumerism, the increased independence of the young and the increase in women's political power. Marchand suggested the characteristics of modern society not only as "urban" but also as "youthfulness, mobility, optimism, and tolerance for diversity and speed of change."²⁹⁷ The rapid change of styles and strategic promotion of sales, the change in urban middle-class family structure, and women's suffrage obtainment definitely parallels Marchand's characteristics of modern society in the 1920s. Therefore, it is clear that people who criticized women's challenges to social conventions did not wholly favor the modernization of the society. They feared the disruption of existing social structure which the modernity with women's challenge to social conventions would bring. These people found comfort in the preexisting social system which emphasized the traditional gender roles and women's physical and mental modesty.

¹ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 145-175.

² *Ibid.*

³ Arthur S. Link and William B. Catton, *The Age of Franklin D. Roosevelt 1921-1945*, vol. 2 of *American Epoch: A History of the United States since 1900* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 28-30.

⁴ Evans, 182.

⁵ Sharon H. Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 387.

⁶ Strom, 387-388; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27-28.

⁷ Strom, 387-398.

⁸ Link and Catton, 28-30; Evans, 184.

⁹ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Link and Catton, 29.

¹¹ Link and Catton, 28-30; Evans, 177; Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1957), 88-122.

¹² Paula S. Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 266-276.

¹³ Allen, 100.

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- ¹⁴ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harvest Books, 1929), 64, 114, 134-135, 137, 253, 258.
- ¹⁵ Evans, 175-176.
- ¹⁶ Lynd and Lynd, 140.
- ¹⁷ Fass, 65-79.
- ¹⁸ Evans, 177.
- ¹⁹ Fass, 310-324; Link and Catton, 28; Evans, 175; Allen, 99, 110-111.
- ²⁰ Allen, 109-110.
- ²¹ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 97.
- ²² Fass, 292-300.
- ²³ Evans, 189; Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Maternalism, Feminism, and the Politics of Reform in the 1920s," in *Major Problems in American History, 1920-1945*, ed. Colin Gordon (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 45-55.
- ²⁴ Evans, 186-195; Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 5-6.
- ²⁵ Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1-30.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Cahn, 31-82.
- ²⁸ Blanche Payne, Geitel Winakor, and Jane Farrell-Beck, *The History of Costume: From Ancient Mesopotamia through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1992), 431-432.
- ²⁹ Payne, Winakor and Farrell-Beck, 483.
- ³⁰ "Rainy Daisies' Triumph," *The New York Times*, 30 October 1921, sec. 7, p. 10; "Rainy Day Club Marks 25th Year," *The New York Times*, 6 November 1921, sec. 2, p. 11.
- ³¹ Linda Hall, "Fashion and Style in the Twenties: The Change," *The Historian* 34, no. 3 (1972): 485-497; Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 234.
- ³² Lynne Richard, "The Rise and Fall of It All: The Hemlines and Hiplines of the 1920s," *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 2, no. 1 (1983-1984): 42-48.
- ³³ "Skirts are to be Longer," *The New York Times*, 28 August 1921, p.4.
- ³⁴ "Sees Longer Skirt, But Not Too Long," *The New York Times*, 9 August 1921, p. 9.
- ³⁵ "Long Skirts Now the Fashion Paris Sidewalk Census Shows," *The New York Times*, 8 September 1921, p. 17.
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 MAKE MUCH
 OF DÉCOLLETAGE

A Molyneux model (extreme left) is of huge chiffon with floating sections on sleeves and skirt. The two-piece mode (next to left) appears in white organza with crystal embroidery at the waist and a deep décolletage.

Germaine fashions the backless to the right above with a green lace bodice and organza ruffle flounces rising at one side. The touch directly above is of white with wide orange chiffon panels and diamond embroidery.

Figure 1. Evening Dresses from *Vogue*, 1 July 1926, p. 71



Figure 2. Women's Transparent Dresses from *Vogue*, 15 July 1926, p. 73

Camp Girls are Khaki Clad

The Summer Girl is going to Camp—to the seashore or the mountains for a whole long summer out-of-doors. And, whether according to the dictates of the Camp or according to her fancy, her wardrobe will be mainly khaki. Here are sturdy khaki suits for hiking, riding, boating, games. Great care has been taken with every detail of these garments—seams, pockets, buttonholes and buttons.

A—Tailored shirt and knickerbockers, the best outfit to wear on paths that lead up hill and down hill—and over a fence, perhaps. They are well-fitting and firmly made. Sizes 8-20. \$4.74

B—The wrap-around skirt of this smart-looking Norfolk suit truly be slipped off quickly leaving trim knickers. Sizes 10-20. \$8.44

C—Call it a "Farmette" if you will! The little girl who wears it knows that a lighter, more comfortable suit for games of every kind could scarcely be imagined. Sizes 6-10. \$2.74

D—A real dress with Peter Pan collar and narrow sash; yet the little tennis player is ready for the most strenuous frolic—for under her full pleated skirt she wears a sturdy pair of knickers that button just below the knee. Sizes 6-16. \$4.89

E—Every camp wardrobe should include a middy blouse. This one—with bloomers to match—has a turn-back cuff trimmed with buttons. Sizes 6-20. \$3.74

F—Overalls! Yes, indeed, as a camp suit they are most fascinating and comfortable. They have big, roomy pockets, bloomer knees and may be worn with a light, cool blouse. Sizes 6-16. \$1.74

SEPARATE PIECES

- Pleated skirt, On bodice, sizes 6 to 14. \$1.39
- On band, sizes 12 to 16
- Shirred skirt buttoned all the way down front. Sizes 12 to 16. \$1.74
- Full pleated bloomers, sizes 6 to 10. \$1.49
- Knickers, sizes 6 to 20. \$2.44
- Shirt, sizes 6 to 20. \$1.74



GIRLS' DEPARTMENT—THIRD FLOOR
R. H. Macy & Co.

Figure 3. Girls' Knickerbockers from *Vogue*, 15 May 1922, p. 5

3. CONTROVERSIES ABOUT AMERICAN WOMEN'S FASHION, 1930-1939

In chapter three, I will continue to focus on the controversial issues about American women's fashion appearing in *The New York Times* and magazines between 1930 and 1939. I will discuss the controversial issues in the same order as in chapter two – body exposure, femininity versus masculinity, and extravagance versus thrift and conservation – in relation to women's lives during the period. In the first section, contrasting opinions on women's bathing suits, halters and shorts will be discussed. In the second section, I will look at women's foundation garments and mannish garments in relation to the social existence of tension between femininity and masculinity. In the last section, the irony of desperate need of increase in consumption and the necessity of conservation during the Depression will be discussed in relation to women's fashion.

Body Exposure

As women went back to longer skirts with the return of breasts, waists and hips in the late 1920s, the public criticisms of body exposure in women's mainstream fashion almost disappeared. Some reminisced about the social meaning of short skirts in the 1920s, and were concerned about the long skirt's influence on women. One regarded the short skirt as a means for women to become close companions of men, since the short skirt offered women physical freedom to do things such as flying, car racing, and dancing with men.¹ Another person thought of it as "a triumphant gesture of freedom on the part of women."² In contrast, some others regarded the longer skirt in the 1930s as an impediment to women participating in business.³ However, women's skirts remained above the ankle

during the day.

While dresses became longer in the 1930s, more body exposing clothes such as shorts, halters and abbreviated bathing suits as leisure wear caught public attention. The controversies about abbreviated bathing suits, shorts and halters, which were mostly worn on beaches, in mountains, and other resort areas during the period, may be understood in relation to the social context of the time. With the increase of unemployment during the Great Depression, the U.S. government provided indirect relief by creating employment. Under the New Deal, the federal government spent about \$1.5 billion on constructing or improving facilities such as camps, picnic grounds, trails, swimming pools and parks between 1932 and 1937 through agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration. The Works Progress Administration made or repaired 12,700 playgrounds, 8,500 gymnasiums or recreation buildings, 750 swimming pools, 1,000 ice skating rinks, and 64 ski jumps. The National Youth Administration and the Recreation Division of the Works Progress Administration trained and employed people in recreation services including parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, beaches, and swimming pools. Recreational facilities were built not only to create employment, but also to cultivate desirable recreation services for the masses.⁴ In addition, the amusement parks appealed to the public with the emphases on their “beaches, picnic groves, lawns, and ballrooms.” People could enjoy recreation in amusement parks with such facilities, paying only the admission fee. During the Depression years, “drippers” who could not afford a dime to use a bathhouse wore clothes over their bathing suits and went back home with the dripping water from beaches.⁵

Bathing suits

Throughout the 1920s, swimming became popular with the widespread advice that emphasized the importance of physical exercise and getting air and sunlight to the skin. According to

Cunningham, swimming was one of Americans' major leisure activities by the 1930s. The increase of unemployment, the popularity of sun-tanning, and the increased number of public beaches and pools built as New Deal projects, all brought more public attention to bathing and swimming. Cunningham explains that the most popular styles of bathing suit in the 1930s were "the body hugging maillot with or without an infinitesimal skirt," and a dressmaker style bathing suit with "a fitted bodice and a short full skirt." We can observe the former style of bathing suits in Figure 4. In addition, two-piece bathing suits which exposed the wearers' midriffs as the one in Figure 5 were also introduced. Rubber yarns were often used to make close-fitting bathing suits. Lastex, which had a rubber core covered with two other yarns of natural fiber, was introduced to the market in 1931. Bathing suits made of Lastex had two-way stretch. Cunningham found that many women preferred dressmaker styles of bathing suits for several reasons. Dressmaker bathing suits were often designed with a full skirt as described previously. This made the bathing suits look more modest. Another factor that contributed to attaining a more modest look with the dressmaker bathing suits was that they were often made of nonelastic woven materials rather than elastic materials such as Lastex. This made these bathing suits less snug to the body. They were also preferred for "fabrics having intricate and elaborate patterns."⁶ Even though many women preferred modest styles of bathing suits, the public criticized women in bathing suits for revealing too much of their bodies. Many bathing suits were backless, as the one in Figure 4, in order to display a neat sun-tanned back in evening gowns which exposed much of wearers' backs (see Figure 6). Armholes were also getting wider. In addition, bathing suits exposed a larger portion of women's legs compared with the previous period, even though women still covered the upper part of the thighs, as we can observe in Figure 4 and 5.⁷

The public tried to impose restrictions on certain styles of bathing suits. One of the styles to be restricted was the "extra-trim bathing costume" which had wide armholes and a bare back, and came

down to cover only the upper part of thighs. These abbreviated bathing suits were banned on many beaches, not to mention on the boardwalk and on public streets, throughout the nation in the early 1930s.⁸ The American Association of Pools and Beaches decided to demand that the bathing suit manufacturers produce less body-exposing bathing suit designs for 1933. The association complained about women wearing overly abbreviated bathing suits, and one of the members explained that the abbreviated bathing suits became popular following the Olympic contestants' appearing in brief bathing suits.⁹ In 1932, white bathing suits were also banned on the beach in Ocean Grove, New Jersey, which was a very conservative Methodist community of the time. *The New York Times* reported that the beach manager gave no explanation about the reason for banning white bathing suits.¹⁰ It can be inferred that the white bathing suits would become transparent when they got wet, which would look quite immodest.

On the other hand, there were also indications of burgeoning change in societal expectations for bathing suits in some parts of the United States in the early 1930s. In 1932, Mayor Harry Bacharach of Atlantic City, New Jersey, reviewed the styles of bathing suits for the summer, and even approved the ones with "short trunks and a scanty bandeau." He and other reviewers said that the important thing was not the style of bathing suit one wears, but how one behaves in a bathing suit. However, laces or nets were banned in the bathing suits, along with the design that consisted of a trunk and shoulder straps.¹¹ Recognizing the changing style of bathing suits, a policeman in North Haledon, New Jersey, proposed to the Common Council that the law for the bathing suit style regulation should be changed. According to this town law, people should wear two-piece bathing suits with long sleeves and knee-length bloomers.¹²

There appears to have been a gradual change in societal expectations of bathing suits, as more women adopted abbreviated bathing suits as the decade went on. Such issues as bathing suits without

stockings or exposing bare calves by wearing short socks were out of fashion by the 1930s. It became a tacit agreement that women could go barefoot in bathing suits on the beach, as seen on the women in Figures 4 and 5. Many women defied the restrictions that were imposed on certain styles of bathing suits. By 1939, restrictions on bathing suit styles almost disappeared in primary sources. One writer in *The New York Times Magazine* declared in 1939 that “it had become pretty generally agreed that sin and swimming are rather incompatible.”¹³ As Sproles suggested from an aesthetic perspective, people might have become familiar with the styles of bathing suits which displayed more of women’s bodies, as they were repeatedly exposed to the styles.¹⁴

However, bathing suits continued to be banned in public places outside of many beaches, especially on the East Coast, throughout the 1930s, as they were in the 1920s. Most of the time the restrictions were not confined to women but also applied to men. Rockaway, in New Jersey, banned men and women from wearing bathing suits on the streets.¹⁵ Bathers were allowed to wear bathing suits only on beaches and at pools in the Palisades Interstate Park in New York in 1936.¹⁶ In Long Beach, Long Island, bathing suits were also banned on the boardwalk in 1938.¹⁷ By 1938, different beaches had different regulations on whether people could wear bathing suits on the boardwalk or on the streets. For example, bathing suits were banned on the boardwalk in Rockaway and Coney Island, while people were allowed to wear bathing suits on the streets in Jacob Riis Park and Orchard Beach in Bronx. The explanation was that Rockaway and Coney Island beach were near residential and business areas.¹⁸ The imposition of laws restricting bathing suits in these public places suggested that people did wear or attempted to wear bathing suits outside the beach. The increased number of reports restricting bathing suits in public places, compared with the number of reports in the 1920s, shows that women on the East Coast grew more daring in challenging social conventions that placed a taboo on revealing too much of the body in public places.

In sum, women's bathing suits were restricted in styles for the body exposure. However, many women continued to wear more body exposing styles of bathing suits, many defying the restrictive laws. By the end of the 1930s, such laws almost disappeared, and this represents the change of societal expectations for body exposure in women's bathing suits. In addition, the increased number of laws which forbade wearing bathing suits in public places outside of beaches and pools on the East Coast means that some people dared to expose more of their bodies away from the beach. This trend can also be observed in controversies related to some women's shorts and halters during the period.

Shorts and halters

According to Ann Buermann Wass and Clarita Anderson, women's gym outfits usually consisted of knickerbockers and blouses in the 1920s. However, knickerbockers grew shorter and sometimes women wore shorts instead of knickerbockers. Some women were photographed in shorts, while they were running in the 1920s. In the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, most women contestants, including American women in field and track, wore shorts with tailored shirts.¹⁹ Women also wore shorts in playing sports such as tennis and skating in the early 1930s.²⁰ The popularity of shorts for women seems to have grown in the mid-1930s. In April 1935, *The New York Times* reported that shorts sales increased so much that "one manufacturer was compelled to purchase another mill to take care of the orders."²¹ A society woman in Figure 7 is shown wearing shorts in Palm Beach. In addition, halters were popular among women, especially on beaches and in mountains on the East Coast around the 1930s, and many ordinances banning halters appear in *The New York Times*. There were criticisms of and restrictions on these women wearing shorts and halters in public places such as on the streets, in shopping areas, and in a church.

In the mid-1930s, many reports on regulating shorts and halters in Yonkers, a town in New

York, appeared in *The New York Times*. Yonkers' residents protested against women hikers in shorts passing by their neighborhoods, especially on Sundays. These women were coming and going to the Tibbetts Brook Park for hiking on weekends. Alderman William Slater took action in 1935 to ban women in shorts on Yonkers streets. He caught five women attired in shorts and halters, under the city law banning "appearance on a city street of any person in scanty attire." These women were to appear in the local court. The alderman turned in the photographs as evidence of violating the law.²²

Although he declined to prosecute, the judge told the women that "all we desire you to do is just dress the way the women in Yonkers dress when upon our public streets."²³ A person wrote to *The New York Times* that what the Yonkers alderman and the judge ordered women to do was ridiculous, since wearing street garments in hiking was "merely unhygienic," and "just too charmingly Victorian."²⁴

However, alderman Slater sponsored a new ordinance of banning "other than customary street attire," on Yonkers streets, to forbid shorts, halters, and "bathing attire or similar costume."²⁵ The ordinance would fine the violator no more than \$150, imprison the violator for no more than 30 days, or both. The ordinance was signed by the mayor of the city and became effective on July 29, 1935.²⁶ However, women found a way to avoid arrest, even before the new ordinance came into effect. A few girl hikers were found to carry strange bundles. They took out their skirts from the bundles and slipped them on before crossing the Yonkers streets, thus avoiding arrest.²⁷

In 1936, the crusade against shorts continued in Yonkers. The signs warning hikers against wearing body revealing attire on Yonkers streets were posted as early as May.²⁸ The ordinance was obeyed by most of the hikers. They put clothes over their shorts on the public streets.²⁹ However, two hikers – one man and one woman – were arrested for wearing shorts, despite the warnings.³⁰ They were fined \$10 each in the local court.³¹ The violators appealed to the court, and the defense counsel pointed out that the ordinance banning "other than customary street attire" failed to specify what was

customary street attire and what was not. However, the court denied the appeal.³²

In the following year, the violators' attack on the vague statement of the ordinance brought a new specific ordinance forbidding "a bathing suit, shorts, halter or any costume or clothing which indecently exposes or reveals any part of the wearer's person."³³ The new law was also vague as it did not specify exceptions for children or athletes.³⁴ However, no violators were found in Yonkers, under the revised ordinance.³⁵ The Yonkers confrontation over abbreviated attire was reported until 1938 in *The New York Times*.³⁶

Following the case of Yonkers, shorts and halters were banned on the streets of Suffern, New York in 1935.³⁷ Shorts were also banned in Camp Smith in New York where soldiers were in summer training. Colonel Walter Delamater, in charge of the regiment, thought that women in such attire would "affect his young men," and commented that "it looks bold on the part of young women who dress that way."³⁸ The colonel's comments on women's shorts in the camp connote women's open allurements of young soldiers with exposed bodies.

In 1936, shorts and halters were banned in shopping areas in Westport, Connecticut. However, there was no State statute that would validate police actions on the violators.³⁹ In Convington, Kentucky, the police declared that they would arrest females over 10 years of age wearing shorts on the streets.⁴⁰ In Babylon, New York, a young woman was forced out of a church by a priest, for wearing a halter and slacks. She went to the church in beach attire for confession, not knowing the confession hours. After the priest ordered her out of the church, she came back with her jacket on, but the priest still tried to "pull her from the pew." Not only the body exposure but also the slacks were the problem to the priest.⁴¹ Proper attire for the church required skirts for women.

The ban against shorts on the streets continued in the late 1930s. In 1938, an ordinance banning "garments [that] unnecessarily expose or reveal any part of the wearer's person" in shopping

areas was passed in Great Neck, Long Island. The vague statement of the ordinance would cause controversy over whether wearing shorts in the hot weather would be an unnecessary exposure of bodies. It was mentioned in *The New York Times* that it “involves a basic issue of human freedom and some subsidiary problems in esthetics.”⁴² This comment connotes that an individual’s body exposure could be viewed as a personal freedom of choice in clothes rather than as an offensive behavior to disrupt the established social conventions which should be regulated and criticized.

While some authorities were imposing restrictions on shorts and halters on the East Coast, there rose an argument that the restrictions were the question of esthetics. It was insisted that the reason for residents’ protest against shorts in Yonkers was esthetics rather than morality, since many residents were bothered by the hikers – many of them were fat – displaying “too fleshy bodies.”⁴³ It must have seemed too old fashioned to give morality as a reason for banning shorts and halters on the streets which hikers had to across on their way to the park for hiking. Emphasis on esthetics rather than morality in interpreting the protest in Yonkers seems to reflect the recognition of change in societal expectation on body exposure in women’s fashion.

The evidence and the recognition of change in societal expectation were also observed in other East Coast areas. In 1935, Rockaway Chamber of Commerce attempted to “tighten a city ordinance against wearing bathing suits on the streets, to include the wearing of shorts.” The Rockaway chamber asked for support from Coney Island. However, Coney Island organizations had a flexible view about wearing shorts.⁴⁴ The Rockaway chamber also decided to allow shorts on the beach front, saying that “of late there has been an entire change of attitude on what constitutes modesty, and if we try to be somewhat dignified we lose our standing as moderns.”⁴⁵ As previously mentioned in referring to Marchand, modernity meant “urbanity, youthfulness, mobility, optimism, and tolerance for diversity and speed of change” in the 1920s and the 1930s.⁴⁶ Rockaway’s legislators recognized and admitted that

there were some changes in social expectations about women's body exposure, and they had to accept and be tolerant of the changes in order to keep abreast of modernity. In addition, in 1936, in the Palisades Interstate Park, in New York, the park manager allowed shorts in the park, saying that "I see no use in interfering with hiking costumes, because the hikers are going to wear what they please in any event."⁴⁷ There were people who insisted on their freedom in clothing selection, and these people contributed to bring the change in social expectations regarding women's body exposure in public places. Another liberal view on shorts could be found in Danbury, Connecticut. A florist, who was on the forefront of the protest against women's shorts, attempted to present an ordinance that was similar to the one in Yonkers. However, no action was taken by the Mayor.⁴⁸

Overall, many women exposed more of their bodies in the 1930s, despite the popularity of longer skirts in mainstream fashion. Many women's bathing suits grew more body revealing, and *The New York Times* reports show that more women wore shorts and halters as leisure wear on the East Coast. The ordinances banning bathing suits, shorts, and halters in the public places outside the beach implied that more women grew daring in exposing more of their bodies in public places on the East Coast. This also reflected the trend toward "more flexibilities in social customs" and less occasion-specific clothing behavior during the period. Payne, Winakor and Farrell-Beck suggested the influence of sportswear on less occasion-specific clothing with the increase of "leisure time and mobility" in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ In addition, the existence of the ordinances reflect the existence of force which acted to change the societal expectations in relation to body exposure in women's fashion. In line with Davis and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton,⁵⁰ the controversies about women's body exposure demonstrated the existence of ambivalence about the proper amount of body exposure to be allowed within the society, and the social negotiation process of establishing a new dress code. The gradual disappearance of discussions and reports on restricting bathing suits, shorts and halters by the late 1930s

represented the change of societal expectations about body exposure as the society became accustomed to more exposure of bodies in women's fashion.

Femininity versus Masculinity

In the late 1920s, women's hemlines began to drop, and the long, slim figure with womanly body curves became popular. Some devices were used to achieve the popular figure. Some women employed thyroid substances that were known to be harmful to the heart in order to lose weight, and added "mysterious compounds to the bath water" in order to dispose of fat that partially covered their bodies, but were merely cheated by the advertisers. In addition, some women would pay for getting slapped with a rubber hand to reduce partial body fat and attempted to mold their bodies into ideal ones. *Hygeia*, the health magazine, pointed out that these devices were dangerous and useless in reducing fat, and recommended a controlled diet and physical exercise.⁵¹ In addition to these devices was the corset. With the lengthened hemlines, designers presented corsets and girdles in women's fashion. Corsets and girdles were indispensable to achieve the new silhouette. However, many women protested against corsets, due to the physical and psychological constriction they would bring.

On the other hand, mannish clothes such as tailored suits composed of tailored jackets and skirts or trousers gained attention in the 1930s. Some women adopted other garments such as pajamas and slacks on various occasions. Many women adopted these garments against social criticism that demanded traditional femininity. In this part of the chapter, I will discuss the controversies related to femininity and masculinity during the period, focusing on corsets and masculine garments adopted by women in the 1930s.

Corsets

A long and slim hourglass silhouette persisted throughout the 1930s, and corset sales increased, compared with the sales in the 1920s. In 1931, corset sales increased from the sales in 1929. According to The Controllers Congress of the National Retail Dry Goods Association, corsets had no competitor as a profit-maker by 1932.⁵² The American Retailers Association presented “well-rounded feminine curves” in their fall semi-annual convention in 1933.⁵³ “Well rounded curves” were also featured in the 1936 fashion show in Paris with wasp waists and “padded bust and hips.” Taking into account the influence of Paris fashion on American fashion, it is not hard to conclude that curves dominated American women’s fashion in 1936.⁵⁴ Wasp waists persisted in women’s fashion in 1937. The Dress Creators League of America, Inc. presented dresses which had “corseted waistlines that frequently swathed by wide girdles and stays.”⁵⁵ Corset manufacturers and retailers forecast most satisfactory sales for 1939 spring corset market. “Depleted retail corset inventory” and the slim hourglass silhouette for the spring season promised good corset sales.⁵⁶ According to Heidi Boehlke, corset sales were stable and profitable throughout the 1930s.⁵⁷

Corsets were often referred to as “foundation garments” or “Foundettes” in the 1930s, but the corsets during the period were far from the laced and whale boned corsets that constricted female organs. Manufacturers and advertisers endowed corsets with an affirmative image of a “female charm supporter.”⁵⁸ It was recommended in *Independent Woman* that a “foundation garment is as necessary as lipstick. It makes your clothes look better...makes you feel smoother, better groomed. It means comfort and support that will help keep down aging fatigue lines in your face, at day’s end.”⁵⁹

Many foundation garments were made from elastic material such as Lastex with two-way stretch. The first Lastex girdle called “Le Gant” was introduced by Warner Brothers Corset Company of Connecticut in October 1931. Due to the flexibility, lightness, hand-washability, and quick dryness,

Lastex girdles were more than welcomed by consumers. Other underwear companies also recognized the value of Lastex, and began to use Lastex in their products. The Munsingwear company in Minneapolis started producing Lastex undergarments in 1932. According to Boehlke, a designer named Ruth M. Kapinas was in charge of the Munsingwear's Lastex undergarment production. Among the popular styles of foundation garments during the period was the "all-in-one" – a combination of a girdle and a brassiere – which looked similar to the one in Figure 8. In 1937, Kapinas invented an all-in-one design called "bando-lure" which removed the thick joining seam between the brassiere and the girdle. Instead, she placed the S-curve seam by joining the inelastic part of the upper brassiere and the elastic lower part of the foundation garment at the nipple line. Wearers felt comfortable and were satisfied with lightness and body-controlling effect of "bando-lure." After the introduction of "bando-lure," Munsingwear undergarment sales increased by 40 percent in 1937 compared with the sales in 1936.⁶⁰

With the introduction of more comfortable foundation garments such as "bando-lure," manufacturers could insist that their products could "insure all the necessary control and molding without even the least suggestion of constriction."⁶¹ The corset advertisement copy in Figure 8 also emphasized that the product "is by far the most comfortable corset you've worn." Women could even zip themselves up in foundation garments without aid during the period.⁶² Women in foundation garments could be freed from the conventional feeling that they locked themselves up in corsets that were hazardous to their bodies.

Once the slim hourglass silhouette started to gain popularity in the 1930s, the severe resistance against the new style of fashion and the corsets, which appeared at the turn of the decade, almost disappeared. The improved features of corsets must have contributed to the reduction of resistance. Only a few resisting voices were reported in *The New York Times* in the 1930s. A person jokingly

suggested that men should stand together not to encircle their arms around the corseted waists.⁶³ In Hunter College, New York, 84 percent of the students “denounced corsets as unnatural, unhealthful and an instrument of torture.”⁶⁴

Women’s contour controlled by foundation garments also parallels the atmosphere of the time that emphasized the traditional femininity for women. The average unemployment rate in the 1930s was 17.1 percent. The peak of unemployment was reached in 1933, with 25 percent of the work force out of work. Despite the effort of New Deal, the unemployment rate never dropped below 14 percent.⁶⁵ With the high unemployment rate within the society, working women, especially married women, were regarded as stealing jobs from men, the traditional breadwinners. Women’s traditional gender role as homemakers and care-takers was emphasized during the Great Depression. A proper place for women to stay was home to bring up their children and to do the house keeping. Even the government discriminated against women public officials. The Economy Act of 1932 declared in section 213 that both spouses could not work for the government. Since men were regarded as the primary breadwinners during the period, it was more likely that women lost their jobs.⁶⁶ In such a social atmosphere, traditional feminine images were emphasized. According to an article in the *Journal of Home Economics*, women had to be feminine and attractive in order to fascinate men to entice them to marry, and then stay home to keep their husbands from getting lovers outside their marriage.⁶⁷ Women were still confined by social conventions that demanded that they be feminine. The paralleling phenomena between women’s contours controlled by foundation garments and the social atmosphere which emphasized women’s traditional gender roles and images could be understood in the light of Blumer’s collective selection theory.⁶⁸ The social atmosphere might have influenced the collective tastes of the time for women to adopt the style of fashion which somewhat demanded the control of their bodies by foundation garments.

Masculine garments

Women's fashion was not only feminine but also masculine in the 1930s. With the curves and lengthened skirts came slightly broad shoulders, as we can see in Figure 9. Broad shoulders appeared not only in women's daytime clothes, but also in evening clothes.⁶⁹ However, people during the period might have recognized the mannish effect of broad shoulders in daytime clothes, while the broad shoulders would not have been observed in evening clothes such as sleeveless dresses and halters with low-backs. Many women, especially in the business sector, wore tailored suits during the day, and the mannish effect of broad shoulders was enhanced in tailored suits with straight skirts.⁷⁰ However, Claudia Brush Kidwell found in magazines during the period that broad shoulders were presented with the emphases on their contrasting effects of "small waists and slender female hips." According to her analyses, "broad shoulders had become an integral feature in the ideal female body," and were "not intended to be a symbol of masculinity; it evolved as a design device that emphasized a woman's femaleness."⁷¹

Tailored suits composed of broad-shouldered jackets and skirts were not the only mannish characteristics in women's fashion in the 1930s. Some women adopted a variety of trousers in the 1930s. Pajamas not only stayed home but also appeared in night clubs and resort areas. The United Underwear and Negligee League of America even introduced a pajama wedding dress in 1931.⁷² Fifth Avenue retailers introduced the sales of women's trouser suits in 1933.⁷³ The introduction of pantie girdles in 1934 implies that the number of women adopting bifurcated garments was increasing. The Tailors Guild of America even selected "the best-dressed men-tailored women" in New York City in 1937.⁷⁴ The first woman in Figure 4 wears a pair of pajamas with a halter, while the third woman wears a trouser suit of the 1930s.

Hollywood stars including Katherine Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich contributed to

popularizing the tailored suits with trousers.⁷⁵ These women appeared in trousers in films and in their backstage lives. Dietrich wore man's tuxedo in film *Morocco* in 1930.⁷⁶ The Paris police chief even asked Dietrich to leave town unless she changed to a skirt.⁷⁷ According to Arnold, "masculine dress could lend a frisson of mystery and exotic androgyny to their star persona, or, as in the case of Katherine Hepburn, an air of patrician nonchalance and chic."⁷⁸ Some others interpreted the mannish attire of these film stars as sexually alluring and feminine. Tight fitting jackets revealed body curves, and mannish clothes contrasted feminine hairdo and makeup, which consequently more emphasized "femaleness."⁷⁹

While criticisms of women's broad shoulder effects could not be found in primary sources, women's trousers were subject to social criticism. A person who wrote to *The New York Times* in 1933 went too far, saying that women were adopting trousers not only to be in business but "to grab everything in sight, and she may not stop until the day when man has become what woman was once, a house worker and a creature whose main function is love." He went on saying "I like to see man keep his position at least as the equal of woman. Perhaps he is the equal now, perhaps that's what annoys me, but there is something in me that springs into the breach when even our trousers are threatened."⁸⁰ It is clear in his words that men's trousers symbolized male superiority, and some men felt challenged by women adopting trousers during the period. This man's over-hostility toward women's trousers seems to be related to the social-economic atmosphere during the period that criticized working women for stealing jobs from male breadwinners.

As husbands and fathers lost their jobs, their wives and children had to find work to help family ends meet. This may have contributed to the slight increase in proportion of women – especially married women – in the work force. Women workers represented 24.3 percent of the work force in 1930, while they represented 25.1 percent in 1940. Married women workers represented 28.8

percent in 1930, and they represented 35 percent in 1940. When Robert and Helen Lynd revisited Muncie, Indiana – Middletown – in 1935, they found that more women were thinking about working partly due to the economic situation. More single and married working-class women wanted to work, while more business-class women wanted to work between their graduation from school and marriage.⁸¹

According to Robert McElvaine, the proportion of women in workforce did not decrease during the Depression partly due to the segregation of the labor force. In other words, many women had jobs that were traditionally regarded as women's work. Traditional women's jobs included domestic service, primary education, clerical and social service jobs. McElvaine explained that these jobs were less affected by the economic depression and the New Deal influenced an increase in employment in these jobs.⁸²

However, Evans noted that the number of men in these jobs also increased during the 1930s, and they dominated high positions.⁸³ In Middletown, men had been penetrating the traditional women's jobs since the 1920s. For example, the number of male teachers increased by 157 percent, while female teachers increased by 74 percent between 1920 and 1930. The increased number of men in Domestic and Personal Services was two and a half times as great as the increased number of women in this category of occupation.⁸⁴

More women were also hired in government in the New Deal. Social workers such as Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady, Molly Dewson, the head of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee, Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, were in the forefront. As more women were hired through Eleanor Roosevelt's recommendation to the President, a network was formed among the professional women in the government and in social welfare. Through the network, women could exercise political power to bring out their concerns in social welfare, education, and health.⁸⁵

While more women were gaining economic power and working for the government,

husbands and fathers who could not provide for their families felt the degradation of their status within the family. Mirra Komarovsky describes the situation as follows:

Unemployment, in so far as it affected such families, has caused the concealed lack of respect for the husband to come into the open or, if the antagonistic sentiments were openly expressed prior to the depression, to increase the aggression toward the husband. The manifestations of the above changes were in increased conflicts, blaming the husband for unemployment, constant nagging, withdrawal of customary services, sharp criticism in front of the children, irritability at hitherto tolerated behavior, indifferent to his wishes, and so on.⁸⁶

As more men lost their jobs and more women worked to provide for them, men must have felt threats from women challenging their traditional role as breadwinners. Women, especially married women, who wanted to work met social hostility, being accused of competing with men who were believed to be the primary breadwinners. According to Kenon Breazeale, *Esquire* magazine, which was first published in 1933 for men, responded to this “diminished male self-esteem.” The articles on issues such as food, drink, home décor, gardening, and etiquette – which were traditionally thought of as women’s interest – featured women as “doing things all wrong” and gave advice to counter their taste. In addition, *Esquire* also objectified the feminine body by including erotic images such as famous artists’ nude pictures and illustrations of pinup girls called Petty Girls – name after the illustrator George Petty – with voluptuous bodies.⁸⁷

Therefore, a man’s criticism of women’s trousers above could be understood in this context of the time. America was in the deepest depression in 1933, with the unemployment rate of 25 percent, with many men out of work. The man above might represent the agony of men who were stressed by increased unemployment and the consequences it would bring to them, such as losing respect from their family members and their traditional role as bread winners.

Others criticisms against women in trousers also existed. Designer Schiaparelli, a French designer, also denounced women in trousers as extremists, when she visited America in 1933. She believed that trousers were desirable only for sports and play.⁸⁸ In the same year, trousers were banned in the University of Idaho, for women looked “unsightly” in trousers.⁸⁹ In 1938, a woman who wanted to appear in slacks as a witness in a Hollywood court caused controversy, even though trousers seems to have been widespread among Californian women by the late 1930s.⁹⁰ Women’s trousers were criticized for challenging the existing social conventions that required women to be women and men to be men. Historically, women in trousers had been ridiculed and attacked within American society since the introduction of bloomers. As it was discussed in chapter two, people might have feared the change of relationship between men and women implied in women’s trousers and criticized women in trousers for being “over assertive and unfeminine.”⁹¹

While trousers met some resistance, it seems that women in trousers were no longer atypical in some places by the end of the 1930s. According to the articles in *Collier’s*, trousers were a “commonplace in the West,” while “in the residential sections of New York it is not too startling to see women strolling in slacks.”⁹² Therefore, the local court in Hollywood finally announced to the female witness who appeared in slacks that “the costume was in good taste” with a mild denunciation.⁹³ *Collier’s* also recommended slacks for “beach and boat” in 1938. However, it warned women to “be sure they are tailored to your girlish form with the perfection achieved in California, where they are practically a uniform.”⁹⁴ Women had to “perfectly” fit themselves in trousers. Women were still the ones to be looked at. Some women’s adoption of trousers in the 1930s might not necessarily mean women’s challenge to men’s role within the society, as some had perceived during the period. Women’s trousers were mostly confined to the use in homes and resorts, and many women were not ready to wear them to work.⁹⁵ Moreover, as it could be observed among Hollywood stars, mannish

garments were adopted to enhance the female attractiveness.

However, some recent scholars have found social meanings in women's adoption of mannish garments. Arnold thought of women's adoption of masculine garments as a process of establishing a new definition of femininity with the change of men's and women's gender roles within the society.⁹⁶

Foote also suggests a similar idea:

successful changes in appearance have been a part of larger changes in gender conventions.

With the establishment of a new set of values and beliefs about male and female behavior, society has redefined what it is to be and look like a man or a woman.⁹⁷

Again, Ewen and Ewen also regarded women's adoption of mannish garments as the implication of women's mobility within the society.⁹⁸ Therefore, women's adoption of trousers can be partly understood as a byproduct of change in gender conventions which was on the way, with more women gaining social and economic power and willing to earn their living during the period. A new definition of a feminine image was being formed. The process of change in gender conventions accompanied a social level of ambivalence about gender specific dress code which was reflected in criticisms on women's trousers.

Extravagance versus Thrift and Conservation

The cause of the Great Depression can be partly found in economic maladjustment which I discussed in the previous chapter. The Brookings Institution clarified in its study, *America's Capacity to Consume*, that the upper 0.1 percent of families had income equal to the lower 42 percent families in 1929. Brookings study also added that the income of the upper class grew more rapidly than that of the lower class in the late 1920s. Therefore, upper 0.1 percent families had the 34 percent of national savings, while about 80 percent of the families held no savings in 1929. William T. Foster insisted that

the oversavings of the upper class made no contribution to creating more consumption to keep up with the speed of production, and contributed to bringing the Great Depression. However, the upper class also actively invested in business between 1925 and 1929. However, McElvaine found that the heavy investment contributed only to balance the economy temporarily, while it accelerated production which resulted in overproduction and surplus. In addition to the oversavings and heavy investment, McElvaine found the causes of the depression in exports and credit sales. Agriculture held 25 percent of total employment in 1929, and 25 percent of farmers' total income came from exports in 1929. However, the Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930 raised the duties on imports, and European countries also responded by raising tariffs on American exports in return.⁹⁹ Consequently, the decrease of exports resulted in food surplus and increased unemployment. Moreover, the increase of American tariffs on European imports resulted in the decrease of debt payback from the Allied countries in World War I. This worsened American economic conditions and made it more and more impossible to encourage private investment in Germany to help Germany compensate for World War I destruction in Allied countries. The Allies' economy also suffered from reduced compensation from Germany. The abundance of credit also deepened the depression. Many people bought products without money, depending on credit during the 1920s. By the late 1920s, they were paying debts and could not purchase new products.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, America during the Great Depression needed to create more consumption.

There were contrasting opinions on the new style of women's fashion, which was introduced in the late 1920s. With the start of the Depression, some hailed the change of fashion, because it would create new consumption. Moreover, people expected that lowered skirt hemlines needed more fabric, which would contribute to getting the textile industry out of depression. The director of fashion art and design for the McCall Company reported in 1930 that "the definite acceptance of the new styles by

women all over the country will give an important stimulus to business.”¹⁰¹ Theresa O’Donohue, the president of the Ladies of Charity and a member of the executive board of the National Conference of Catholic Charities, urged women to spend more money on dress saying that

Too many people, especially women, are hoarding money that would stimulate business if it were spent properly. Many women are making an old dress do when they can well afford a new one. Go out into the highways and byways and demand long sleeves and long skirts.

Remember that the short dress requires exactly 2 and 1/2 yards less material than the long. You can’t buy it any cheaper and it only means that much less fabric is being manufactured.

Demand trimmed hats. Bring back feather and flower ornaments.¹⁰²

Louis E. Kirstein, former member of the National Recovery Administration Industrial Advisory Board and vice president of William Filene’s Sons company in Boston, insisted that fashion retailers should create new desires by creating obsolescence to “avoid stagnation in depression.”¹⁰³

On the other hand, some believed that the change in women’s fashion would bring a decrease in consumption. A woman wrote to *The New York Times* that she would not buy “long skirts or tight waist lines.” She believed that other women must have felt the same, which would be “disastrous to business.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, due to the “seasonal depression” in the garment industry with the change of mode in women’s fashion, a professor of economics in the University of Pittsburgh, Dr. Francis J. Tyson, insisted in 1931 that women should wear standardized garments of even length and style.¹⁰⁵ Against the professor’s assertion of standardization of garments and mild criticism of the whims of fashion, a woman wrote to *The New York Times* that women’s long skirts contributed to the increase of employment in the textiles industry.¹⁰⁶ The executive director of the Industrial Council of Cloak, Suit and Skirt Manufacturers also said that the standardization of women’s garments would “enormously increase unemployment in the women’s apparel trades.” He also reported that “75 percent of selling

appeal of ready-to-wear rested upon decorative elements.”¹⁰⁷ The decorative elements in garments conflict with the concept of standardization in women’s fashion. The Fashion Originators Guild of America even reported in 1936 that the loss of billions of dollars in a few years was due to standardization of styles and the consumer pressure for the cheaper garments.¹⁰⁸ America during the Depression desperately needed an increase in consumption, and the ways to create more consumption and increase the employment rate were explored, to bring back economic progress.

Between 1929 and 1933, during the worst years of the Great Depression, GNP dropped almost 30 percent, and the unemployment rate rose approximately eightfold reaching almost 25 percent.¹⁰⁹ However, Franklin D. Roosevelt won the presidential election in 1932, and he actively created employment with the increased allotment of federal expense, especially before his next election in 1936. During 1935 and 1936, the American economy seemed to be getting out of the Depression. During these years, lavish items came back to women’s fashion. For example, fur sales, which dropped rapidly after the start of the Depression and gained sales increase after Roosevelt’s election,¹¹⁰ gained sales increase of 20 percent in 1935 over the previous year.¹¹¹ In 1935, Tobe, the fashion authority and merchandising consultant, forecasted even more increase of fur sales in women’s fall and winter fashion in various price ranges.¹¹² In 1936, the vice president of Russeks Fifth Avenue in his return from Europe said that “America would welcome the luxurious creations of the Paris couture.” He added that “The lavish display of furs and fur-trimmed coats was the most amazing thing I have ever witnessed.”¹¹³ In the fall, special report to *The New York Times* announced that “retailers were putting great effort behind ‘dressy’ apparel, due to evidences of improved economic conditions.”¹¹⁴ *The New York Times* reported that fur sales led the increased sales of 50.4 percent in October 1936 over the same month in 1935 in local department stores in New York. Compared with the sales of the same month in the previous year, 61 among 66 departments gained sales increase.¹¹⁵ However, Roosevelt and his political

supporters believed that the Depression was over, and cut down the federal expense on work relief in 1937. In addition, credit was tightened and the first social security tax was imposed on consumers. The result was soaring unemployment and the collapse of the stock market. The year 1937 and 1938 was the period of "New Depression."¹¹⁶ However, Roosevelt eased credit and increased deficit spending in the spring of 1938, and the economy improved again by 1939. This does not mean that the eased credit and increased government spending moved the country out of economic depression.¹¹⁷ Rather the start of war in Europe helped the United States get out of the Depression, as the U.S. government supplied weapons to the Allies with the war against Hitler.

Even though the American economy hungered for an increase in consumption in order to get the country out of the Depression, there still were a few voices which condemned extravagance in women's clothing behavior. Some criticized the time, money and energy women wasted in shopping for their clothes.¹¹⁸ A cardinal also denounced women's senseless silly fashion. He mentioned that "A clever psychologist of the day has said that you can tell the quality of a woman's brain by the kind of hat that covers it."¹¹⁹ On the contrary, American society, especially in work places, demanded good-looking women with fashionable clothes.¹²⁰ Lynd and Lynd also discussed that the "modern world has emphasized more openly extreme femininity, including less passivity, more positive allurements, and a richly toned sexual response."¹²¹ Women were still criticized for paying attention to their appearances, despite the social demand for attention to their appearance.

While some tried to create more consumption, thrift and conservation was necessary for many families during the Depression. People moved to lower rent housing, and even moved in with relatives. Sales of telephones, automobile, instant foods, and clothing dropped, while home canning, domestic industry such as bringing in laundry and sewing revived.¹²² Primarily due to the economic situation, many young people postponed marriage, while abortion and contraception were widespread. The birth

control clinics of the American Birth Control League increased from 55 to more than 500, between 1930 and 1938. According to a survey in 1937, about 80 percent of Americans approved birth control.¹²³

More women had to remodel their dresses than in the previous period, by extending hem-lines with trimmings and “adding new collars and cuffs.”¹²⁴ Women could keep up with fashion by turning old clothes into new ones. Loris Connolly found that women, especially rural women, made clothes from cotton bags during the Depression and WWII, when new fabric was unaffordable or the production of cotton was not sufficient to meet the civilian needs.¹²⁵ Knitting and crochet were also the useful thrifty skills. However, Jane Farrell-Beck and Joyce Starr Johnson found that dress remodeling information almost disappeared from magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Vogue*, and *The Delineator* by the early 1930s, and suggested that the disappearance was partly due to the decline of needlework education in schools.¹²⁶ According to Jean Parsons, more and more women preferred ready-to-wear to home-made clothes between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century with the rapid fashion change. Moreover, most working women did not have enough time, energy and skills to construct their own clothes during the period. Therefore, magazines and home economists recognized the importance of ready-to-made purchasing skills.¹²⁷ The importance of home sewing seems to have decreased by the 1920s, although some needed to remodel their clothes during the Depression.

Thrift and conservation were especially emphasized in women's fashion during the “New Depression.” A best home-made dress contest was held in 1937.¹²⁸ Magazines introduced smart ways to manage one's wardrobe. *Woman's Home Companion* introduced Mrs. James Marlay, a visiting Reader-Editor from Detroit, to share her know-how for spending only \$200 a year on her clothes and still being a charming dresser. Mrs. Marlay selected simple clothes and changed accessories to wear clothes in various occasions and for more than one season.¹²⁹ *Ladies' Home Journal* also said that

a multi-purpose dress in black or brown combined with accessories would cut down the budget for the wardrobe. Coats without fur or with detachable fur were recommended for those who wanted to wear a same coat for several years.¹³⁰ *Scholastic* also emphasized the importance of good material and multi-purpose clothes with different accessories in wardrobe planning for high school girls.¹³¹ A study in *Journal of Home Economics* concluded that high school girls and their mothers needed wardrobe-planning courses, based on a survey done in 11 high schools in Texas.¹³² Thrift and conservation was necessary to many women during the Depression.

More consumption and extravagance in women's fashion were welcomed during the Great Depression. Economic conditions desperately needed the increase of consumption in order to return prosperity to American society. On the other hand, there still were a few who criticized women paying attention to their bodies by following the up-to-date fashion. However, thrift and conservation were important to many American women in the 1930s due to the poor economic conditions, and they became more necessary and important during World War II, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

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PICTURE YOURSELF
IN ONE... OR ALL... OF THESE

Saony

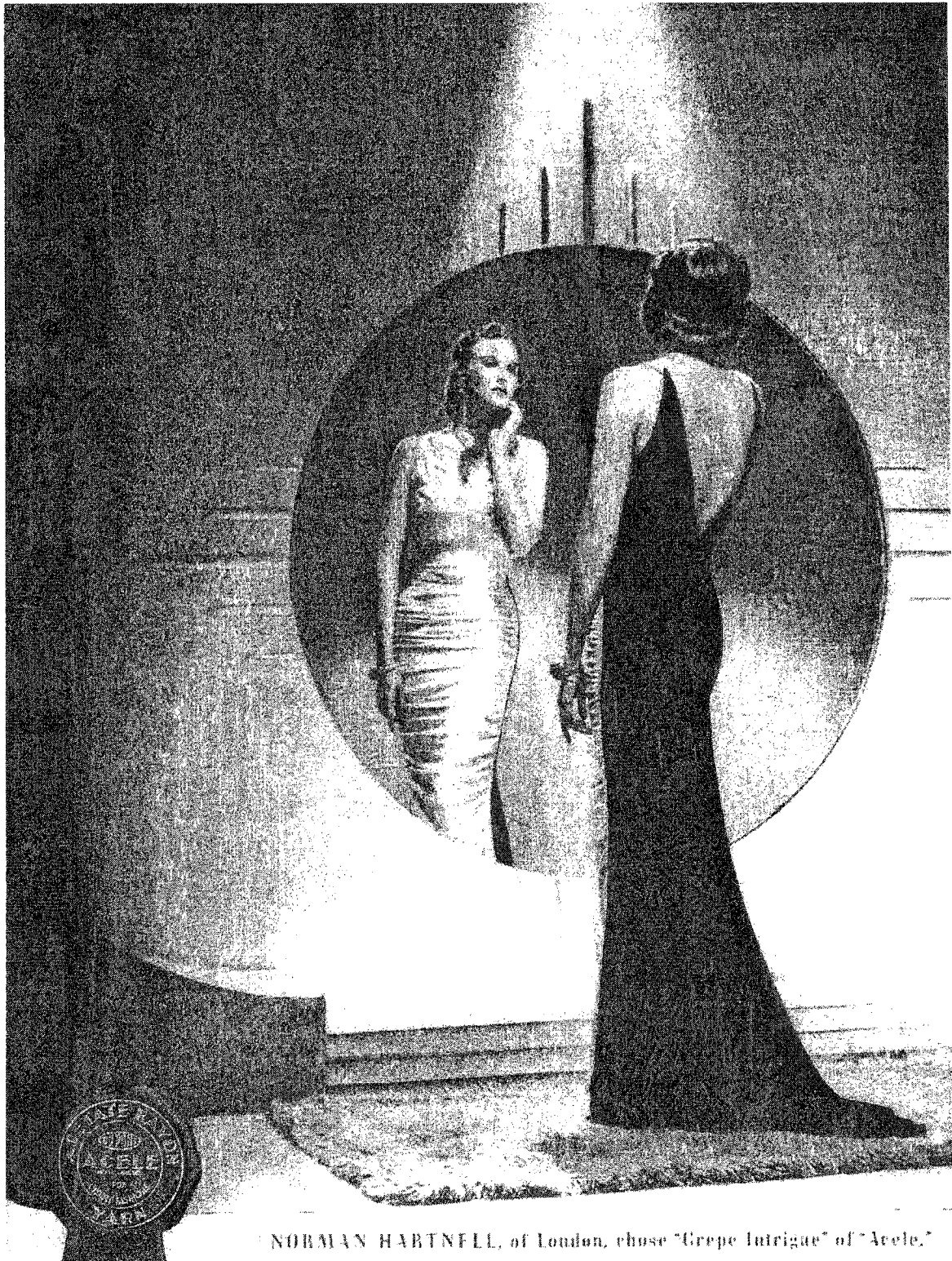
MERMAIDS

with the camera, or face it! In a Saony, you're eye and rightly so. • Just suppose you were in this picture, you're in baby pants and separate candy stripe halter. • Or, that you're in picture, you're the pyjama girl at the left, although you have two pockets, you haven't aitch on your back. • Or, there you are that light-hearted sailor over at the right, too bad your jacket hides all the stripes that circle the waist of your shirt. • Or, that you stretched out in front, in an exclusive candlewick knit with uplift bras, decollege and cross-strap back. • Yes, you! Get into this style picture. You'll see Saony and-and-and fashions at

Figure 4. Bathing Suits, Pajamas, and Trouser Suit from *Vogue* 1 June 1935, p. 115



Figure 5. Two-Piece Bathing Suit from *Vogue* 15 June 1935, p. 7



NORMAN HARTNELL, of London, chose "Crepe Intrigue" of "Acele."

Figure 6. Evening Gown from *Vogue* 15 February 1938, p. 15



Figure 7. Shorts from *Vogue* 15 June 1935, p. 63

Lily of France

Loveliness

The new Lily of France Step-In does everything a Lily of France corset should do—yet is by far the most comfortable corset you've worn. It's just as great a pleasure to the fitter to model one of these for you as it is for you to be fitted.

SOLD IN QUALITY STORES
IN THE U. S. A.
AND IN CANADA
BY ALL THE T. EATON CO. STORES

Figure 8. Foundation Garment from *Vogue* 1 April 1935, p. 110



Figure 9. Suits with Broad Shoulders and Longer Skirts from *Vogue* 1 April 1935, p. 71

4. CONTROVERSIES ABOUT AMERICAN WOMEN'S FASHION, 1940-1945

In this chapter, I will also focus on the three categories of controversies – body exposure, femininity versus masculinity, and thrift and conservation versus extravagance – in women's fashion between 1940 and 1945. In the first subsection, I will look at the relation between fabric conservation and body exposure in women's fashion during World War II. In the second subsection, discussion will be focused on how femininity was emphasized during the war years, which required practicality in women's fashion. In the last subsection, I will look at the social promotion of thrift and conservation and the actual practice of fabric conservation during the war years.

Body Exposure

Before World War II broke out, Americans were roughly divided into two groups considering international relations. One group was called internationalists or interventionists. This group believed that the United States should defend the world's democracies. The other group was called isolationists who never wanted the United States to be involved in foreign affairs, especially in European affairs. The latter group exercised power to pass the four Neutrality Acts between 1935 and 1939. The Neutrality Acts banned the United States from providing loans, credits, and arms or munitions to the belligerents. In addition, Americans were not allowed to travel on ships of belligerent nations, and American merchant ships were not to be armed.¹

However, Americans were not "neutral in thought" when World War II began as Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. A Gallup poll revealed that 84 percent of Americans wanted

the Allies to win, while only two percent of Americans supported Germany.² Moreover, more than half of Americans agreed to help Britain and France, so long as it did not endanger Americans' safety.³ Therefore, Congress revised the Neutrality Acts, allowing the United States to sell weapons to the Allies on cash-and-carry basis. In March of 1941, the Lend-Lease Bill was passed to lend armaments to the Allies. Until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, many Americans wanted the United States to help the Allies, even though very few Americans agreed to the United States entering the war.⁴

As the United States supported the Allies, they needed to save raw materials much as possible to produce military supplies. In August 1941, the National Women's Undergarment Manufacturers Association proposed a plan to save 10 percent of the fabrics used in fashion annually by shortening the skirts' length by a few inches. Shorter skirts would need shorter undergarments, which would also contribute to fabric conservation.⁵ However, the founder of the Fashion Originators Guild of America, Maurice Rentner, opposed the plan. He believed that it was impossible to shorten skirts, since "dresses are just as short today as decency and grace will permit." An expert who worked for a popular price dress manufacturer also found it impossible to shorten the skirts, because the average skirt length was one inch below the knee. He suggested that narrowing the fullness of skirts would reduce the fabric usage. The National Dress Manufacturers Association's official also could not be sure whether women would adopt shorter skirts.⁶ Despite the disagreement among the manufacturers on shortening the skirt length for fabric conservation, Mrs. Robert Holman, the head of the women's division of the Massachusetts Committee on Public Safety, predicted that the skirts would be shorter in the spring of 1942, due to the fabric shortage.⁷

As the United States entered the war, American women had no choice but to wear shorter and narrower skirts for fabric conservation. The government imposed restrictions on fabric usage – L-85 –

in women's wear for the fall and winter of 1942. However, the maximum length and sweep of dresses and skirts were within the range of length and sweep of the styles already presented at the time. For example, the average lengths of size 16 dresses were 41-1/2 to 44 inches, and the maximum length permitted for size 16 was 43 inches and the proportionate lengths for other sizes. The maximum length of suit skirts was 28 inches, while the average style of the time ranged between 26 and 28. The sweep of suit skirts made of wool material under nine ounces were not to exceed the width of 72 inches, and those made of wool material over nine ounces were not to be wider than 64 inches. These maximum widths were within the range of suit skirts' sweep which was within 54 to 86 inches at the time.⁸ Women's dresses and skirts under the government restrictions were not extremely narrow or short compared with the styles presented at the time. When L-85 was revised in summer 1943, the restrictions on sweep and details were tightened, while the dress and skirt lengths remained the same.⁹ Therefore, skirt length itself was not much shorter than the period previous to the fabric restrictions.

During the war years, public criticisms of body exposure in women's fashion was rarely presented in the primary sources. One reason may be found in the skirt length. The skirt length limitations listed in L-85 remained within the average skirt length presented at the time, and the skirt length appears not to have created social antipathy in general. The skirt length grew shorter in the second half of the 1930s to reach below the knee by the end of the decade. Moreover, people had already experienced the exposure of women's legs since the 1920s. As Sproles explained, they must have become familiar with women's display of their legs by the 1940s, as people have been repeatedly exposed to the style.¹⁰ However, this does not mean that all skirts had the maximum length permitted by the government. Some skirts revealed knees, especially when women sat down or walked. Some women adopted deep V-necks under the excuse of fabric conservation. The style of evening gown that revealed the back and throat with a skirt length that reached to the knees was created.¹¹ Americans

during the period understood these styles as a part of patriotic movement to win the war. However, the National Catholic Women's Union criticized these styles as extreme in 1943. It insisted that "fabrics are diabolically employed to create a sensual allure," and V-necks represented "Voluptuousness" instead of "Victory." It went on to insist that "immodest fashions and dress of today offend against the Sixth and Ninth Commandments." For the National Catholic Women's Union, the restrictions on fabric usage and the "patriotic wartime move" were abused to create the immodest fashions of the time. However, it is important to recognize that the National Catholic Women's Union criticized some extreme styles not women's fashion in general. Moreover, designers pointed out that skirts could go up farther when women sat down due to the narrowness of skirts, but "skirts have been shortened little if at all for several years."¹²

Another reason for the rarity of criticism of body exposure in women's fashion may be found in the patriotic atmosphere of the time. After the United States entered the war, Americans sent their sons, husbands, and friends abroad. Americans felt desperate to end and win the war as soon as possible. Many civilians volunteered to help agencies such as the Red Cross and local civilian defense offices. Volunteer organizations such as the American Women's Voluntary Services sold war bonds, delivered food to the military, taught Braille to the veterans who were blind, and gave first aid to the wounded in ambulances. People collected scraps including rubber, papers, fats, bones, and a variety of metals. Victory gardens were cultivated in homes to supplement food production. The government urged civilians to "eat what you can and can what you can't." War bonds and stamps were sold to ordinary Americans.¹³ Under this atmosphere of the time, some extreme style of garments must have been regarded as a part of attempts to conserve fabric.

Woman's Home Companion introduced eight types of people who represented women's "psychology" of the time. Among the types was the actress Virginia Dwyer who enjoyed revealing

much of her body “to feel sun and air on her skin and to let her muscles have free play.” She was introduced as a type that “made bare midriffs, halters and shorts socially acceptable.”¹⁴ It seems true that some dresses of women, especially young women’s summer attire, were quite abbreviated during the period. A woman clothed herself in brassiere, panties, slip, stockings, garters, one-piece dress, hat, and a pair of shoes, and the total weight of her clothes was only 21 ounces.¹⁵ However, abbreviated summer garments such as bare midriffs, halters, and shorts did not seem to have been accepted everywhere in the United States during the first part of the 1940s. A woman wrote to *The New York Times* that she was embarrassed by the public reactions to her summer attire which was composed of a backless midriff and a pair of shorts worn under a short skirt in New York City. However, the same attire received no negative attention in Cleveland where she spent her summer vacation.¹⁶ Shorts were also banned on the streets in Monahans, Texas. The city councilman who started the anti-short campaign insisted that there were other places where shorts and bare-midriffs belonged.¹⁷ Even in some resort areas such as Wildwood, New Jersey, shorts were banned after 6 PM.¹⁸ However, shorts might have been banned in Wildwood due to their informality rather than due to body exposure. Fabric conservation was very important during World War II. However, it seems that fabric conservation and wearing abbreviated summer garments had little correlation during the period. Halters, shorts and bare-midriffs on the streets were still controversial issues in some communities in the United States.

Femininity versus Masculinity

After World War II began, president Roosevelt asked Congress for \$1.8 billion for military spending in May of 1940. Especially, he recognized the importance of the Air Force, and wanted 50,000 aircraft and the national capacity to produce 50,000 a year. Roosevelt’s proposal seemed impossible to attain, since the United States was producing 2,000 a year at the time. However, 20,000

aircraft were manufactured in 1941, and soon 300,000.¹⁹ The United States started to mobilize for the national defense in 1940.

When the nation started to mobilize in 1940, 12 million women – 26 percent of women - were working. Nearly 90 percent of these women worked in traditional women's jobs such as teaching, nursing, social work, civil service, and domestic service. In addition, most of these working women were single. In 1940, about 50 percent of single women were working, while only 15 percent of married women were working.²⁰

However, America's manpower shortage required women's hands, as the country enforced the defense program. Six million men left farms to serve in the military or to work in the defense industry, and the percentage of women in farm labor increased from 8 to 22.4 percent between 1940 and 1945.²¹ Women were urged to work in defense industries and drive tractors in place of men. By 1944, the percentage of working women rose to 36 percent making 19 million. However, historians pointed out that the increase of working women during the war years was not significant. Among the six million women who started working during the war years, nearly three million were young women who had graduated from schools and were ready to work anyway. The remaining three million can be understood as a normal increase, considering the population growth during the war years.²² However, it is important that there was an increase of women in the labor force.

Between these years, the number of married women in the workplace exceeded single women for the first time in national history. However, most of these women were over 35 years of age without small children. Historian David M. Kennedy pointed out that American society criticized working mothers by exaggerating the juvenile delinquency problems, despite the fact that the percentage of working women with small children did not increase much. The working mothers with children under six increased from 9 percent in 1940 to 12 percent in 1944.²³ According to a survey conducted by the

Women's Bureau, only 32 percent of working women had any children under 14, and a half of these women had only one child under the age of 14. Women in defense industries primarily relied on their families for the child-care, and a survey result of 1944 indicated that 16 percent of mothers in defense industries had no child-care. Moreover, working mothers had no government arrangement to lighten the burden of housekeeping such as shopping and cooking. Therefore, war industry women were often absent or resigned from their work.²⁴ Historian William L. O'Neill pointed out that the government made few efforts to employ more young mothers with children. With a few exceptions, childcare facilities were poor or nursery fees were too high for most working women to afford.²⁵

Despite the moderate increase in the number of working women during the war years, it is true that more women were working in the defense industry during the war. Among the two million women who worked in the defense industry, nearly a million were working in the aircraft industry, followed by 225,000 working in shipbuilding. The government campaigned to attract more women to the defense industry by featuring women in stylish working garments as Rosie the Riveter. Riveting is a skilled job in industry. Contrary to the propagated image of Rosie the Riveter, most of women in defense industries were employed in low-skilled routine jobs.²⁶ This was partly due to the requirement of strength in riveting, and changes in shipbuilding that required more welding than riveting. Moreover, employers did not want to train women in high-skilled jobs, since they expected or believed women would return home after the war was over. The employers also intended to lower women's wages compared to men in the same work. However, unionized male workers protested against this intention for fear of losing their jobs to lower waged women.²⁷

Rosie the Riveter was often featured in smart working slacks, for women's safety in industry. At Mrs. Roosevelt's press conference in the White House in August of 1941, a denim coverall with a short-sleeved blouse was introduced as a mechanic suit for female factory workers. A suit composed

of a jacket and slacks was also introduced for those women who had to take the place of men on farms. Both suits had a matching hat or a cap, and slacks were closely fitted at the ankle.²⁸ The Women's Bureau recommended that women wear proper clothes instead of wearing "cast-offs of the home closet" to prevent accidents and to lessen fatigue. Short-sleeved blouses with slacks or coveralls were presented as proper clothes for the aircraft industry workers, while women in bench assembly could wear short-sleeved dresses.²⁹ The Bureau of Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture also suggested to women in the defense industry or on farms to wear two-piece slack suits composed of shirt jackets and slacks.³⁰ Designers introduced functional clothes such as one-piece slacks called "defense suits" and wrap dresses called "kerchief dresses" in a variety of colors, fabrics, and details. Big bags which could carry knitting and a first-aid kit were also a part of functional accessories influenced by war.³¹ Many women factory workers covered their hair with rayon patriotic scarves depicting proud images of American Army, Navy and Army Air Corps, and "home front culture" such as blackouts and rationing.³² The Office of Civilian Requirements of the War Production Board arranged to send low-cost work garments such as slacks, coveralls, shop aprons and overalls directly to war factories, offering priority sales to the workers during the time of material shortage in 1945.³³ Women in the defense industry and farms were encouraged to wear pants for their safety and effectiveness in working. We can see two women mechanics in coveralls in Figure 10.

The indirect influence of war on women's fashion could be found in shortages of rubber, fuel and other raw materials. *The New York Times* reported in early 1942 that many suburban housewives were using bicycles for going to the markets, in the face of tire rationing. Bicycle tires were going to be rationed soon, but the ones already manufactured were to be sold for the year. Mrs. Roosevelt also bought a bicycle to learn riding. The most effective attire for bicycling women was composed of a culotte with over skirt, a pullover with a leather jacket or windbreaker, a hood tied under the chin, and

mittens.³⁴ *The New York Times* also helped to propagate making women's slacks out of men's, in order to encourage fabric conservation. A stenographer in the Colorado State Capitol who made her slack suit from her boyfriend's sport suit was introduced as looking good. Her friend at the statehouse also planned to remake her slacks out of her husband's, after he went into the army.³⁵ In preparation for the fuel shortage, junior misses were urged to wear slack suits for warmth. After gasoline rationing was issued in December of 1942, women needed to wear slacks in order to walk long distance and keep themselves warm in cold weather. For this reason, Glen Rock junior high School in New Jersey allowed female students to wear slacks in cold weather by relaxing the rule banning girls in slacks. Chicago councilmen also agreed to remove the old law which forbade women from wearing slacks on the streets.³⁶ Such social situations somewhat influenced women to adopt masculine garments, and must have let women to experience the practicality of wearing them.

In addition, as early as in 1940, when the country started to mobilize, college women also started to shop for masculine garments such as right-buttoned jackets and coats, shirts, sweaters, moccasins, and even trousers in college men's stores.³⁷ These college stores advertised that women in good colleges should look just like "Princeton sophomores."³⁸ At Wellesley, faculty campaigned against students' slacks. However, when the China's First Lady, Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, visited Wellesley campus in navy blue slacks, faculty dropped the campaign against slacks.³⁹ "Durability and chic" accounted for the college fashion, and women's slacks and blazer well represented these features.⁴⁰

Masculine garments were not only getting popular among college women, but also among women in general. *Consumer Digest* suggested in its April 1941 issue that a slack suit should be found in a well-selected woman's wardrobe.⁴¹ In March of 1941 *Collier's* also introduced women's blouses, jackets and coats inspired by American colonial ancestors' garments, which had masculine details such as a jabot and looped gold braid.⁴² High school girls wore slacks, especially on rainy or snowy days.

In 1942, a Dean of Girls in a high school told a reporter in *Scholastic* that she would lose her job if she banned girls from wearing slacks, because there would not be any girls in the school if she sent girls in slacks back home.⁴³ In the same year, *Woman's Home Companion* presented a movie star, Ingrid Bergman, who told that she always wore comfortable clothes such as slacks off the screen, as one of the eight women who represented the "psychological types" of American women.⁴⁴

By the spring of 1942, slacks sales had increased substantially and many designs featured masculine garments.⁴⁵ Filene's in Boston and J. L. Hudson in Detroit sold women's slacks. Marshall Field's, The Fair, and Goldblatt Bros. in Chicago reported sales increases of five to ten times compared with 1941. The total sales of women's slacks increased about fivefold compared with the previous year.⁴⁶ The Commerce Department predicted that women would continue to demand "comfortable, informal clothes and sensible shoes" after the war.⁴⁷ Masculine styles of clothes were popular among some women as a fashion trend, while some other women must have bought those styles out of necessity and practicality influenced by the social conditions during the period. As Blumer suggested, celebrities including Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and Ingrid Bergman adopted trousers because of "suitability or potential fashionableness of the design."⁴⁸

American society, in general, had to overlook women in slacks during the emergency conditions of World War II. However, practicality was often not the primary thing alone to consider in women's clothes. A group of New York women insisted that "serious fashion readjustments" were needed due to the influence of war on women's fashion. They discussed that "durability and simplicity should be the outstanding qualities of a war-time wardrobe, but that femininity must not be sacrificed, even in defense workers' uniforms."⁴⁹ In December of 1941, the American Red Cross ordered its ambulance drivers to discard slacks and wear skirts.⁵⁰ A group of female plum canners in a factory in Hartford, Connecticut, protested against the company order that required all employees to wear slacks

for safety, because they did not look good in slacks.⁵¹ Women office workers at Ford Motor Company wore dresses against the company law that required all women workers to wear slacks. A secretary at Ford said that “they want to feel like ladies.”⁵² According to a survey done by *Scholastic* in October of 1942, those high school students who were against female students in pants thought the femininity was the primary thing to consider in women’s appearance. A student from Connecticut said that girls should endure the cold weather “for beauty’s sake.” Some others were against girls in pants, because girls did not look feminine in pants and, therefore, they would not receive “consideration” from men. Some of those who agreed to girls’ pants emphasized practical reasons such as enduring cold weather or saving stockings. However, for other students, how women looked in pants was important. They said “yes” to women’s pants, only for those women who looked good in them.⁵³ “How women look” was important to many students whether they were cons or pros to women’s pants. Overall, traditional femininity, often represented with skirts, was still an important character for American women.

In response to the social demand for femininity, the Bureau of Home Economics of the Department of Agriculture offered advice that “women’s work clothes should be pretty as well as practical.” A culotte was suggested for those women “who wanted work clothes to look like a dress.”⁵⁴ The Women’s Bureau also was “very careful not to make any over-all recommendations even for such fundamentals as the question whether women workers should wear trousers or skirts.”⁵⁵

During World War II, many women served as soldiers in the official military branches. The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), which was later changed to the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), was established in May 1942, and 140,000 women including the number of women served in the WAAC or the WAC during World War II. Some WAACs and WACs even served overseas. The Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) of the Navy and the women’s Coast Guard (SPARs) also started to train about 100,000 and 13,000 women each in 1942. The Marine

Corps Women's Reserve (MCWR) was established in 1943, and attracted 23,000 women. Some 1,000 women also served in the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) during the Second World War.⁵⁶ Women's military branches met the challenge of bad rumors and public criticisms. For example, the public suspected that the WACs were organized to provide sexual pleasure to male soldiers, while many others thought women in the army were mannish or mostly lesbians. To overcome this social suspicion and criticisms, women in the WACs were often depicted as asexual, modest and well educated. Moreover, the WACs women were often scrutinized in terms of sexual orientation and dates.⁵⁷ Therefore, uniform designers for the women's military had to consider the complex social conditions and needs of the time. Mainbocher tried to combine femininity and practicality in his uniform designs for WAVES which was eventually adopted by the SPARs later; the outdoor uniform consisted of a tailored jacket and a six-gore skirt, and the summer working uniform of a seersucker dress with a jacket.⁵⁸ The uniform designs had to convince the public that women in the army did not lose traditional femininity.

The emphasis on women's traditional femininity can also be found in off-duty garments. Women who wore masculine garments during the day at their work were urged to wear feminine garments off work in the evening. It was believed that feminine evening gowns would "go a long way toward bolstering up the morale of the service man on leave or the overworked business man who keeps the wheels of industry at top speed." Three major American designers, Jean Schlumberger, Lilly Daché and Valentina insisted that "men in service when on leave wanted to get away from the military influence," and it was women's "responsibility" to entertain these men with their feminine gowns in the evening.⁵⁹ A spring fashion show given in Los Angeles for retail store buyers also displayed feminine garments with "ruffles, flounces, flowers and frills." The show stylist explained that "the women have to do their part to take the attention of their menfolks away from their more serious duties."⁶⁰ An article

in February of 1943 issue in *Journal of Home Economics* directly indicates that women were “dressing to please the men this season, and no doubt about it!”⁶¹ It was women’s responsibility to entertain men, despite the fact that some of these women were tired with their all-day work in industries, offices, and voluntary jobs.

In addition, it was reported that women were eager to adopt female costume after work, being tired of their masculine work garments. A female fashion editor for *The Los Angeles Examiner* said in 1944 that the readers of her section were “more interested in the feminine type of fashions than ever before,” because women readers asked for more information on feminine dresses introduced in her section.⁶² *The Journal of Home Economics* also told that “after a girl has worn trousers all day on the assembly line, when the whistle blows she wants to hustle into something soft and feminine.”⁶³ It is possible that women would have felt tired of masculine garments in the workplaces, and wanted to adopt feminine garments off the duty. However, it is also possible that social encouragement to wear feminine garments after work must have influenced women to demand such styles.

Since many Americans still believed that traditional femininity was important for women, American society was not absolutely tolerant of women’s pants. Female students in Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn had to strike against the rule banning slacks in their school.⁶⁴ Girls in Knoxville Junior High School in Pittsburgh also protested against a ban on slacks. The school allowed girls to wear slacks “providing the fad does not create distractions.”⁶⁵ The school superintendent regarded the popularity of slacks among the students as a fad, which was a passing trend. In a local court in Nashville, Tennessee, a judge ordered women witnesses not to wear slacks in his court. A woman witness was sent home to change to a skirt.⁶⁶ In addition, a person complained in his letter to *The New York Times* that women were consuming more material by wearing pants which the person thought did not become women, especially those with big hips. He demanded that the government

“put them back in skirts where they belong,” in order to “mount the saving of material to something.”⁶⁷

A father of a 15-year-old girl also wrote to *The New York Times* that he spanked his daughter with a hairbrush for appearing in dungarees in front of his guests. He said that his daughter “has been a lovely girl ever since.”⁶⁸ Women’s pants were not free from social criticism. While the Commerce Department predicted the more widespread wearing of pants after the war, some parts of America did not want to accept women in pants as a long-term trend.

In sum, the shortage of labor required many women to take traditional male jobs in factories, farms and military services. The women’s gender role was changing due to social conditions. This, along with the necessity of conservation, influenced women to adopt masculine garments; dressing in college men’s clothes such as right-buttoned blazers, coats, shirts and other items formed a fashion trend among college women. As Ewen and Ewen explained, women needed simpler, masculine garments as their social participation increased. Therefore, their suggestion that women’s simple, masculine garments symbolized women’s increase of mobility definitely fit the case of women’s fashions during World War II.⁶⁹ However, practicality was not the whole thing to consider in women’s clothes. Traditional femininity and how women look were still important in women’s fashion for many Americans even during the war years when practicality and effectiveness should have been the primary consideration. Especially women’s off-duty garments were expected to be feminine, for the reason that women have to cheer up men on vacation from the military or who worked hard to keep American defense programs going. There also were criticism and regulations which tried to ban women from wearing pants. An abrupt change in women’s gender roles and increased adoption of trousers aroused social ambivalence about the definition of feminine images. Therefore, critics campaigned for traditional femininity in women’s fashion. Many women themselves were not ready to adopt masculine garments, especially pants. As Foote and Arnold suggested, a new definition of femininity

seemed on the way to being established, with the change in gender roles.⁷⁰

Women's traditional role as homemakers was still important to many women. The female employment rate decreased from 36 percent in 1944 to 28 percent in 1947. According to a researcher who interviewed a group of women who worked during the war and delivered babies in 1946, 76 percent of these women were eager to return home, quitting their jobs after the war. A Census Bureau survey done in 1951 also revealed that 50 percent of women war workers believed that their primary responsibilities were to take care of their homes.⁷¹ Therefore, it was without question that many women must have believed that women's clothes should be feminine. Even though femininity was still important in women's fashion during the war years and many women retreated to their homes after the war, the social demand of practicality in women's day-time clothes during the war offered women the experience of comfort and practicality in simple masculine garments, especially pants. These experiences would not be forgotten and must have contributed to paving the way to adopt more pants after the war.

Thrift and Conservation versus Extravagance

As the United States entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, Americans started to collect scraps of essential materials including rubber, paper and metal.⁷² People had to turn in empty tubes to buy new tooth paste, while many dry cleaners required customers to return metal hangers.⁷³ As previously mentioned, rubber, fuel and fabric conservation orders went into effect. The rubber conservation order was announced in December of 1942, and corset manufacturers had to use minimal rubber in the foundation garments.⁷⁴ In late April of the same year, the War Production Board reduced the amount of rubber which could be used in undergarments such as corsets, girdles, combinations, and brassieres by 50 percent to extend the undergarment production for eight to

nine months beyond existing stock.⁷⁵

According to fabric conservation order L-85 issued in April of 1942, unit pricing was restricted, sleeves such as balloon, dolman or leg-of-mutton sleeves were banned, and details including cuffs, wool pockets and flaps, wool linings, hoods, hem, belt and sash width were restricted. However, the sweep and length of skirts, dresses, coats, and jackets remained within the average measure presented before the order was issued.⁷⁶ The emphasis of the order was primarily on fabric conservation, but also on maintaining the present mode of fashion in order to avoid great changes of wardrobes.⁷⁷ In addition, Mrs. Roosevelt encouraged Americans to “use their ingenuity” to maintain fashionableness.⁷⁸ Designers and manufacturers promised to cooperate with the War Production Board to exhibit creativity to provide Americans with fashionable garments which would “make contribution to maintaining the morale of the American people.”⁷⁹ The fabric conservation order on women’s fashion created a so-called “duration silhouette” which was praised to be “sleek, slim, functional and expressive of active American womanhood.”⁸⁰ Designers such as Norman Norell, Nettie Rosenstein, Jo Copeland, Adele Simpson, Claire McCardell, Mollie Parnis, and Hannah Troy presented garments which saved more fabric than L-85 demanded. Dirndl skirts changed to have trouser-pleats; peg-tops and barrel-shaped skirts were replaced by sheath skirts; sleeves were even shorter, and street-sweeping evening gowns almost disappeared in their designs.⁸¹ As the fabric shortage intensified, fabric limitation order L-85 was amended in 1943, and the fabric yardage permitted to each clothing item was tightened in general to maintain the adequate clothing supply. More specific restrictions were imposed on details such as collars, ruffles, revers, pockets, and flaps. Even maternity and children’s wear were regulated. The outcome of this revision was the “pencil slim silhouette” which was slimmer and simpler than the previous one.⁸²

In addition to the government restrictions on fabric usage, women were urged to remodel or

mend their clothes. As previously mentioned, a stenographer at the Colorado statehouse made a suit out of her boy friend's sport suit, and she influenced her companion at work to turn her husband's pants into hers. This story was reported in *The New York Times* to encourage other women to do home sewing.⁸³ *The New York Times* also announced a beginning of a sewing class sponsored by Bloomingdale's.⁸⁴ *Recreation* magazine introduced a few ways to make accessories such as belts, pins, buttons, and lapel ornaments and to mend old dresses with scraps from the ragbag.⁸⁵ A fashion show sponsored by the War Savings Staff and the Traphagen School of Fashion featured chic remodeled clothes made from old clothes, tablecloth, curtains, upholstery, and bedspreads.⁸⁶ A clothing specialist in the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics presented a few practical clothes designs and ways to make these clothes at home.⁸⁷ American Women's Voluntary Services sponsored a fashion show called "Remake Clothes Revue" in May of 1944, and received praise from Mrs. Roosevelt and New York City Mayor La Guardia.⁸⁸ In October, American Women's Voluntary Services also sponsored a contest which awarded recognition to 14 stores for best window display on clothes conservation. The three main categories of the contest were "best windows promoting remade clothes, best windows promoting sew, serve and save, including war bonds, best patriotic appeal window including clothing conservation theme." The prizes were given in war bonds.⁸⁹ In addition, leftover yarns, old sweaters and cotton stockings were reknitted to produce new garments, bobby sox, house slippers, and accessories.⁹⁰

It was not only important to conserve fabric by remodeling or mending the old clothes, but also by selecting durable pieces in the first place. Therefore, when women were shopping, it was also emphasized to buy a style of clothes that would last longer.⁹¹ However, by the mid-1944, clothing quality was very poor due to the restricted material and the labor shortage caused by the migration of labor from the low waged textile and apparel industry to the higher waged war industries. For this

reason, clothing experts urged women to remodel clothes that were two to three years old for better quality results.⁹²

As the whole country made efforts to conserve fabrics, companies which violated L-85 seem to have been rare. Only one case of violation was reported in *The New York Times* in 1943. An apparel firm named Angeles Apparel Company of Los Angeles made 2000 pieces of women's lounging robes violating the sweep limitation. The company was not permitted to sell the pieces until they were amended to meet the regulation, and was not allowed to produce any lounging wear for the next three months.⁹³ No other report on the violation of government conservation order was found in *The New York Times* until May 1945, when the War Production Board found many advertisements displaying garment designs, such as dolman-sleeved clothes, which were restricted in L-85.⁹⁴

To prevent soaring prices due to the expected material shortage as the war went on, the U.S. government also issued price control through the Office of Price Administration. However, when the war was heading toward its end in May of 1945, 13 Manhattan women's clothes manufacturers were found to violate the price limitation order. They were charged of \$66,337 by the Office of Price Administration for the violation.⁹⁵ The government demanded strict obedience to the restricting orders until the war's end.

While most of the manufacturers were willing to follow the government orders for conservation and price control, people were spending money more than ever on shopping. With the start of World War II, more jobs were created in the defense industry, and the total employment rate began to increase. Therefore, the disposable income increased from \$92 billion in 1941 to \$151 billion in 1945. The greatest increase in disposable income took place between 1941 and 1942. Personal income increased throughout the war years due to the increase of average working hours and not primarily due to the increase of wages, since wages were limited to 15 percent increase over the January

1, 1941 level to prevent inflation. With the increase of income, consumption expenditures also rose between 1940 and 1945.⁹⁶ Therefore, the War Production Board announced in 1943 that the previous year was “proved to be the largest purchasing year in the country’s history.” The War Production Board found the reason for the increased consumption in insufficient conservation campaigns.⁹⁷ In addition, more people were buying high-priced garments and shoes, searching for better quality goods during the war years, and, accordingly, fewer manufacturers turned out lower-priced products. The War Production Board and the Office of Price Administration recognized the presence of the low-income group and encouraged manufacturers to produce inexpensive goods.⁹⁸ Manufacturers, in general, seemed to have promoted more spending by providing consumers with higher-priced level goods, while they were superficially obeying the government regulations in terms of fabric usage and price control.

Conservation and thrift was emphasized out of necessity during World War II in the United States. The government encouraged fabric conservation by imposing regulations on the fabric usage in women’s fashion. In addition, women were urged to look for quality rather than quantity in shopping, and remodeling and mending were encouraged. Many designers helped to save more fabric voluntarily, and most manufacturers obeyed the fabric and price limitation orders with a few exceptions. However, Americans were spending more money than ever on purchasing goods during the war years. Some reasons for more spending could be found in disappearance of low-priced products and poor quality in garments, which encouraged consumers to look for better quality ones in the higher-price level, while it can be inferred that Americans must have inclined to spend more money with the increase of income.

Overall, women’s shorter and narrower style of fashion rarely provoked public controversy during World War II. Women had narrow choice of styles, due to the government restrictions imposed on clothes styles. The patriotic mood of the time appears to have influenced the rarity of controversies

about the abbreviation in women's dresses. Moreover, clothing styles were not very different from the ones before L-85 was issued. Since the controversies on exposure of calves, necks and arms almost disappeared in the primary sources in the second half of the 1920s, it can be inferred that American society became familiar with women exposing these parts of the body in the 1940s. On the other hand, numerous controversies about women's trousers were found during the period. Traditional feminine images were still important for many Americans, despite the demand of functionality in garments during the war. Women's role in the society changed due to the war, but people were not ready to accept women's new roles. In addition, many Americans were willing to conserve fabrics by mending, remodeling and making accessories from scraps during the period. The durable quality of clothes was also emphasized. However, the quality of lower-priced products was poor, and manufacturers were reluctant to produce clothes in lower price levels. For this reason, Americans had to spend more money on clothes to obtain better quality products.

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Figure 10. Coveralls from *Bazaar* November 1943, p. 85

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

I discussed the controversial issues about American women's fashion in relation to women's lives between 1920 and 1945. In interpreting the changing meanings of fashion from the controversies during the period, fashion theories discussed by Blumer, Sproles, Davis, and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton were most useful. The research results will be summarized and integrated in light of the fashion theories proposed by these scholars.

The 1920s

Women in the 1920s had different life styles from women in the past. The number of working women increased, and more women gained economic power in the 1920s. While the number of women in domestic services decreased, the number of women in offices, industry, public schools and service trades were greater in the 1920s than in earlier American history.¹ The number of female students graduating from high schools and colleges rapidly increased since the late nineteenth century, and these women were more likely to enter female dominant professions such as nursing and teaching after graduation.² Most of these working women in the 1920s were single, and usually left their jobs after marriage. However, the number of married women, especially middle-class married women, in the work force increased throughout the decade. According to some scholars, these women used birth control information to have fewer children, and could complete their house work faster due to the mass production of electric house keeping appliances.³ Moreover, the nineteenth amendment endowed women with the right to vote. Women gained formal political power in 1920. Women continued to make efforts to gain political justice after winning suffrage, even though their main interests were

somewhat divided.

In addition, many women had different attitudes in the 1920s. Many women, especially young women, in the 1920s were very frank about their feelings and ideas. These women would not become slaves of social convention and challenged existing societal standards by drinking, smoking, engaging petting with men, and actively participating in sports. With the influence of Sigmund Freud, many young men and women talked openly about sex, and they believed it was natural to express sexual desires. The increased production of closed cars provided young men and women more privacy to enjoy a sexual relationship.⁴

In addition to the change in many women's social-economic status, attitude and life style, there also were revolutionary changes in women's fashions in the 1920s. Women wore simple, loose, tubular dresses which exposed their calves. There also were dress designs which exposed women's arms, necks and upper breasts. By the late 1920s, some women even went around barefoot during the summer. Women's body exposing, abbreviated fashion caused social criticism. Moreover, the public tried to impose regulations on women's body exposing fashion through authorized institutions such as local and state governments, working places, churches, schools, law courts, and jails. According to Nystrom, many people "become accustomed to the conditions under which they live, the implements that they use, the procedure of getting along with other people, and change makes readjustment necessary, increases embarrassment and causes additional labor and thought." Therefore, "most people dread changes." He went on to explain that customs were supported by "the formal institutions of society" including religion, government and law, while education "works both against and in favor of custom." The emphasis in schools on scientific solutions to overall problems trained the young to challenge custom. However, the established curriculum, relationship among teachers and students, fixed types of sports, and many other things were "dominated by custom."⁵ Interestingly, resistance

found in the primary sources was mostly from people in formal institutions. No doubt that the importance of customs in these institutions parallels the resistance against the body exposure in women's fashion.

Generally, regulations and criticisms from these social institutions were legitimized by emphasizing the fact that women were following the fashion tyranny, concentrating on their outer looks and neglecting the importance of spiritual things in their lives. In addition, women's body exposure had to be restricted, because it was assumed to arouse men's sexual desire which was believed to be impossible to control by men themselves. Therefore, women who exposed their bodies were regarded as sexually promiscuous, and deserved to be criticized and regulated. The irony was that women's sexuality was commercially exploited, while the society was trying to impose regulations on women's body exposure. The first annual Miss America Pageant, which included a bathing suit contest, begun in 1921, was promoted by a hotel businessman for his profit, and women's bodies were objectified in advertisements as elongated, dramatized and sexualized.⁶

However, women would not give up hygienic merits and comfort. Women protested against lengthened skirts in 1922, 1923, 1928 and 1929, and protested against the regulations imposed on their dress. In return, society began to recognize the change in American womanhood, and could not fully justify their reasons for regulating or criticizing women's fashion. Moreover, according to Nystrom, Americans were aware of "the democratic ideal of equality or at least of equality of opportunity taught in schools, by the press, and from the pulpit and platform," and the individual rights to select their own wardrobe could not be ignored.⁷ Therefore, bare-legged women could not be regulated in the presence of sockless men in Kansas,⁸ and Cardinal Hayes was hesitant to approve of any formal restrictions on women's fashion which he believed was "such a personal matter."⁹ In addition, women teachers protested against regulations imposed on their dress¹⁰, and a female principal who powdered her nose

and wore up-to-date dress was approved by the parents and did not have to resign in California.¹¹

Flappers in Somerset, Pennsylvania could protest against the Parent Teachers Association's decision to regulate abbreviated attire, emphasizing themselves as "free-born Americans,"¹² which connoted their rights of expressing personal taste in fashion as citizens with women's access to suffrage. A lady who was arrested at the Zion City train station was brave enough to tell the police: "When you pay for my clothes you can tell me what to wear."¹³ These examples are clear evidence of women's challenge to the social convention regarding body exposure and abbreviation in women's fashion, along with the fact that women in general continued to wear the popular style of the time.

American society in the 1920s was going through rapid urbanization and technological development along with the change in women's life style and attitudes. According to Marchand, the rapid social change during the period created "deep anxiety about social disorder" such as the corruption of traditional moral standards and patriarchal family life.¹⁴ The social resistance against women's body exposure can be understood as one of the phenomena which resulted from the societal fear of change and disorder. As Ewen and Ewen suggested, women's body exposure represented changes in women's life styles and their challenge to social conventions.¹⁵ They feared women's body exposure as a symptom of changing definition of womanhood, which might cause social change and disorder.

While there were many resisters against the body exposure in women's fashion, there also were people who defended the style. The healthiness and practicality in women's new fashion was one of the primary reasons for the defenders of the new mode to encourage women to continue wearing the new style of fashion. Some defenders recognized the change in women's attitude and thought reflected in women's clothing choices. One of the defenders pointed out that the public fear of moral decline in women's fashion during the period was a means to maintain the patriarchal society. However, some others regarded the new style of clothing as a fad, while others recognized the possibility of the change in

societal expectation of women's proper way of dressing. Many defenders believed that women's fashion during the period was just a change in manners and not a decline in morality.

As many women's life styles and attitudes changed, they must have felt what Davis called "collective identity ambivalence."¹⁶ In relation to Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton's symbolic interactionist theory of fashion, women's body exposing fashions of the time could be understood as a representation of women's identity ambivalence. The coexistence of resisters and defenders of the style suggests that the ambiguous meanings of the style were going through a process of social negotiation.¹⁷ Therefore, establishment of a new dress code was on the way with the change in social conventions about women's body exposure. As some of the defenders insisted, society would no longer assign negative meanings to women's body exposure in fashion as they become accustomed to it. This idea also aligns with Sproles's discussion on aesthetic perspectives of fashion adoption, and Lind and Roach-Higgins's findings. According to Sproles, a new fashion trend – which can be the styles exposing more of women's bodies - is formed as the perceivers become familiar with a new mode as they are exposed to it repeatedly.¹⁸ Lind and Roach-Higgins also found that liberal social-political attitude assigned to certain styles of fashion somewhat lost its meanings in liberal universities where many students adopted the style without being affiliated with liberal social-political attitudes.¹⁹ In a similar way, women's body exposing fashion would not convey the meanings of immodesty as more people adopted the style of fashion as time went on. However, people do not adopt a new mode just because they become used to it. As Blumer suggested, the new style has to meet "the developing taste" of the time.²⁰ The increase in women's social participation, and many women's frankness and challenge to social conventions would have formed a collective taste which enforced women to adopt body exposing styles of fashion against the social taboo.

The change in American womanhood also seemed to have influenced women's adoption of

the “boyish” style of dress, and some women’s adoption of knickerbockers, in the 1920s. Women’s tubular dresses, which de-emphasized women’s traditional body curves, required skinny women with flat breasts as the stereotype of fashionable women. Many women cut their hair short and wore small cloches. Fass found meanings of liberty and sexual allure in short hair styles of the time.²¹ This immature image with the short skirts made women look active. The traditional passive feminine image was challenged in the mainstream fashion during the period. Ewen and Ewen recognized women’s increased mobility reflected in women’s simple boyish fashion in the 1920s.²² John Simon also regarded the boyish look of the period as a reflection of women’s increased freedom in the public sphere and their desire for sexual equality.²³ These scholars recognized the change in womanhood which must have set “the developing new taste” during the period.²⁴ Therefore, when the mature styles with emphases on women’s contours came back to women’s fashion in the late 1920s, many women opposed the style for its symbolic meaning of women’s social restrictions and passiveness.²⁵

However, physical attractiveness and marriage were still important to many American women during the period. Women had to attain fashionable slim figures through diet, exercise, and body controlling undergarments. Cosmetics and facial exercises were advertised for those who felt the strain to look younger, with the popularity of immature look. The youthful look became a new ideal of femininity. Therefore, Doan insisted that the boyish fashion of the time was just an imitation of masculinity rather than a challenge to traditional femininity, since women’s priority was to be attractive in the boyish fashion.²⁶ In addition, Arnold found symbolic ambiguity in the boyish style of fashion of the time. She suggested that the immature boyish silhouette represented the burgeoning change in womanhood toward “dynamic femininity” from traditional femininity.²⁷ Therefore, the boyish fashion not only met the changing taste of the time which experienced the change in womanhood, but also implied women’s ambivalence about their social status and gender roles.²⁸

In addition, there were efforts to promote knickerbockers in the 1920s. Some women wore knickerbockers on the streets and in offices, while most women who adopted knickerbockers wore them as leisure wear or sports wear. The public criticized and tried to restrict women in knickerbockers. It could be presumed from the primary sources that many people felt threats from knickerbockers' connotation of change in gender relations which formerly sustained the preexisting social order.²⁹ Since trousers had been adopted by many feminists in the past, knickerbockers also reminded people of feminism and women's challenge to male authority.³⁰ Moreover, some feared women's acquisition of male traits such as corruptibility and aggressiveness and the loss of purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.³¹ These all point to Marchand's suggestion of "deep anxiety about social disorder" such as the corruption of traditional moral standards and patriarchal family life, in the era of changing womanhood and rapid urbanization and industrialization within the society.³² Therefore, the public demanded women to keep traditional femininity. However, the social expectation regarding feminine images was slowly changing with women adopting more formerly masculine garments in the later period. As scholars including Foote and Ewen and Ewen suggested, the change in feminine images with women's adoption of trousers can partly be understood as a byproduct of change in women's life style, attitude and gender roles,³³ which also can be justified by Blumer's collective selection theory in terms of "developing tastes."³⁴ In other words, the change in women's life style, attitude and gender roles must have set the taste among some women to adopt knickerbockers. The controversies about women's knickerbockers also reflected the existence of ambivalence and social negotiation of meanings in femininity in the era of changing womanhood.³⁵

American society had a tradition of frugality which was influenced by the urban bourgeois protestant ethic. However, more women could buy fancy clothes such as silk dresses and hosiery in the 1920s, due to economic prosperity and women's increased economic power. As King suggested in his

mass-market theory of fashion adoption, industrial development also made a variety of garments available in each price level in the apparel market.³⁶ Veblen discussed at the end of the nineteenth century that the leisure class tried to display their social and economic success through expensive, elaborate, and up-to-date fashion.³⁷ In this research, there was no evidence of women displaying their husbands' social-economic status, as Veblen insisted. However, as more women gained economic power and were away from their homes to work in the cities, these women were less likely to display the social-economic status of their families. In addition, rapid modernization and booming economic development of American society in the early twentieth century enabled women in social classes other than the leisure class to also pursue extravagance in fashion during the 1920s. Many American women enjoyed selecting their wardrobes from the ample amount of apparel produced in factories in the 1920s. American women had pride in being the best-clothed women in the world. Many American women wanted to look as attractive as possible in fancy and quality garments in the 1920s. There were voices in the public which emphasized the importance of economic modesty in women's fashion against many women's interests in the material environment. However, many women continued to wear fancy clothes while the American economy prospered, challenging the old convention of thrift and conservation. The decline of keeping the tradition of frugality somewhat paralleled the secularization of American society. Consumption and extravagance were even welcomed during the Depression in order to bring back economic prosperity.

Overall, those who criticized women's fashion for body exposure and challenging traditional feminine images during the period, mainly found the bases of women's challenge to social conventions in consumerism, the increased independence of the young and the increase in women's political power. Marchand suggested the characteristics of modern society not only as "urban" but also as "youthfulness, mobility, optimism, and tolerance for diversity and speed of change."³⁸ The rapid change of styles and

strategic promotion of sales, the change in urban middle-class family structure, and women's suffrage definitely parallels Marchand's characteristics of modern society in the 1920s. Therefore, it is clear that people who criticized women's fashion during the period did not wholly favor the modernization of American society. They feared the disruption of the existing social structures which the modernization would bring with women's challenge to social conventions. As Nystrom suggested, these people must have found comfort in the preexisting social system³⁹ which emphasized traditional gender roles and women's physical and mental modesty. However, women continued to challenge the social convention as their life styles, attitudes and gender roles changed over the time.

The 1930s

With increased unemployment during the Depression, the government tried to create employment through constructing or improving recreational services such as camps, picnic grounds, trails, and swimming pools. Amusement parks provided similar facilities to attract the mass of unemployed people for the payment of a low admission fee.⁴⁰ In addition, with more recreation facilities available during the period, leisure wear such as halters, shorts, and abbreviated bathing suits caught public attention on the East Coast, while women's mainstream fashion of lengthened skirts and emphasis on women's contours received almost no criticism.

Public criticism of bathing suits formed a theme from the primary sources, as women's bathing suits grew more close-fitted to the body and more body exposing, with wider armholes and low-cut backs. However, it could be observed that bare-legs and short socks were no longer criticized in the 1930s. Restrictions on women's abbreviated bathing suits almost disappeared from primary sources by the late 1930s. As Sproles suggested from an aesthetic perspective, people might have become familiar with the styles of bathing suits which displayed more of women's bodies, as they were repeatedly

exposed to the styles.⁴¹ Body exposure in abbreviated bathing suits no longer implied the meaning of immodesty as time went on.

Another theme to be recognized regarding body exposure in women's fashion was halters and shorts. Halters and shorts seem to have been popular among some women on beaches and in mountains. Halters and shorts, not to mention bathing suits, were banned on streets, especially on the East Coast. However, some on the East Coast began to acknowledge the freedom in clothing selection with the change in social convention, and halters and shorts were permitted on the streets in these areas. The ordinances banning bathing suits, shorts, and halters in the public places outside the beach implied that more women grew daring in exposing more of their bodies in public places on the East Coast. This also reflected the trend toward "more flexibilities in social customs" and less occasion-specific clothing behavior during the period. Payne, Winakor and Farrell-Beck pointed out the influence of sportswear in trends toward less occasion-specific clothing with the increase of "leisure time and mobility" in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴² In line with Davis and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton,⁴³ the controversies about women's body exposure in bathing suits, halters, and shorts demonstrated the existence of ambivalence about the proper amount of body exposure to be allowed on different occasions, and the social negotiation process of establishing a new dress code. The gradual disappearance of discussions and reports on restricting bathing suits, shorts and halters by the late 1930s represented the change in societal expectations about body exposure, as society became accustomed to more exposure of bodies in women's fashion.⁴⁴ The ambivalence was resolved in favor of more exposure.

The United States went through economic hardship in the 1930s, due to the economic depression. Many people lost their jobs during this period. However, women lost comparatively fewer jobs than men, mainly due to the segregation of labor force. Consequently, the proportion of

women in the labor force increased slightly between 1930 and 1940. Among women workers, the proportion of married women also increased from 28.8 percent to 35 percent between 1930 and 1940. Many women held traditional women's jobs such as domestic service, primary education, clerical and social service jobs. These jobs were less affected by the economic depression.⁴⁵ In addition, many women worked for the government in the New Deal. These women formed a network centering around Mrs. Roosevelt to bring out their concerns in social welfare, education, and health.⁴⁶ However, working women, especially married women, were criticized for stealing jobs from men who were believed to be the primary breadwinners in American society during the period. Single women were also against married women workers. Even the government issued the Economy Act in 1932 declaring that both spouses could not work for the government. Since men were regarded as the primary breadwinners, this order can be interpreted as a government intention to reduce the number of married women in the government.⁴⁷ Therefore, women's traditional gender role as housekeepers and caretakers was emphasized.

Tension between femininity and masculinity was found in women's fashions in the 1930s. As women's contours were somewhat emphasized in their fashions, "foundation garments" – which were also referred to as corsets - were adopted by many women. These foundation garments were usually made from elastic material such as Lastex, and women could even zip themselves up in them. Advertisers assured consumers that these foundation garments provided women with support and comfort. The active promotion of foundation garments appears to have influenced women to adopt the garment with its increased comfort in elastic material. However, the public would not have accepted the foundation garment along with the mainstream fashion which emphasized women's contours, if it did not meet the taste of the time. The paralleling phenomena between women's contours controlled by foundation garments and the social atmosphere which emphasized women's traditional gender roles

and images can be understood in light of Blumer's collective selection theory.⁴⁸ The social atmosphere seems to have partially influenced the collective tastes of the time for women to adopt the style of fashion that demanded the control of their bodies by foundation garments.

Other controversies were found in women's masculine garments. Broad shoulders could be observed in women's fashion in the 1930s. However, broad shoulders contrasted with small waists and slim hips, and became part of a new ideal femininity of the time.⁴⁹ In the 1930s, some women also began to wear trousers on the streets as well as in resort areas. Pants such as slacks, pajamas and shorts replaced the knickerbockers of the 1920s. Film stars including Katherine Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich influenced the public in adoption of trousers. These women looked sexually alluring in mannish attire, because tight fitting jackets revealed body curves, and mannish clothes contrasted with "feminine hairdos and makeup."⁵⁰

However, the public and women in general were not ready to accept women's trousers, especially on streets. The public resisted women's trousers, and emphasized femininity even in trousers for leisure. As more women were working due to their husbands or fathers' unemployment, many unemployed men lost their authority as head of families. These men were threatened by women in trousers who seemed to them to be challenging male authority. Women's trousers were criticized for challenging the existing social convention that required women to be women and men to be men. Historically, women in trousers had been ridiculed and attacked within American society since the introduction of bloomers, as was discussed previously. People might have feared the change of relationship between men and women, and ultimately the disruption of social order implied in women's trousers, and criticized women in trousers for being "over assertive and unfeminine."⁵¹ However, it seems that women in trousers were no longer atypical in resort areas by the end of the 1930s.

Even though women's adoption of trousers was confined to certain occasions, scholars

discussed the change in gender roles and definition of femininity implied in women's trousers as discussed above.⁵² This perspective can be justified by Blumer's collective selection theory with its concept of "developing tastes." According to Blumer's theory, the change in women's gender roles and social-economic status seems to have influenced some women to challenge social conventions and to adopt trousers during the period. The potential fashionableness of trousers attracted film stars to wear them, even though their traditional femininity was emphasized in trousers.⁵³ In addition, in line with Davis and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton again, the controversies about women's trousers represented the existence of ambivalence about gender-specific dress codes, and the social negotiation of what it means to be feminine.⁵⁴

During the Depression, the tradition of frugality was less important than creating more consumption in the efforts to bring back economic prosperity. Therefore, the change in styles of women's fashion, which started in the late 1920s, met conflicting opinions on whether it would create more consumption or not. Some expected that the change in women's fashion with the lengthened skirts would create more demand in apparel and textiles, while others believed that the change would create seasonal depression in the apparel market. In both cases, the center of the discussion was to create more consumption. Therefore, extravagant clothing items such as fur coats were even welcomed by Americans between 1935 and 1936, for they represented improved economic conditions. However, there still were a few voices that condemned extravagance in women's fashion. They criticized women's open sexual allurements in lavish attire, despite the social emphasis on women's appearances.⁵⁵ In line with Arnold's view, women's open sexual allurements meant their improved social-economic status within the society during the period.⁵⁶ However, thrift and conservation were necessary to many women during the Depression, especially during the "New Depression," between 1937 and 1938.

The 1940s

As World War II began in 1939, many Americans opposed the U.S. government's involvement in the war in Europe. However, many Americans wanted to help the Allies to win the war, and the government provided essential products to the Allies. Therefore, ways to conserve essential materials, including fabric, were emphasized, even before Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. After the United States entered the war, the government issued L-85 regulations to impose restrictions on fabric usage on women's wear. The L-85 regulations indicated maximum skirt length and sweep. As a result, women's fashions during the period were slim and short – most daytime skirts were just below the knee. However, the slim, short fashions of the period did not draw much moral criticism, because most of the skirts had lengths that were already being worn before the restrictions were announced. According to Sproles's aesthetic perspectives in fashion adoption, Americans appear to have become accustomed to knee-length skirts as they had been repeatedly exposed to that length.⁵⁷ In addition, the patriotic social atmosphere of the time regarded abbreviated garments such as V-necks and short skirts – if they were not extreme – as patriotic, because they were understood as attempts to conserve fabric. However, body exposing summer garments such as halters, shorts, and bare-midribs were still not acceptable as street wear in metropolitan New York City and small-town Monahans, Texas, while they were acceptable in resort areas and in some other cities, including Cleveland. Fabric conservation was very important during World War II in the United States. However, it seems that fabric conservation and wearing such abbreviated summer garments had little correlation during the period. Some communities were more conservative about the dress code, despite the fact that a less occasion-specific dress code was on the way to being established during the period. While some brief garments worn during the summer were not fully acceptable in American society, it is clear that women's leg exposure in public places was no longer a sensation by the 1940s.

When the nation started to mobilize for the defense program in 1940, more women worked in the defense industries. Of the two million women in the defense industry, more than half worked in the aircraft and shipbuilding industries. The government and business promoted a stylish image of women represented as Rosie the Riveter to attract women to compensate for the manpower shortage during the war. Rosie the Riveter was often featured in smart working pants, to promote working pants for women's safety and effectiveness in workplaces. In addition to slacks in workplaces, many women had to adopt slacks due to rubber and fuel shortage, in order to keep themselves warm in cold weather. By 1942, national trouser sales had increased five-fold compared with the previous year.⁵⁸ Due to the social needs of practicality during the war years, even a fashion trend to adopt masculine garments was formed. College women shopped in college men's stores, and women continued to add details inspired from men's garments. As Ewen and Ewem explained, women needed simpler, masculine garments as their social participation increased. Therefore, their suggestion that women's simple, masculine garments symbolized women's increase of mobility definitely fit the case of women's fashions during World War II.⁵⁹

However, American society was not fully ready to accept masculine garments for women, even under the emergency situation. There were criticisms and regulations on women's slacks during the period. Even women themselves demanded feminine garments such as skirts and dresses. Femininity was even demanded in women's working pants. High school students' opinions introduced in *Scholastic* in the fall of 1942 revealed that most students were concerned with how women looked in pants.⁶⁰ In addition, American society emphasized femininity in women's off-duty garments, in order to boost the morale of men in the military and business. Traditional femininity was still important in American society. Therefore, many women returned home, leaving their work, while some others were forced to stop working after the war ended. Abrupt changes in women's gender roles must have

created ambivalence about the definition of feminine image during the period. Again, the controversies about women's trousers reflect the existence of ambivalence and social negotiation of meanings of femininity.⁶¹ Even though many women adopted pants out of necessity during the war and femininity was still important to women's fashion, women's experience of comfort and practicality in masculine garments during the war years must have contributed to more women's adoption of pants in later years. Celebrities, including Madame Chiang and Ingrid Bergman, who adopted trousers represented the potential fashionableness of trousers in later years. Traditional feminine image was to be replaced with more active femininity, as women crossed the gender line to adopt masculine garments, as their social-economic status and gender roles changed.

Thrift and conservation was especially emphasized during World War II. Fabric conservation order L-85 and its revision in 1943 resulted in the slim and short silhouette with restricted details. In addition to fabric conservation, shopping for quality goods, remodeling and mending were encouraged. Much information on remodeling and mending was available, while there were contests and fashion shows which introduced remodeled garments. Many designers voluntarily helped to save more fabric, and most of manufacturers seem to have obeyed the fabric conservation order issued by the government. However, American women were purchasing more products than ever throughout the war years with their increased income. This may partly be due to the disappearance of low-priced goods and the decline in the quality of garments which induced women to shop for better quality garments in the higher-price levels. The social situation demanded thrift and conservation out of necessity during World War II. Extravagance in women's fashion was restricted. However, many American women were ready to spend more on clothes with economic prosperity after the war.

Conclusion

Overall, the published accounts of controversies about American women's fashion between 1920 and 1945 displayed the change in meanings of fashions during the period. The severe attacks on women's mainstream fashion of the 1920s were mostly contained in the first half of the 1920s. Even though the skirts were longer and women's body contours were emphasized in mainstream fashion in the late 1920s, women exposed more of their bodies by adopting leisure clothes such as more abbreviated bathing suits, shorts and halters on the East Coast. Such body revealing leisure clothes received less criticism and restrictions as time went on. In addition, the length of women's dresses grew shorter in the second half of the 1930s, and reached below the knee around 1940. Due to government restrictions on fabric usage and styles, the length of women's dresses stayed around the knee throughout World War II. Women's revealed legs were rarely subjected to public criticism during the war. In line with Sproles, the rarity of controversies on the skirt length since the late 1930s suggested that American society appears to have become used to women's leg exposure by that time.⁶² As Lind and Roach-Higgins concluded, a certain style loses its symbolic meanings as the style becomes prominent.⁶³ Women's body exposure lost its meanings as challenge to the social convention with more women adopting body exposing clothes during the period. As some scholars suggested, women's adoption of short skirts and body exposure implied the increase of women's mobility and improved social-economic status of women. The change in womanhood and women's gender roles aligned with Blumer's "developing tastes" that served women to adopt the styles which challenged the traditional standard of modesty in body exposure.⁶⁴

The definition of femininity also changed over a period of time. In the 1920s, the boyish style of fashion became an ideal feminine image, while broad shoulders served as a part of femininity with the significance of women's contours in the 1930s. The liberal attitudes and life styles of women

in the 1920s and social hostility toward working women in the 1930s do seem to be related to the ideal feminine images during these decades. As Blumer discussed in his collective selection theory, the ideal feminine images of the time were adopted by many women, since they met the emerging taste of the time.⁶⁵ In addition, women's increased social participation and economic power over this period, which appear to have influenced the tastes of the time, seem to be represented in some women's attempt to adopt bifurcated garments, including knickerbockers, trouser suits, and pajamas in the 1920s and the 1930s. Scholars discussed the relationship between changing gender roles and women's adoption of masculine garments during the period. However, it was not until the United States entered World War II that many women adopted trousers because of a prominent change in their work roles. Despite the necessity of practicality during the war, women in trousers received many criticisms, and femininity was even emphasized. Masculine garments were gradually integrated to the feminine image, as women's gender roles changed.

In addition, American women enjoyed purchasing an ample amount of quality garments during the era of economic prosperity in the 1920s, despite some social criticisms on extravagance and emphases on the tradition of frugality. However, increase of consumption became a main interest of many Americans during the Depression, while conservation became a necessity to some women during the period and to most American women during World War II. Veblen's ideas of conspicuous consumption of the leisure class no longer provided an understanding of clothing behavior of women between 1920 and 1945. The ample amount of garments in up-to-date fashion were available to women in different social-classes. Moreover, there was no evidence found in the primary sources that women were mainly representing the social-economic status of their families.

The accounts of controversies in *The New York Times* and magazines during the period do not provide clear insights into the psychological reasons for each woman to adopt certain styles of fashions.

Therefore, it is impossible to identify whether individual women had certain identity ambivalence in the process of adopting new styles of fashion as Davis, and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton insisted.

However, the change in women's life styles, attitudes and gender roles demonstrated that women and the public during the period certainly felt ambivalences about the issues on which the controversies centered, especially the issues related to body exposure and femininity versus masculinity. Therefore, the controversies about these issues suggested that a new dress code was on the way to being established through social negotiations of meanings in women's fashion, as Davis and Kaiser, Nagasawa and Hutton suggested.

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