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THE BUSINESS OF FASHION:  
FASHION GROUP INTERNATIONAL, 1928-1997

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

of

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Larissa Knopp

Date Submitted: 4/20/2020

Date Approved: 4/21/2020



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Lara Vapnek

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## ABSTRACT

### THE BUSINESS OF FASHION: FASHION GROUP INTERNATIONAL, 1928-1997

Larissa Knopp

In 1931 a group of women formed an organization that would serve as a clearing house for American fashion and as a support group for women professionals in the fashion industry. Members included Dorothy Shaver, Edith Head, and Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as other well-known professionals. Fashion Group soon grew into an international organization that helped launch careers in every area of the industry. Fashion Group International helped women create space for themselves in the upper echelons of the fashion world.

Through a careful examination of archival documents, including letters, meeting minutes, newsletters, and speeches, this thesis shows how Fashion Group International helped women achieve professional success in the fashion industry. This dissertation looks at the women who held positions of power in the fashion industry after 1930 and it traces how they helped other women achieve similar positions. Furthermore, it shows how Fashion Group International helped guide the American fashion industry for six decades, as it transformed from a local to a global business.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Lara Vapnek for her patience and support during this process. She was always willing to read drafts of chapters and guided me through each stage of writing. I would also like to thank Dolores Augustine and Tracey-Anne Cooper for sitting on my committee and providing excellent feedback. Special thanks to the archivists and librarians at the New York Public Library who assisted me in my research.

Thanks should also go to my friends and family for their patience and belief in my abilities. Specifically I would like to thank my parents, Bill and Lori Knopp, for their unfailing support throughout the entirety of my graduate studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Everybody else seemed to think we had to follow Paris and that our own designers were nothing but helpless copyists,” Dorothy Shaver told the guests of the Fashion Futures show hosted by Fashion Group in 1934. Shaver, who worked for Lord & Taylor, was one of the founding members of Fashion Group and believed that American designs could be the same quality as Parisian and that women had a place in the top positions of the fashion industry.<sup>1</sup> Paris had been the undisputed fashion capital of the western world since the seventeenth century, but a group of women in New York wanted to challenge that claim. This dissertation shows how members of Fashion Group helped professionalize the fashion industry in the United States through education and the promotion of American design and helped professional women advance in the field and find positions of power in the rapidly changing industry.

### **Statement of Research Question**

This dissertation will explore the contributions of Fashion Group to the fashion industry. Though the Fashion Group International is mentioned in various books and articles there has not been a significant piece of work that examines how Fashion Group influenced the industry. It is not clear the extent in which Fashion Group helped pave the way for middle class women to join the work force of the fashion industry at the managerial and executive levels and the types of support Fashion Group provided to help the women become professionals in the field, but the research presented here will show that the organization helped women advance in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Smith, “More About ‘Fashion Futures’ Show,” [ca. 1934], Series 3, Box 7, Folder 34, Dorothy Shaver Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C.



With a better understanding of how Fashion Group shaped women's experience in the fashion industry, we could better understand the networks of middle class women and gain a more thorough knowledge of women's contribution to fashion business through the creation of positions and the rise of women through traditionally male avenues. Also, this dissertation will help explain the rise of American fashion in a global setting by examining the organization's work to promote American designs, New York and other American cities as fashion capitals, and the international connections that members fostered.

Fashion Group helped advance middle and upper class women in every field within the fashion industry and allowed for more women to hold professional positions. Members had more mobility in their careers due to the support found in Fashion Group through network development, education, and mentorship. Fashion Group also helped professionalize the field of fashion and brought it to international attention through the creation of professional degrees and hosted events with leaders of every industry.

### **Historiography**

This dissertation will address a gap in fashion and business history. Fashion Group International has not been written about at length and the contributions the organization made to helping professional women find the support needed to advance in the fashion industry of the twentieth century should not be overlooked.

Much of fashion history is focused on the physical clothes produced, but this work is concerned about the professional women who worked in fashion. Valerie Cummings' book *Understanding Fashion History* is not a traditional history of fashion designers and trends. Instead it examines how the study of fashion history has changed

over time. The book provides insight into how the topic is addressed in research today and how historians should approach the field. Anne Hollander has written several books about the history of fashion. One book, *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress*, shows how men's and women's fashion diverged in the early modern period and how each developed separately and how women's fashion gained a reputation for being frivolous. It particularly looks at the male suit and the role that it played in history. Valerie Steele, the director of the Fashion Institute of Technology, writes prolifically about clothing trends and their relationship to sexuality and gender and while these books are essential to fashion history, they focus on the specific trends and forms of dress, whereas the business infrastructure that supports the fashion industry is often overlooked.

This dissertation will specifically focus on female professionals and the business that was controlled by them. The book *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, edited by Regina Lee Blaszczyk, is a look at the fashion industry through a business lens. In Blaszczyk's research model "the high-profile industrial-design consultants celebrated in museum exhibitions are less important than the thousands of corporate professionals—art directors, retail buyers, home economists, and magazine editors—who worked behind the scenes to produce and reproduce cultural forms."<sup>2</sup> This work is focused on the business aspect of the fashion industry, it looks beyond the big names of designers and the trends produced. However, this book does not focus on American fashion and while it does examine the networks between fashion professionals and other industries, it does not examine those relationships through the lens of gender.

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<sup>2</sup> Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "Rethinking Fashion," in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina Lee Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 6.

New York's fashion scene was able to rise to prominence during the twentieth century and this dissertation shows a key part of that transformation. Norma Rantisi's article "The Ascendance of New York Fashion" traces the economic history of the fashion industry in New York throughout various periods. She used maps to show where the industry is located in the city and how the industry migrated from the Lower East Side to the Garment District along Seventh Avenue. In the section about the consolidation of the industry between the 1920s and 1930s, Rantisi briefly mentioned the Fashion Group International. "The objectives of the Group were to be a 'forum' for the exchange of information and a 'force' for women to enhance their careers, and the primary means for achieving both was through networking and attaining the support of Group members."<sup>3</sup> Though mentioned in articles and books, Fashion Group as an organization is never evaluated, the goals and aspirations are often summed up in a few sentences.

This work will show that women did not exit the fashion industry during the twentieth century. The industry experienced rapid change during the industrialization, and although women changed the type of work they did, they remained an integral part of the industry. Wendy Gamber's *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* showed that women were an important presence in the production of custom fashion. Yet, as the industry shifted to mass produced items women lost their place. The women who had previously been small business owners were no longer able to compete. "In the field of feminine fashion, these were gendered transformations. Once highly skilled crafts predominantly controlled by women, the manufacture of dresses and hats became relatively unskilled processes largely controlled—if not entirely executed—

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<sup>3</sup> Norma M. Rantisi, "The Ascendance of New York Fashion," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28.1 (March 2004): 95.

by men. By 1930 the female economy of fashion had been all but supplanted by the ladies' garment trade."<sup>4</sup> The time that Gamber's book ends is exactly when the Fashion Group was created, my research can show that women had not been completely supplanted and had in fact organized to maintain some power within the shifting industry. Even as industrialization overtook clothes production, women found ways to maintain their presence and became modern business professionals.

A key part of this dissertation focuses on the way that Fashion Group provided ways for members to develop networks. The work that has been done on social networks is extensive, but this dissertation will show how specifically how females in the fashion industry established global and local networks. The way that humans use networks and social capital has been researched extensively. Social capital can be an important way for knowledge sharing across organizations. Editors Volker Wulf and Marleen Huysman published *Social Capital and Information Technology* and the chapters explore the role social capital plays in IT, but the key factors of social capital can be applied to other industries. Social capital is built upon existing networks, shared language, stories, or culture, and mutual trust. This can be extraordinarily helpful because it can lead to trust and appreciation, better sharing of knowledge, and community development. The book also explores the darker side of social capital, such as restrictions placed upon people outside the network or a lack of perception about the environment outside of the network.<sup>5</sup> Network analysis theory argues that people are more inclined to start relationships with people who look and sound like themselves, also that having a mutual

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<sup>4</sup> Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Volker Wulf and Marleen Huysman, *Social Capital and Information Technology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 1-15.

contact generally makes a connection easier and stronger, which is known as transitivity.<sup>6</sup> My research can show how these theories apply to a professional organization that served women.

This dissertation also shows how the organization responded to the post war era of globalization and the development of new products and marketing techniques that accompanied globalization. Geoffrey Jones wrote about the globalization of the fashion industry after World War II. Of course, the process of globalization had started much earlier, but after 1945 the process boomed. It was unique in the fact that the fashion industry industrialized at a much later date than other industries.<sup>7</sup> Jones sees his work as necessary because much of the research done of the beauty industry is focused nationally, often specifically about the United States. Jones points out that there are “deep-seated obstacles to globalization...human beings have varied considerably in how they presented themselves through clothes, hairstyles, and physical appearance. This reflected skin tone and hair texture difference between ethnic groups, climatic and dietary variations which impacted on how people smelled and presented themselves, and cultural and religious values.”<sup>8</sup> The globalization of the beauty industry led to a homogenization, or Americanization, of beauty standards that was, to varying degrees, successful. Not only were there differences of culture to contend with, but other nations were not always as accommodating of advertising as the United States government; restrictions were more strict in other nations on what could be advertised and shows were often not able to be

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<sup>6</sup> Jeroen Bruggeman, *Social Networks: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Jones, “Blonde and blue-eyed? Globalizing beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980,” *The Economic History Review* Vol 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 126.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Jones, “Blonde and blue-eyed? Globalizing beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980,” *The Economic History Review* Vol 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 126.

sponsored. This caused American methods of marketing to not translate well across nations.<sup>9</sup> Much of the market growth in the post war years relied heavily upon brand recognition and image, so without the heavy use of advertising companies had a harder time outselling the local brands.

Jones argued that though the depressed discretionary spending ability of Europe, Japan, and other locations, skewed the pre-eminence of the United States in 1950, there is no denying the importance of the American market. Not only did Americans have a higher level of discretionary income, it's an extremely large market and had a unique value system, beauty products became a necessity, no longer a luxury.<sup>10</sup> That market was also perceived as homogenous; dominant discourse of the ideal beauty was white and the products available reflected that.<sup>11</sup> Jones pointed out that a major barrier to expansion of cosmetic countries was the changing nature of the industry itself. The expense of building and sustaining a brand was steep and the market in developed nations was tight and full of competition; on average, cosmetic companies spent twelve percent of their sales on advertising.<sup>12</sup> This all lead to a more globalized market by 1980, however that globalization was patchy. The market was not consistent across the globe, the types of products purchased varied region to region and the American diffusion of the "ideal blonde and blue eyed model" was complex. That ideal was disruptive to local discourse of beauty, but the American beauty culture was also seen as aspirational for many

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<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and blue-eyed? Globalizing beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980," *The Economic History Review* Vol 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 136.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and blue-eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980," *The Economic History Review* Vol. 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 132.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and blue-eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980," *The Economic History Review* Vol. 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 132.

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and blue-eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980," *The Economic History Review* Vol. 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 140.

women, especially in developing nations, and not just because of what the model looked like. The business methods of American beauty was seen as an image of modernity and opportunity for women to have some economic mobility.<sup>13</sup> Noticeably different from the male ideal which focused on the shape and height of the body, the female ideal focused on face, figure, and proportion. The globalization of the fashion industry after World War II was extensive, but it was not homogenous. The process had more success in certain markets, but it did spread American ideas further and helped the United States position itself as a world power. The American beauty ideal did cause disruption, but never dominated the globe. The American influence was strong and could be seen in the innovation and fashion trends of the late twentieth century since American firms had a global reach, but over time those corporations began to combine their brand with local identities.<sup>14</sup> By the 1970s, the American ideal was fracturing even in United States, youth culture and the rise of the Civil Rights movement disrupted beauty standards at home, and as the 1980s progressed groups became even more segmented due to a variety of reasons. Though the blonde and blue-eyed ideal never dominated, certain ideals did persist: white teeth, big eyes, slim bodies, lack of body odor, and lighter skin became beauty standards nearly worldwide. And while American firms grabbed major portions of global markets in the post war era, Jones does not focus on the specific people that worked to achieve that expansion. Research often focuses on the specific corporations that moved across international borders, but my research can show a specific aspect of that movement and the key role women played in marketing.

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<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980," *The Economic History Review* Vol. 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 143-144.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980," *The Economic History Review* Vol. 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 150.

The mainstream fashion industry's focus on white beauty combined with the fact of segregation caused African American women to take their beauty into their own hands. Tiffany M. Gill wrote about the female operated beauty salons and how they became community hubs for information about the Civil Rights Movement, health concerns, and the latest trends in black beauty because they were not under direct supervision of the church or whites. "While women like Ruby Blackburn...were undoubtedly activists, they were still businesswomen...Beauticians demonstrated that they could look after their own economic needs and the needs of their communities simultaneously, perhaps better than any other group of black businesspeople."<sup>15</sup> This is distinct because the black women who owned beauty shops or worked as beauticians often were concerned with much more than just their own economic advancement. There was a pressure to help the entire community find economic and social advancement and the use of beauticians by the Highlander Folk School shows that these women were central hubs. They were able to help communities learn to read, register to vote, or join the NAACP, all through the lens of beauty classes.<sup>16</sup> While similar activities happened in the black beauty community and Fashion Group International, there were different motivations and ultimately black salon owners were often more community focused, and were excluded from the structures that would allow them to become upwardly mobile in the same way as white salon owners. Also, the activities of the African American community were often grassroots movements or were aided by organizations that aimed to the larger community.

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<sup>15</sup> Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 120.

<sup>16</sup> Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 108-109.



## Overview of Chapters

Chapter One focuses on the origins of Fashion Group. It explores who the founding members were, their similarities, and what goals they created for the organization. Chapter Two examines how Fashion Group grew and became an international organization. The chapter also explains how that growth caused a need for structural changes. Chapter Three is about the direct support women received from Fashion Group. This chapter really explores what actions the organization took to reach its goals of promoting New York and boosting women in the industry. Chapter Four focuses on a tumultuous period in Fashion Group's history. It's an era of increased political activity and a reevaluation of the organization's goals. Chapter Five explains the last decades of the twentieth century. Once again Fashion Group had to reevaluate its goals and considered the option of opening membership to males. Also, this chapter is concerned with two large social trends that directly impacted the organization.

## CHAPTER ONE

First started in New York City in February 1931 with only seventy-five members, Fashion Group International (FGI) has since grown into an international organization with a membership over six thousand, according to the headquarters, which are still located in midtown Manhattan. In a brief biography from 1946, the Group described itself as “a non-commercial membership organisation of professional women.”<sup>17</sup> Membership was available for any woman who worked in a field that fashion touched: department stores, advertising, publicity, cosmetics, interior decorating, and much more. The group’s membership has been filled with famous names since its inception, some of the founding members are the most well-known names in fashion even today, yet membership includes aspiring designers, students, and run of the mill fashion aficionados. Though it would appear that the founding members came from a variety of backgrounds, they were quite similar in many ways. The women who did the heavy work of getting Fashion Group International organized and underway had strong networks both within the industry and out of it, were well educated, held positions of power in the fashion industry, and they did not feel that they had enough authority within the field.

### **First Meetings**

Women did not feel that they had any authority in their chosen field. At an early meeting in 1929, before Fashion Group was officially founded, the women discussed how it was not fair that the men who dictated fashion often did not wear the fashion. The *New York Times* covered the meeting in 1929 and explained the women’s reasoning; “the announced aim of which is to develop the art of fashion, to make every woman cognizant

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<sup>17</sup> “Biography of The Fashion Group,” page 1, October 15, 1946, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

of that art, so that styles will be decided by those who wear them, rather than those who sell them.”<sup>18</sup> The women who came together to form this group did not believe that the men who owned the department stores where women shopped should be the ones to decide the fashions of the day. They needed a women’s group who could help guide the fashions and keep the women who wore the clothes in mind; granted this group did not believe that the average American woman knew what true style was and thus it was necessary to guide her gently towards good taste.

The goals of the Fashion Group International were clearly defined during the first few luncheons that the women attended. Originally the organizers intended to form a group that could be affiliated with the National Retail Dry Goods Association, a guild that, based in New York, would serve as a clearing house for ideas and help guide the fashion found in the United States. In short, “to improve good taste and proving that good taste is not a matter of money but of knowledge...”<sup>19</sup> Though originally the women did not intend to strike out on their own, it was soon decided that there was enough interest to form a separate organization. Lois B. Hunter recalled in 1940, just ten years after being involved in the original planning, that “[f]our hundred fifty letters of invitation to luncheon were mailed to lists of women interested in reporting, promotion and designing of fashion merchandise...The consensus of that first session was, however, that we were a strong enough group, with sufficiently unanimous aims and interests, to organize ‘on our own’...”<sup>20</sup> Hunter herself signed those letters as the chairman of the Sales Promotion

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<sup>18</sup> “Society Women Form Style League,” *New York Times*, December 17, 1929.

<sup>19</sup> “Background Material for Tenth Anniversary Story on the Fashion Group, Inc.,” Memorandum from Jane Ellis, page 1, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Ethel Kremer from Lois B. Hunter, December 12, 1940, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

Division of the National Retail Dry Goods Association. In 1931, The Fashion Guild (though soon changed to Fashion Group) came into existence with bylaws and a charter. It was an organization dedicated to women, run by women, and all the officials were elected by the group members.

Fashion Group emerged in early Depression Era New York, a city of extremes; downtown tenements were filled with poverty stricken people, uptown was filled with wealthy families who may not feel the pinch of the depression. Movies were glamorous, hemlines dropped and luxurious fabrics were used, and yet many in the city were waiting in bread lines. New York was a major manufacturing hub in the early twentieth century, by 1900 there were nearly two thousand apparel manufacturing firms that employed 84,000 people, mostly concentrated on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.<sup>21</sup> The stock market crash hit New York manufacturing hard, “Two years after the Crash, hundreds of New York’s factories had shut their doors and a third of the city’s manufacturing capacity had been lost, and along with that, many thousands of jobs. More than a million and a half New Yorkers were drawing emergency relief and a quarter of the population lacked any regular source of income.”<sup>22</sup> Though tenements were packed with the underpaid and unemployed and certain buildings had been subdivided and neglected to the point of becoming slums, certain groups still lived in a glittering New York that was not touched by the stock market crash of 1929. Art deco gems were built in midtown Manhattan and frequented by New York’s elite. Jules Stewart wrote in his history of depression era New York, “The impoverished of Manhattan could only gaze in wonder at the bejeweled

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<sup>21</sup> Norma M. Rantisi, “The Ascendance of New York Fashion,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 28, no. 1 (March 2004), 90.

<sup>22</sup> Jules Stewart, *Gotham Rising: New York in the 1930s* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 23.

ladies in ermine coats accompanied by cigar-smoking men in dinner jackets emerging from the Waldorf-Astoria...The hotel's Peacock Alley bar was famed among Manhattan's smart set for serving hand-crafted cocktails to iconic celebrities like Clark Gable, Joan Crawford and the dance duo Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers."<sup>23</sup> These were the same venues that founders of Fashion Group frequented and they rubbed elbows with the rich and famous of the era.

Fashion Group International helped women establish networks since the moment it was formed, but the women who originally started the organization were already well connected. Mary Brooks Picken explained her involvement with the early planning; she was called to have breakfast with two other women, one being Hilda Swarthe, in order to discuss the development of a group that could serve as a way for information from the New York fashion industry could be disseminated throughout the country and serve as a point where members could meet and exchange information.<sup>24</sup> Picken was a fashion educator, she published ninety-six books in her lifetime and taught at Columbia University; Swarthe owned an interior design business and had previously worked as a buyer for Macy's.<sup>25</sup> They were experts in the fashion world and they, along with the other organizers, knew that in order for the United States to be taken seriously in the global fashion market there needed to be a cohesive American style. According to a history produced by the organization, "The Fashion Group was instrumental in convincing manufacturers in every field that a correlation and interchange of fashion information

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<sup>23</sup> Jules Stewart, *Gotham Rising: New York in the 1930s* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 43.

<sup>24</sup> "The Fashion Group," Mary Brooks Perkin, 1967, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>25</sup> Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 176.

would benefit the industry as a whole.”<sup>26</sup> Established connections between various subgroups in fashion could lead to a more desired cohesive look. At conferences and luncheons, women were able to explore trends not only in their own corner of the industry, but also understand how other areas grew and complemented their own. This would help American women have hosiery that matched their purses, as well as a present a united front to other fashion capitals, namely Paris.

A desire to promote American fashion animated the found of the group. At a luncheon in November 1932 the promotion of American fashion was discussed in detail;

America, and more particularly its fashion centers, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, may, and undoubtedly will, increasingly become a part of future fashions. This possibility of American design becoming a greater factor in popular fashion is a matter of great importance to us all. We must all be interested in the factors aiding this movement. In my opinion, there are three of outstanding importance. First, the importance of developing greater ability in artistic design; second, increased encouragement of American design by the owners and managers of our fashion industries; and third, the development of a better and more scientific understanding of the nature of fashion.<sup>27</sup>

One of the main objectives that Fashion Group established from the beginning was the creation of fashion capitals in the United States. Members were originally concerned especially with New York, but as other cities gained traction as fashion centers Fashion Group promoted the importance of each location. Paris had reigned as the fashion capital for centuries, so pitting American design against the haute couture houses was a bold move.

FGI brought many sub-fields of fashion under one umbrella as well. Interior decorators, designers, and store purchasers could interact and formulate trends that

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<sup>26</sup> “History of the Fashion Group,” Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>27</sup> Paul H. Nystrom, Speech to Fashion Group, 30 November 1932, pg. 7, Box 183, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

crossed multiple industries. Speaking at a luncheon in 1931, Kenneth Collins of Macy's recalled an incident which involved a window display that proved to him that interior design needed the help of the Fashion Group;

We selected a pleasant color scheme, but fortunately just about the time that we were to make a rather large expenditure of time and money on this window someone had the common sense idea to investigate what the bathmats, shower curtains, wash cloths, bathroom bottles, etc. looked like. To our dismay, we discovered that the bathroom fixture manufacturers were making everything in pastel colors and that all the other manufacturers were making everything in clear, hard colors.<sup>28</sup>

Though Collins himself was not a member of FGI since men were excluded from membership, he saw the benefit of a larger entity guiding American taste. He believed that with the aid of Fashion Group American style could achieve a more cohesive look. As a representative of Macy's, Collins served as a tool in helping Fashion Group gain far reaching influence in the largest department stores.

The early organizers were so well connected to New York high society the *New York Times* took notice. As early as 1929, an article was published about the possibility of such a group, "A group of society women met yesterday at a luncheon at the St. Regis and formed the nucleus of an organization to be known as the Fashion League..."<sup>29</sup> a reporter explained. The article went on to list the women that were involved with the meeting, noticeably missing from the named women were those who held high positions in the industry already. This article only listed women who led the social scene in New York, those women who bore names like Vanderbilt and Stuyvesant. Other documents show that leading women in the industry also attended these planning luncheons, which

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<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Collins, pg. 3, January 1931, Box 72, Folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>29</sup> "Society Women form Style League," *New York Times*, December 17, 1929.

shows that some of the founding members were extremely well connected in the high society of early twentieth century New York.

## **Networks**

The fact that many of the original organizers were upper class is important because it helped justify the formation of the group. At a luncheon held in 1931, FGI was still known as the Fashion Guild, Kenneth Collins, a representative of Macy's, said, "I might cite to you a few illustrations...that will show you how badly manufacturers without the guidance of people such as those represented in this room, misused Modern Art."<sup>30</sup> Most of the original members did have a connection to the fashion industry, however some did not. They were merely women of influence and could use that influence to control how American trends grew and shifted.

At the same time, the women used their position in society as a way to keep power over their newly formed organization. Fashion and society women were, and often still are, viewed as frivolous and not having much to do with much outside of Fifth Avenue, part of holding control came from the fact that the organization was underestimated, men did not grasp the goals of Fashion Group and the importance of the work the members did. A guest speaker from Lehman Brothers in 1931 showed how fashion could be shuffled aside and men not fully understand the importance of the industry. The speaker said, "I have been completely confused as to why I am here. [I]t doesn't seem to me that fashion is a particularly virile subject...But the subject you have given me is fashion, and how one can turn that around so as to fit the general ideas of

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<sup>30</sup> Kennelth Collins, pg. 2, January 1931, Box 72, Folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.



economics...is a task I am afraid I am unequal to.”<sup>31</sup> Obviously fashion is a subject that can be fit into the general ideas of economics, the members invited him to speak because their industry was closely tied to the market and they were concerned about their job security and the future of American business. By the 1920s the Garment District was firmly established in the western half of midtown Manhattan and the industry “witnessed the emergence of key institutions that supported the continued growth of the women’s wear industry by helping to keep mass production in line with mass consumption.”<sup>32</sup> There was no doubt that the fashion industry was a key component of the New York economy. The women used their class as a way to justify their ability to dictate fashion and as a way to fill their luncheons with guest speakers, but also to keep their own authority within their organization.

The early members of Fashion Group did not just have connections within the fashion world. These women were connected to Hollywood, politics, and upper class America. For example, Margaret Case wrote to Elizabeth Brackett, wife of Hollywood producer Charles Brackett, that “Kay Mills tells me that you have two charming debutante daughters. If you would like to have us, we might consider photographing them sometime for the magazine.”<sup>33</sup> Case worked for Edna Woolman Chase, the editor of *Vogue*, and through networks, both personal and professional, was able to find subjects for the magazine. Members had connections across the nation and globe, which was made possible by the very nature of their lifestyles and the lifestyles of those they were

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Mazur, Address to the Fashion Guild, April 7, 1931, Box 72, Folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>32</sup> Norma M. Rantisi, “The Competitive Foundations of Localized Learning and Innovation: The Case of Women’s Garment Production in New York City,” *Economic Geography* 78, no. 4 (October 2002), 447.

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Case to Elizabeth Brackett, letter, 21 September 1938, folder 22, Charles Brackett Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.

acquainted with. The letter that Case wrote continued to specify that the Brackett girls would soon return to Providence, so even though their father mainly worked in California, the family spent time on both coasts.

Eleanor Roosevelt was a charter member of Fashion Group and was she was still living in New York when it was formed. Her books do not specifically mention her connection to FGI but her writings do suggest that she believed in women's right to have careers;

As a rule when a woman keeps on working after her marriage, it is a matter of necessity—not always an economic necessity, but sometimes the necessity of feeling that she is still able to do something which expresses her own personality even though she may be a wife and mother...It seems to be perfectly obvious that if a woman falls in love and marries...her duty to her home does not of necessity preclude her from having another occupation.<sup>34</sup>

Roosevelt owned a small furniture company named Val-kill with three friends between 1927 and 1938 which may explain her interest in the creation of Fashion Group, also it is clear that Roosevelt's opinions and goals align with those of the group in that she did not believe that having a family or husband was enough to satisfy every aspect of a woman. Roosevelt wrote that she was often in the city during this time though she and her husband lived in Albany; "In my teaching I really had for the first time a job that I did not wish to give up. This had led to my planning to spend a few days every week in New York City, except during school vacations."<sup>35</sup> In a bulletin from December 1932 an announcement confirmed the presence of Roosevelt at the latest luncheon, "...we felt she paid the F.G. a great compliment in attending the Luncheon on the 30<sup>th</sup>. She had as her

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<sup>34</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, *It's Up to the Women* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1933), 145.

<sup>35</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, *This I Remember* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 54.

guest Miss Nancy Cook who manages Mrs. Roosevelt's Valkill Furniture Shop."<sup>36</sup>

Roosevelt was an active member of FGI, though unable to attend every luncheon she made time to go to the meetings even when her visits to the city were filled with other activities. Roosevelt's books do show that her beliefs aligned with the goals of the Group, but also, since Roosevelt owned a furniture business, she may have had other interests that drew her to the organization. She brought her interests to the attention of Fashion Group when she attended meetings, in 1934 she asked Fashion Group members to consider acting in an advisory capacity for industries in small villages so that they could be self-supporting, she also asked them to look into what they could do to make a difference in Puerto Rico's working standards.<sup>37</sup> Puerto Rico had experienced an influx of American businesses looking for cheaper labor and tax incentives. It was during the post-war era that saw a drastic increase in American firms moving, but the process started in the 1930s and was marked by Puerto Rican women moving to local urban sites to work in low-wage positions.<sup>38</sup> Roosevelt believed that the members, in their roles as business leaders, had a responsibility to their communities, both locally and in a global sense. It makes sense that the upper crust women on New York would want a political wife involved in their organization, especially one as active as Eleanor Roosevelt, and it is clear that she would have been near enough for the connection to be an easy one.

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<sup>36</sup> F.G.'s Bulletin, December 1932, Box 144, Folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>37</sup> "Mrs. Roosevelt Attends Luncheon Meeting of Advisory Council of Fashion Group," *New York City Women's Wear*, 19 June 1934, Box 7, folder 34, Dorothy Shaver Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

<sup>38</sup> Carmen Teresa Whalen, "Sweatshops Here and There: The Garment Industry, Latinas, and Labor Migrations," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 61, (Spring 2002), 47.

Even after her furniture company was dissolved and she moved to Washington, D.C. with her husband, she remained connected to Fashion Group. She regularly attended luncheons and special events when she was in New York and she remained a member of Fashion Group. In December 1940, Eleanor Roosevelt hosted four members of Fashion Group (Edna Woolman Chase, Dorothy Shaver, Carmel Snow, and Jane Ellis) and received a letter of thanks from Ellis, who wrote, “We so much enjoyed our tea with you, and are very happy that you have consented to attend Fashion Futures.”<sup>39</sup> Fashion Futures was an event hosted by Fashion Group to promote American textiles and designs and to offer direction to American style. A press release announced “The industry has had no impartial guiding hand to look to since the fall of Paris, and through Mayor LaGuardia The Fashion Group has been asked to produce this show, in an effort to give style direction to the industry.”<sup>40</sup> This was pivotal since Roosevelt offered her fame and popularity to the event, but this was also an opportunity for American designs to shine. Paris was occupied and thus was not producing the quality or quantity of designs that the world was accustomed to.

Eleanor Roosevelt was not the group’s only political connection. Sifting through some of the early papers held at the Fashion Group International’s archives, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia is often mentioned. In 1940 the *New York Times* wrote about the lunches he attended with members of FGI; “He said the dress industry was not now as prosperous as he would like to see it and advised the manufacturers to give more consideration to their designers. The Mayor called the practice of employing designers by

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<sup>39</sup> Jane Ellis, Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, 18 December 1940, Box 183, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>40</sup> Press Release, 18 December 1940, Box 183, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

the hour or day as ‘disgraceful,’ declaring that creative work could not be done under the stress of time and the economic conditions imposed.”<sup>41</sup> LaGuardia’s presence indicated that these women were taken seriously. They were able to meet with people who held power and influence on a large scale. Also, it shows that New York City was concerned with the fashion industry; it was a great economic boon to have such a large industry in the area and it is clear from the quote that FGI and the mayor allied themselves to strengthen that industry. It was a connection that would last through the years. The quote above was printed in 1934 but LaGuardia and FGI continued to meet until his death.

Edith Head and Elizabeth Arden both worked closely with Hollywood producers and actors. Head, a prominent costume designer (according to her obituary published in the *New York Times*, she worked on one thousand films), had not quite come into her own when she first joined FGI. Head’s biographer Paddy Calistro wrote, “While the movies of the 1930s provided the rest of the world with escape, they established Edith firmly in a profession that she was to honor for the next fifty years... This was her career. She was still assisting Banton on many of the major films, but her status had improved. She was now a full-fledged designer.”<sup>42</sup> Head’s career began to flourish just as she joined a fashion group on the other side of the nation; she created the networks that would carry her career and she provided a link between New York fashion and the silver screen that reached all the women, no matter the class, in the country.

Fashion Group was not open to male membership though this did not keep the women from working closely with men and keeping connections open between FGI and leading men in the industry, who held much of the power within the industry. At the first

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<sup>41</sup> “Mayor Shows Wit in Couturier Role,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1940.

<sup>42</sup> Edith Head and Paddy Calistro, *Edith Head’s Hollywood* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983), 27.

official meeting of the Fashion Group in 1931 Kenneth Collins gave the key note address. Collins was the advertising director of Macy's and worked closely with many of the founding members. Another meeting hosted an economist from Wall Street to discuss the stock market crash of 1929 and the effects it may have on the fashion industry. Many guest speakers were male and held positions of power or were experts in their fields. Also, although men were not able to become members of the group, many men worked within the fashion industry and were often invited to work with group members or attend special events.

Many of the memoirs of the founding members are filled with references to their own personal networks. Dorothy Shaver, one of the founders, lived with her sister for many years, even after she became highly successful. Helena Rubenstein wrote about her own connection to her sister when she was first gaining popularity in the United States. In her memoir she recalled, "How I longed for Manka to be with me then...I needed her help, and I wrote to her in London, asking if she would join me in America... Together Manka and I made plans, bold plans... Suddenly we were faced with a new situation. Department stores began clamoring for the right to sell my preparations over the counter."<sup>43</sup> Though Fashion Group did not help form these personal connections, it is important to note the many nuances in the women's networks and who they turned to during times of need, both personally and professionally. Most members did marry, but they still wrote about other personal relationships that they relied upon as they worked towards their career goals. Their success in the business of fashion was bolstered by the support found in their private lives.

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<sup>43</sup> Helena Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 61.

## Education

The women that first formed the Fashion Group International were highly educated. According to one memo, the majority of the women involved in the organization had at least a bachelor's degree. Many more went on and received advanced degrees, certification, and training in specialized fields; such as design, art, literature, and merchandising.<sup>44</sup> Some members chose to enter the fashion industry after being trained in a different field. In a memo written by Jane Ellis it was printed that "some have changed their professions radically, and yet become outstanding successes...One specialized in surgery, one in bacteriology, another in chemistry. These three are now outstanding successes in the fashion field."<sup>45</sup> From the beginning of Fashion Group the women were a diverse group in some ways and brought different views into the group. Membership was made up of young women who had just started careers, women who came different socioeconomic situations, different religions, and some were immigrants.

In her memoir, Helena Rubinstein recounted her early life in Poland in the late twentieth century and the education that her father intended for her. She wrote, "When my days at the gymnasium were ended, Father was eager for me to study medical science... Women in medical schools and hospitals were a rarity, and they were not exactly welcomed by the medical world..."<sup>46</sup> Though she writes that she eventually left medical school due to her inability to stand the sights and smells of the sickroom, this shows that Rubinstein was raised in a family of means, a family that could afford to send

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<sup>44</sup> "Background Material on the Fashion Group, Inc.," Memorandum from Jane Ellis, page 2, October 1946, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>45</sup> "Background Material on the Fashion Group, Inc.," Memorandum from Jane Ellis, page 2, October 1946, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>46</sup> Helena Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 18.

their children to university. After she left medical school, she traveled to Australia to live with an uncle, where she discovered her knack for selling skin cream to the women who lived on the Australian Outback. Even as she lived in a small ranching community, Rubinstein wrote “I refused to store away my modish European clothes. Stubbornly I dressed up for every possible occasion, and I even defied Eva’s sound advice by continuing to wear my impractical high-heeled shoes on a terrain that had never been intended for anything so frivolous.”<sup>47</sup> As tensions grew between Rubinstein and her uncle, she felt that her only option was to move to a metropolis and begin to sell face cream in her own shop. She was quite young and with limited means, so she called upon a friend she had met on her voyage to Australia who lived in Melbourne who allowed her to stay with her family while she sorted her life out. Another friend, Miss Helen MacDonald, loaned Rubinstein her life savings to start a small business with.<sup>48</sup> Without the connections that she had formed during her trip to Australia, made possible by her family’s class in Poland, Rubinstein would not have been able to establish her first shop devoted to helping women obtain smooth flawless skin.

Edith Head, one of the most famous costume designers in history, was raised in a small mining town in Nevada and trained to be a teacher.<sup>49</sup> She worked as a French teacher in Hollywood and by chance found a summer position working as a sketch artist with Famous Players-Lasky (eventually known as Paramount), “though she knew nothing about drawing the human form and had no experience in costume design.”<sup>50</sup> She had obtained a great education, just not in design; Head graduated with an undergraduate

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<sup>47</sup> Helena Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 23.

<sup>48</sup> Helena Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), 24-26.

<sup>49</sup> “Edith Head, Fashion Designer for the Movies, Dies,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1981.

<sup>50</sup> Edith Head and Paddy Calistro, *Edith Head’s Hollywood* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983), 6.



degree from Berkeley and with a master's in Romance languages from Stanford. The life of a sketch artist was not as glamorous as Head had hoped for, but gradually she began to accompany Howard Greer, the chief designer of the studios, as he worked with actresses and with the costumes.<sup>51</sup> This was the hands on education that would lead her towards the fame and her eventual post as head designer.

Not all the charter members of FGI had an abundance of formal education. Mary Lewis, who rose to become a vice-president of Best & Co., did not finish her high school diploma. A biography created by Fashion Group in 1940 stated that “Mathematics, science and nuisances of that sort had no attractions for her, so she left them severely alone. Her reward was no diploma, a failure which failed to annoy her...She went to night school seeking to cultivate a mild flair for art and even if she manifested no sign of arriving genius she convinced herself that here was something she wasn't going to get too tired of.”<sup>52</sup> The brief biography of Lewis' life does not specify if she finished night school, but that she did change careers. After becoming bored with furniture design, a lucky opportunity led Lewis to the advertising department and she was able to try her hand at writing. That same biography revealed “Mary Lewis' first advertising copy made use of a new and increasingly popular slogan—Made in America. It was in 1918.”<sup>53</sup> Lewis tapped into the political climate of the period and she found something that she was good at, even if she was not formally trained to do it. She was able to climb her way

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<sup>51</sup> Edith Head and Paddy Calistro, *Edith Head's Holly wood* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1983), 6-9.

<sup>52</sup> “Smart Young Woman,” To Jane Ellis from A. Van Derlyn, December 12, 1940, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>53</sup> “Smart Young Woman,” To Jane Ellis from A. Van Derlyn, December 12, 1940, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

to the top of her field even without the university degree that many of her peers had earned.

Whether the women that founded FGI were formally educated or gained experience first-hand while working, they did see the importance of educating the next generation of fashion's workers. In a bulletin from January 1932 a brief announcement called for members interested in being an instructor at the new Textile High School in New York to reach out to the principal. The school was to educate those already in the textile trades as well as anyone interested in joining the trades.<sup>54</sup> The Tobé-Coburn School was the first college that specialized in fashion merchandising and promotion; it was founded by two of the charter members of Fashion Group, Miss Tobé and Julia Coburn. Both women were known as fashion authorities, they joined forces to establish the school in 1937, with the hope to train up the next generation in a professional manner.<sup>55</sup> The creation a degree in fashion offered the industry the ability to professionalize and helped anchor New York as a fashion capital, capable of producing designers and trends of its own. Other colleges followed, including the Fashion Institute of Technology (1944) in New York and the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (1969) in Los Angeles, and offered a wide variety of degrees and certifications in textiles, fashion business, fashion history, and design.

The members, as well as teaching many classes, continued their own educations. A bulletin from February 1932 listed classes at Columbia University that may have held particular interest for members of the Fashion Group. Classes included advanced

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<sup>54</sup> F.G. Bulletin, January 1932, Box 144, Folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>55</sup> "History," Wood Tobé-Coburn School, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.woodtobecoburn.edu/aboutus/history>

advertising writing, advanced magazine article writing, and a textiles class on silks, rayons, ribbons, and pile fabrics “offered especially for manufacturers, merchants, buyers and salespeople who are handling silk fabrics and silk products...”<sup>56</sup> The members understood the importance of continuing education in order for members to stay on the cutting edge of business practices and trends as the times changed. It also shows the level of wealth that was owned by these women; that they were able to afford classes at a university, much less at Columbia, shows that these women either earned large incomes on their own or were married to wealth.

### **Professionals**

Though fashion is often marketed towards women, since the early twentieth century men controlled the majority of the industry. Many of the well-known designers and stylists were men. As fashion became more industrialized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of the female entrepreneurs were edged out;

The intimacy of the custom shop had given way to the impersonal elegance of the department store. In Madame’s place stood a saleswoman who made none of the wares she sold. Male-operated factories, where male cutters and blockers held sway, had triumphed over women’s concerns; the monotony of ‘machine operating’ had finally eclipsed a centuries-old female craft tradition.<sup>57</sup>

Women who worked in the fashion industry saw that men had gained the majority of control and that is exactly why there was a need for an organization which would help women advance in their careers and lend some dignity to their work, one that specifically limited membership to females. Men certainly gained the upper hand during this time but they did not completely remove middle and upper class women from the industry. There

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<sup>56</sup> F.G.’s Bulletin, 23 February 1932, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>57</sup> Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 227.

were enough female entrepreneurs and women working within the system that they could join together to form an autonomous group.

The women that consumed fashion and worked in fashion were often portrayed as flighty and frivolous. There was public outcry against ready-to-wear fashions and the belief that it would make women slaves to fashion because the desire to be in style would be a driving concern.<sup>58</sup> This created a need to professionalize the industry; to give it some respectability. Some of the first women who worked in the modern fashion industry were women of good breeding but not much else recommended them; “So the stores created an anomalous job for women called ‘stylists.’ They hired women of good social background (but with no business knowledge) to advise their buyers and merchandise men. Any woman who had a finishing school education, who knew how to enter a room, and how to use an oyster fork, had the red carpet put out for her. This resulted in a flock of women with some taste, and not too much business sense, getting prestigious jobs.”<sup>59</sup> As these women gained jobs, it was necessary to learn quickly how to conduct business like a man in order to keep that job. Ambiguous job titles were created and women rose to meet those standards. Stylists became a necessary part of any department store and young women were granted an opportunity to rise through the ranks.

Many of the most successful women who helped form the Fashion Group International created jobs for themselves. They found areas that they could carve into and make themselves indispensable. One such woman is Eleanor Le Maire;

[A]n interior designer and color specialist, to whom is credited the modern technique of using color not only for its aesthetic and psychological value, but

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<sup>58</sup> Jenna Weissman Joselit, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 33.

<sup>59</sup> “History of the Fashion Group,” Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

more especially as an important architectural aid... Today Miss Le Maire, with her own office and draughting room in New York, is the only woman in her particular field, which is making department stores easy on the eyes and functionally efficient...<sup>60</sup>

Le Maire spent time travelling in Europe and South America in order to create her own approach to color. She then made her way to New York where she was able to break into a business dominated by men and completely change the way people interacted with color and display. Le Maire worked with department stores to create an interior design that drew women in, that urged them to interact with the displays, and ultimately led them to purchase goods. The position of personal shopper was also created by women who wanted to create space for themselves in the industry. In 1932 a young woman approached FGI with the idea of creating a service “to assist the individual woman in the proper selection of clothes, to save her time and energy in assembling a co-ordinated wardrobe.”<sup>61</sup> The young woman, unnamed in the bulletin, approached the Group in order to find a business partner with taste and money to fund the venture.

No matter the field that the women worked in, they climbed ladders, created new positions, and some eventually made it to the top. Their drive to succeed is one way that women, many from dissimilar backgrounds, were very much alike in character. Dorothy Shaver is a prime example of a woman who was determined to rise; “She is, in fact, the only woman ever to fight her way to the top of a great metropolitan retail establishment... Miss Shaver, however, after 22 years with Lord & Taylor, went up to the presidency 16 months ago exactly as a man would have done—by vote of the male

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<sup>60</sup> “Biographical Sketch of Eleanor Le Maire,” To Jane Ellis from Julia M. Wahn, November 29, 1940, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>61</sup> F.G. Bulletin, November 1932, Box 144, Folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

directors of the Associated Dry Goods Corporation, which controls it.”<sup>62</sup> Shaver was unique. Lord & Taylor, one of the largest department stores of the time, was located on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Shaver, who did not have the benefit of marrying into her wealth or title, proved that women were capable of moving up the same ladder did, however Shaver did that climbing without the same benefits that the men had. She was not included in the boys’ club lunches and did not have the same access to networks that her male counterparts did. That is exactly what the founding members wanted to address by forming the Fashion Group International.

Edna Woolman Chase rose to a position of power and prestige in the magazine world during the early twentieth century. By the time Fashion Group International came into existence, Chase had already worked as editor-in-chief at *Vogue* for over fifteen years. Chase was able to bring three distinct publishing institutions under her control;

She is the only person, man or woman, who is Editor-in-Chief of three important magazines, published in the great capitals of the world. The London, New York, and Paris editions of *Vogue* are separate publishing institutions under one Editor... The American publishing and advertising world owes to Mrs. Chase the adoption of modern art into illustrating and advertising. Mrs. Chase made contracts with these artists as a group and, shortly after the war, *Vogue* began to use drawings of Lepape, Marin, Marty, Brissaud, Guy Arnoux, and Benito...<sup>63</sup>

Chase not only created a space for herself, she created space for other women to follow. She established female employees as editors after she stepped down and completely revolutionized the way women interacted with magazines. She launched careers of young American women, gave them posts in Paris, London, New York, and even briefly Berlin. Chase’s personal and work lives were indistinguishable from each other. Her obituary,

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<sup>62</sup> “No. 1 Career Woman,” *Life*, 1947, 117, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>63</sup> “Edna Woolman Chase,” Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

published by *New York Times* in 1957, said, “She made her career almost her only happiness... Her personal friends were her business associates. So like one were her home and business life that she had her office decorate in the style of the drawing room in her apartment.”<sup>64</sup> She was known for her extremely high standards and getting business finished, if she counted someone among her close friends, she would use her connections for that person.

It is necessary to remember that while Fashion Group International drew women together and created networks and allowed a certain mobility, these women were in competition with each other. A well-known competition was that between Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubinstein. Both wanted to dominate the New York beauty scene and both were highly successful. Historian Marie Clifford wrote of Rubinstein’s use of her early life, “To distinguish her salon from its American counterparts, Rubinstein traded on a certain European cachet. She negotiated a niche for her business and herself by claiming her ‘difference’ and defining it to her advantage.”<sup>65</sup> Rubinstein had to find a way to make her product stand out and she did that by combining feminine and modern in a new way, a way that she cast as purely European. This gave her a unique edge in the competition; that is until Arden was able to surpass her just after the stock market crash of 1929. Arden was able to keep pace with the change in style and remain “modern” while Rubinstein’s salon, with its rococo style, seemed particularly dated.<sup>66</sup> Both women

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<sup>64</sup> “Edna Woolman Chase Dies at 80; Retired Vogue Magazine Editor,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1957.

<sup>65</sup> Marie J. Clifford, “Helena Rubinstein’s Beauty Salons, Fashion, and Modernist Display,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 38, no. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 2003): 88.

<sup>66</sup> Marie J. Clifford, “Helena Rubinstein’s Beauty Salons, Fashion, and Modernist Display,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 38, no. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 2003): 93-94.

took active roles in establishing the Fashion Group, both women are charter members, though they were archrivals in a turf war for New York City.

Arden found herself in another rivalry just a few years later, only this time it was on the west coast. As Technicolor's three-strip process became popular, there was a need for a make-up that could look natural on the screen, specifically a make-up that would make the actors look white when filmed in color. Arden did not win in what *Variety* named the "Hollywood Powder Puff War," that honor would go to Max Factor. He created the pan-cake make-up, which was lighter and easier to apply than anything Arden produced.<sup>67</sup> This episode shows that as the women of FGI created space for themselves, and often for each other, they did jostle one another in order to maintain that space and to keep ahead in their fields. Arden had already created an empire for herself; she headed nearly thirty beauty salons across both Europe and the United States. This did not seem to be enough though because she decided to try her hand in Hollywood and create her own costume make-up.<sup>68</sup> Just because they were all part of the same group did not mean that they were not business women first, whether that business was maximizing profits for her own business or for a large corporation. Members may have respected each other but ultimately often competed for domination of the market.

Also, though the members were similar in many regards, there was still competing views found among them. Even if members were not in direct competition for costumers, they often did not agree on certain aspects of the American fashion industry. In 1940 Alice Hughes wrote in the *New York Post* that, "An odd contract in two speakers' outlook

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<sup>67</sup> Dootson, Kirsty Sinclair, "The Hollywood Powder Puff War": Technicolor Cosmetics in the 1930s," *Film History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 107-111.

<sup>68</sup> Kirsty Sinclair Dootson, "The Hollywood Powder Puff War": Technicolor Cosmetics in the 1930s," *Film History* 28, no. 1 (2016): 109-110.



on fashion startled the Fashion Group... One—Carmel Snow, editor of Harper's Bazaar [*sic*]—called for an ivory tower in which to develop our responsibility as fashion center of the universe. The other—Dorothy Shaver, vice-president of Lord & Taylor—implied there is no ivory tower for style in America. That fashion is no mystery, serving masses and classes alike in interpreting our life and times.”<sup>69</sup> The definition of fashion has been debated for decades (Valerie Steele, Ann Hollander, and other leading fashion historians have written books on the topic) so it would reason that members did not always agree on what fashion was and what purpose it served.

### **Lacking Authority**

Though many of the charter members of FGI are now famous, charter members also included many more who worked in the lower rungs of the fashion industry or who did not quite reach fame. One group of women upset by their lack of authority were stylists from Macy's department store in New York;

[N]one of us felt that stylists, and, indeed anyone who had to do with fashion other than routine buying of merchandise, had any professional standing and the buyers themselves felt that they were merely reflections of the merchandise managers. In a real 'Boston Tea Party' mood, we gathered one day after work along with other 'Macyites', including Hilda Swarthe, who was head of the Comparison Shopping Department at Macy's, at Alice Hughes apartment and after much agitation decided that a professional group would give us professional strength and professional recognition.<sup>70</sup>

As this quote shows, these women felt that they were making history. They believed that they needed a way to gather professional strength and that it could come through a group

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<sup>69</sup> Alice Hughes, "Style Schism at Fashion Group: Mrs. Snow for Ivory Tower; Miss Shaver Against It," *New York Post*, 1 October 1940, Box 7, folder 34, Dorothy Shaver Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C.

<sup>70</sup> Letter to Sarah Tomerlin Lee from Beryl S. Austrian, February 14, 1961, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

made up of women in the industry. Hilda Swarthe, who is mentioned in the quote above, was involved in the first luncheons held to discuss the potential group in 1928. The organization was one that grew out of careful consideration and much planning; it was the consequence of repeated moments of being looked over in the work place.

Fashion Group did not ever set out to be a labor union and certainly never became one, however it was able to provide a safe place for women to come together and address more than the latest trends in styles. Women within the same field could come together and talk about trends in pay and labor. An article in *Life* addressed the pay gap between women and men who did the same work;

Associated's directors pay Miss Shaver \$110,000 a year. This is only a quarter of the sum paid to her friend Thomas J. Watson of International Business Machines. It would not occur to Miss Shaver to make an issue of the obvious example of sex discrimination in a system which confers upon the male business executive rewards four times greater than those fixed for the senior lady business executive...For in any case Miss Shaver's day, in most executive respects, is indistinguishable from a man's.<sup>71</sup>

Women like Dorothy Shaver created a space for themselves at the top of the fashion industry, yet they still needed an organization like FGI to help fight injustices within that industry. The quote said it would never occur to Shaver to make an issue of this obvious point of discrimination, but Shaver also did not accept the status quo. She and the other members knew that the pay gap found in the fashion industry must be addressed. Shaver oversaw a major department store; she was responsible for going over blueprints as the company looked to expand. Shaver accomplished all the same tasks as any male executive, yet she only received a quarter of his salary. This topic is found in Fashion

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<sup>71</sup> "No. 1 Career Woman," *Life*, 1947, 117, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

Group documents time and again and the members worked to create more space for women in an effort to narrow the discrepancy.

Though members had to fight against discrimination, there was no doubt that the women of Fashion Group made money. In a memo sent out at FGI's sixteenth anniversary, members were updated on statistics of FGI. One paragraph explained that "[s]ome members are among the highest salaried women in any profession; collectively they influence, manage, and control more volume of business than any other group of organized women."<sup>72</sup> The memo did not include statistics about salaries, but it is understandable that the women of FGI would control such a large amount of business. They held positions that allowed them to earn wages that gave them purchasing power. In April 1939, Diana Vreeland was awarded a raise for her hard work at *Harper's Bazaar*. Carmel Snow, the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, informed Vreeland in a note, "I am so happy to tell you that Dick Berlin has okayed the increase of your salary to \$125 per week."<sup>73</sup> This shows the importance of having women in high positions able to lobby for those who held lower positions, which was a key factor of Fashion Group. Men's ability to network and find a mentor gave them an automatic boost, so Fashion Group was able to fill that role for professional women.

The Fashion Group did not focus on helping the women who actually worked in textile factories, instead it focused on the professional women who were able to break into the higher circles of the fashion industry, where more power was consolidated and the wealth of the industry was controlled. As a collective force, the women of FGI had

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<sup>72</sup> "Background Material on the Fashion Group, Inc.," Memorandum from Jane Ellis, page 2, October 1946, Fashion Group International Archives, New York.

<sup>73</sup> Note to Diana Vreeland from Carmel Snow, 12 April 1939, Box 1, folder 6, Diana Vreeland papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

made a difference in the way the industry was organized and operated, however, as Shaver's salary demonstrates, the women still had a long way to go. Men still dominated many aspects of the fashion industry and their word often carried more authority than their female counterparts'.

As a final note, it is interesting to note that many of the women that founded Fashion Group did not take their husband's names, or they kept their first husband's name even as they remarried. Chase, Head, Rubinstein, and McCardell all chose not to use their husbands' names. Others, such as Elizabeth Arden, simply made up names as a marketing technique. While some of the highly successful women of the early years of FGI simply did not marry, many did. It was clearly a business decision not to use their husbands' names professionally, due in part to already having established themselves in their profession before the wedding. In the early 1930s, some of these women were already well entrenched in their professions, while others were just beginning to make a name for themselves.

## **Conclusion**

There were seventy-five charter members of Fashion Group. That number soon flourished and reached the hundreds. Those original seventy-five, though not all were individually addressed, may have appeared to be a somewhat diverse group. Not all the women had been raised in the upper echelons of New York society and not all had hit their stride in their chosen career paths; however, there were definite similarities among the women, including the fact that all the members were white females. A quote from a luncheon in November 1932 highlighted the fact that the organization was exclusively white; "In the first place we are all of European descent. Even those of us whose

ancestors came to these shores hundreds of years ago still treasure the traditions of literature, art and other achievements of our ancestral lands. Our artistic heritage is almost entirely European in origin...”<sup>74</sup> Beyond the fact that they were all white the founding members of FGI were well connected, well educated, well positioned, and did not believe they had enough authority in the fashion industry. Those similarities drew them together to form one of fashion’s foremost powers.

Fashion Group grew out of a need to create some kind of clearing house for American fashion and a need to help women become professionalized. The women that came together to form FGI were women that already had authority, they were editors and vice presidents of major publications and department stores; “This period also saw the emergence of fashion magazines... which published fashion editorials that established the trends for a given market segment and ensured the homogenization of consumer interests that was necessary to sustain a ready-to-wear industry.”<sup>75</sup> It is understandable that many of the women were geographically based in New York. New York is still today considered the fashion capital of the United States. The garment district on the west side of Manhattan had grown significantly in the latter half of the nineteenth century and by the 1930s eighty percent of American fashion business took place there.<sup>76</sup> Yet, from the very inception of Fashion Group, it had far reaching connections; it was based in New York, and many of the charter members lived in the city or surrounding suburbs but the members had networks that extended beyond the city. It is no surprise that just a few

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<sup>74</sup> Paul H. Nystrom, Speech to Fashion Group, 30 November 1932, pg. 7, Box 183, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>75</sup> Norma M. Rantisi, “The Competitive Foundations of Localized Learning and Innovation: The Case of Women’s Garment Production in New York City,” *Economic Geography* 78, no. 4 (October 2002): 447.

<sup>76</sup> Véronique Pouillard, “Design Piracy in the Fashion Industries of Paris and New York in the Interwar Years,” *The Business History Review* 85, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 327.

years after the first group was formed, regional groups began to be formed. The first regional group was founded in Cleveland, Ohio in 1932 according to a time line created by the New York Public Library.

Fashion Group International did not set out to make Paris obsolete (and they knew that would never be a possibility), but instead to give weight to the fashion already being created in the United States. Some claim that American style was a failure, “Although the movement managed to attract the public’s attention and generate considerable discussion about fashion’s role in American society, proponents of American fashion had trouble convincing female consumers to give up the ‘Paris idea.’”<sup>77</sup> FGI did not ask women to give up the “Paris idea” but instead offered up a cohesive “American idea” as an alternative. Fashion Group went onto accomplish most of the goals they set before themselves.

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<sup>77</sup> Marlis Schweitzer, “American Fashions for American Women: The Rise and Fall of Fashion Nationalism,” in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina Lee Blaszczyk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 131.

## CHAPTER TWO

Fashion Group soon began to grow as many regional chapters were created in states across the United States as well as twelve other countries. Fashion Group quickly gained authority within the fashion world, both in the United States as well as abroad, and worked hard to achieve its goals of promoting American design, create more and better roles for women in the fashion industry, and guide Americans towards better taste. This growth led to debates among the board of governors because FGI was not positive how and where it wanted to expand. According to the December bulletin from 1935, Fashion Group had formally come into existence with just seventy-five members but less than four years later it could “boast 748 members.”<sup>78</sup> Due to the broad membership every aspect of the industry was influenced by Fashion Group: designers, magazine editors, interior decorators, stylists and personal shoppers found in department stores all had membership. The group was able to expand to other large American cities and then soon after, across international borders. Fashion Group connected to a larger women’s social movement, experienced rapid growth both domestically and internationally, and faced hierarchical struggles that caused shifts within the structure of FGI and the goals of the organization.

### Women’s Organizations

In the second half of the nineteenth century, international nongovernmental organizations flourished. One source suggests that during the 1890s as many as ten were established every year.<sup>79</sup> Many of the new organizations were founded by women and

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<sup>78</sup> The Fashion Group Bulletin, Vol 1, no. 12, December 1935, pg. 1, Box 144, Folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>79</sup> Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 11.

aimed to address societal issues such as public health, labor reform, and poverty relief. These groups were seen as aiding the larger community and were often not considered to be stepping outside the traditional boundaries of the woman's role. As one author explained in 1949, "Women have mobilized themselves and their neighbors, in cooperation with other local organizations, to bring about community improvement in thousands of towns and cities in the United States... Large cities have felt the impact of women's natural interest in decent housing, and political machines are coming to know that women want more than empty platform promises."<sup>80</sup> This author suggests that women are naturally more inclined to be sympathetic to causes that improve the standard of living for the community as a whole. Women's organizations are often tied to larger issues and aim to achieve broad goals.

Fashion Group fits into this larger discussion because it focused on the labor force of the fashion industry; not the working class women in the industry, Fashion Group is not looking to aid factory workers, but the professionalization of the industry. Fashion Group wanted to create standards and help professional women reach areas that had been dominated by men. This is significant because the women mobilized and created Fashion Group before World War II and the formation of the United Nations.

In the pre-war era women's organizations had been alone in the movement to promote their economic rights. Now major labor organizations joined in, and the newly created world organization, the United Nations, and its affiliated bodies were mobilized as well... The commission on the Status of Women, early in 1948, adopted a series of resolutions regarding women's rights and notified the

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<sup>80</sup> Elizabeth Bradley. "Modern Women and Community Organization," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 3 (November 1949): 163.



Economic and Social Council that certain issues required “urgent action.” The demand for equal pay was one of them.<sup>81</sup>

The organization was part of a larger movement of women, who wanted change, who created their own community in order to achieve that change. Fashion Group’s membership was filled with middle and upper class women who wielded power yet still felt that, as women, they were at a disadvantage. A placement bureau was established within the first year of the organization’s existence to help more women find positions in fashion. They created courses to help other women have the resources needed to rise within a field that was becoming more standardized. “The third annual fashion training course sponsored by the Fashion Group, Inc., will open next Tuesday...Subjects covered in the sessions...include fabrics, color technique, accessories, costume fashions, cosmetics, home furnishings and fashion merchandising.”<sup>82</sup> The goals of these courses was to create an industry standard that could be applied to any area of fashion and that the women had the necessary skills in order to navigate the changing field. Many of the courses were led by men and women who were experts in their fields: top editors at magazines like *Vogue* and buyers and stylists from stores like Bergdorf Goodman.

Though Fashion Group’s primary concern was the improvement of the standards in the fashion industry and to promote women’s participation within it, the Group still concerned itself with the community concerns. The women hosted a toy drive to collect gifts for children living in poverty. It was reported on by the *New York Times*, “Members of the fashion group will attend their regular monthly luncheon tomorrow at the Hotel Astor bearing gifts for the poor of the Children’s Aid Society. Six hundred members,

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<sup>81</sup> Nitza Berkovitch, *From Motherhood to Citizenship: Women’s Rights and International Organizations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999): 110.

<sup>82</sup> “Fashion Group Course to Start,” *New York Times*, 3 February 1937.

with their guests are expected to place offerings under the Christmas trees.”<sup>83</sup> The women that participated felt themselves to have some social obligation to give back to their community within New York City, especially aid for those in poverty. This is a trend that is seen among many organizations that are headed by middle to upper class women. As Fashion Group matured and the social climate changed, the members addressed other ways that fashion was directly related to the well-being of the community, not just their immediate community but the global community as well. Fashion Group International had a very specific reason for coming into existence but that did not prevent the members from examining how they fit into the larger picture and what they owed their communities.

Dorothy Shaver made a speech at Fashion Group’s twentieth anniversary luncheon and she argued that good business created spaces that served the community beyond the sale of goods;

We have always felt that Lord & Taylor...is also a cross roads of the whole community, a center where ideas are exchanged. This is one of our most important functions...We are a meeting place for a thousand different publics, of which customers, artists, manufacturers, press, stockholders, employees and local citizens are but a few...In dealing with any situation, therefore, we can not think only of whether it will benefit or injure us, but of the effect it will have on all the different people whose thinking, activities and livelihood we help to shape.<sup>84</sup>

Shaver called members to serve their communities in the very nature of their business. In order to have healthy communities, members must implement good business practices that not only served their companies but also those who worked for and patronize the business. Avoiding predatory business habits was an easy way for members to serve their

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<sup>83</sup> “Fashion Group Aids Poor,” *New York Times*, 15 December 1941.

<sup>84</sup> Dorothy Shaver to Twentieth Anniversary Luncheon, 13 February 1951, pg. 5, Box 7, folder 34, Dorothy Shaver Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

communities and elevate the reputation of their industry. Often the role of fostering community fell to women and Shaver pointed that out to the audience. At the Twentieth Anniversary Luncheon Shaver said, “This is the obligation we have as individuals and as representatives of business. But...we women have a unique responsibility at this uneasy moment at the cross roads...an obligation to keep our perspective and preserve our composure. Otherwise, our lives will have no meaning and we will bring only confusion into the lives of those about us.”<sup>85</sup> Members were called to be better businesspeople as well as better stewards of the community, which is often the double role that women played. Many of the members of Fashion Group were trailblazers, they created new positions for themselves or were the first woman to hold a position in management in their company, yet were expected do that work as well as the social work outside of business hours.

Also, the women attended special lectures that covered a range of topics that were relevant to the current political environment: the rise of Nazism, communism, and the Great Depression’s effect on fashion are just a few. One such lecture was reported on in the *New York Times*. The article described a presentation by Dr. George Gallup, during which he refuted Hitler’s claim that the general population was unintelligent. He argued instead that if the sample was large enough then one could see that the general population was actually quite intelligent. The discussion of Hitler led to a presentation about a looming European crisis that would affect the costs of certain resources.<sup>86</sup> This would interest members because they held positions that tracked trends as well as oversaw

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<sup>85</sup> Dorothy Shaver to Twentieth Anniversary Luncheon, 13 February 1951, pg. 6, Box 7, folder 34, Dorothy Shaver Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

<sup>86</sup> “Gallup Says People Show Intelligence,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1939.

production of goods. Also, it is important to remember that members were well educated and had extensive networks, the social climate of Europe would have impacted their lives, both professionally and personally.

Like other organizations, Fashion Group was concerned with larger issues and kept up to date on any activity that may influence their own industry. Fashion Group members was sure to connect fashion to these larger trends. An article in the *New York Times* from late 1936 discussed the coming fashion trends from Paris; it was predicted that society in Paris would be restricted heavily in the following year due to social and economic changes, thus “the flaring skirt for daytime wear and exaggerated shoulder fullness will disappear from the fashion picture.”<sup>87</sup> It seemed that the trends coming from Paris reflected the fear and economizing that society had already started to feel, which led to all of Western fashion adopting those more simple lines. The looming conflict in Europe was not only relevant to the organization in a social sense but also because a disruption in Paris affected nearly every aspect of the fashion industry. Paris produced the most well-known fashion designers (even if the designer was not French) before World War II and almost all trends came from there. Valerie Steele argued “that Paris has long dominated fashion cannot be credited to any particular spirit of frivolity, innovation, or taste on the part of Parisians. Nor is it the product of individual creative genius, although this concept continues to play a large part in the mythology of Paris fashion.”<sup>88</sup>

There is no denying the role Paris played in leading fashion since the seventeenth century, but when the Paris fashion industry reestablished itself after World War II “the supremacy of Paris was repeatedly challenged by other cities, such as Florence (and later

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<sup>87</sup> “Social Flux Forecast,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1936.

<sup>88</sup> Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 12-14.

Milan), London and New York.”<sup>89</sup> The social climate and the looming war allowed Americans to create a fashion capital and even after Paris returned to its former glory, Americans refused to step aside. Also, large social events in London, such as the 1937 coronation of George VI, affected the styles of the year. That same article mentioned how the approaching coronation brought a revival of the Empire silhouette because it looked well with a court train and emphasized femininity.<sup>90</sup> Members were interested in this information because it directly related to their business. The coronation of George VI could affect the designs produced by Americans as well as the styles that customers wanted in their sitting rooms, not to mention members were ladies of refinement and would naturally be interested in global events.

This global perspective can be seen in one lecture, which included reading a piece by Richard Dillon, Jr. who had been to eastern Asia. Dillon emphasized the fact that Fashion Group operated in an ever shrinking world. As communication and travel accelerated, Fashion Group had to address the new influences upon American society. Dillon wrote about the influence of Asia upon western design;

The airplane has brought the Far East within striking distance of the middle-class traveler, both from the standpoint of cost and time, and this has had bearing on the matter. These Oriental design influences were once in the province of a sophisticated minority, but now they wind up in low-cost housing, which seems all to the good... The tendency of architecture and landscaping to incorporate Eastern ideas has had an undeniable effect on home furnishings of all sorts—fabrics, furniture and accessories. We now have many contemporary American products that reflect Oriental inspiration... It may be that the need for serenity, as exemplified in Japanese houses, has a strong psychological appeal to pressured

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<sup>89</sup> Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 14.

<sup>90</sup> “Social Flux Forecast,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1936.

Americans of the aspirin age...Free space, which now seems to be one of the greatest luxuries in life, *does* appeal to us.<sup>91</sup>

The post war era saw many changes in American society. An important change for members to follow closely was the growth of the middle class and their ability to influence trends, access goods previously unavailable to them, and demand that companies cater to them in ways previously only seen by the wealthy. Fashion Group, in order to remain relevant, required members to learn about cultures that were outside the scope of The West.

### **Growth**

Interest in Fashion Group was found among fashion professionals across the country and in 1932 FGI began to establish regional groups in other cities across the United States. Members actively fostered connections across borders which allowed the new regional groups to flourish. As early as 1931 Fashion Group leaders introduced the organization to foreign and domestic entities. In a bulletin from December 1931 two brief announcements show examples of how the members introduced the newly formed organization. One such announcement was written by Dessie M. Barr of the Fashion Coordination Bureau; “[D]uring my goodwill envoy trip to Paris I presented the greetings of The Fashion Group...such greetings were greatly received by the Minister of Commerce, the President of the Chamber of Commerce and many other commercial officials.”<sup>92</sup> According to the timeline created by the New York Public Library, the first regional group was founded in Cleveland, Ohio in 1932; other domestic regional groups

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<sup>91</sup> Richard Dillon, Jr., “The Influence of the Far East on Design,” 8 October 1953, Box 76, folder 8, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>92</sup> Dessie M. Barr, Bulletin, 20 December 1931, Box 144, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

were soon established in the following years. In the Regional Group News newsletter of February 1956, ten regional chapters were reported: Atlanta, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. (In a bulletin from November 1964, San Francisco's regional group is honored for being the oldest regional group<sup>93</sup> which shows some inconsistencies in the record keeping of FGI) Aside from the Pacific Northwest, most of the country was represented and the newsletter showed that each chapter was active in hosting luncheons, holding fashion shows, and publishing content.<sup>94</sup> Stylists and officers went to Paris to see the newest trends and fashion shows since the inception of the organization, however, Fashion Group officially went international in February 1956 when Paris established a regional group, though the name would not be changed until 1988.<sup>95</sup> The new regional groups allowed for Fashion Group to grow in membership, yet created new problems that needed to be addressed by headquarters in New York. The regional members were originally similar to the members in New York, both in their socioeconomic backgrounds and in the type of work that they did.

Fashion Group was not prepared for such a marked interest in their organization outside of New York. As more women called for their own regional chapters, Fashion Group was forced to examine what it stood for and how its standards and goals could work in nations that had different rules and regulations. This was especially true when

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<sup>93</sup> "We've heard from..." Fashion Group Bulletin, November 1964, pg. 15, Box 147, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>94</sup> Regional Group News, February 1956, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>95</sup> "Fashion Group International records, c.1930-1997," Revised 2007, Finding aid at the Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, New York, [http://archives.nypl.org/mss/980#descriptive\\_identity](http://archives.nypl.org/mss/980#descriptive_identity)

women in other nations began to organize their own chapters; the idea of allowing regional chapters to grow in foreign countries alarmed some members of Fashion Group and argued against growth beyond the United States. In a 1935 meeting of the Board of Governors it was debated whether or not Fashion Group was an entity only for Americans. The minutes of the meeting show that some members did not believe international groups would have the same goals and ethics that were held by the New York office. The minutes of a meeting in 1935 stated, “Mrs. Chase mentioned the dangers with relation to members of the press, because of the subsidizing of the English press. Miss Shaver made a motion which was duly seconded that we lay over the matter of the London situation, allow Paris to proceed as at present, appoint a Committee to study the foreign situation and policy, and to report on their findings at the next meeting.”<sup>96</sup> This is particularly interesting because Chase worked as editor in chief of *Vogue*, an international corporation, and often helped place young women in positions overseas.

Attached to the minutes for the meeting was a proposed resolution that suggested that the only foreign regional groups that would be recognized by New York headquarters were those groups founded by Americans living abroad or women who worked for American firms. The resolution stated that “the Fashion Group is a peculiarly American institution. American women have been engaged in more and wider types of fashion work for a longer period of time than those of any other nation... We feel that it is our privilege and our prerogative to keep such standards and experience under the leadership of the organization most experienced in this comparatively new

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<sup>96</sup> Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Fashion Group, Inc., May 8, 1935, Fashion Group International Archives, Fashion Group International Headquarters.



profession...<sup>97</sup> The claim that American women engaged in fashion work longer than other nations is indicative of how members saw America as exceptional. There was a certain amount of arrogance found in the organization, even as they persistently looked to France for trends. It is not surprising that some members saw Fashion Group as a uniquely American organization because the idea that America was exceptional was an integral part of the support of American designers. Dorothy Shaver addressed the Fashion Group annual meeting in 1952 and spoke of the spirit of American design;

It's a spirit that their designers, being American, have breathed into them, something intangible yet inescapable, something implicit in the style, the fabric, the workmanship, yet something that transcends them all. It's the expression of a whole way of life. To strangers it tells at a glance that we are a free people, a happy people, a prosperous people. It is a wordless yet unmistakable announcement of the difference between Communist rule and democratic government... Today, because of the American designer's ability to interpret social change in feminine terms, the American women's clothes are an expression of herself as an individual yet also as a representative of a cultural pattern. To have achieved all this it seems to me that American designers have had to be a combination of artist, expert craftsman and social scientist. The ability to create beautiful clothes is a rare talent in itself, but to create beautiful clothes that capture the essence of a whole social revolution is rather overwhelming. All of us who are here today personally have been involved in that revolution... Is it surprising that women everywhere are striving to adopt the American Look? Is it surprising that the French couture no longer reigns supreme in the fashion world but must share its throne with our designers?<sup>98</sup>

After the war, with Paris and London in ruins due to bombing, the United States had the economic power and infrastructure to take the lead and many Americans believed the United States stepped into its rightful role of world power. This is not to say members of

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<sup>97</sup> Proposed resolution, attached to Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Fashion Group, Inc., May 8, 1935, Fashion Group International Archives, Fashion Group International Headquarters.

<sup>98</sup> Dorothy Shaver, Speech given at Fashion Group Annual Meeting, 13 November 1952, pg. 1-4, Box 76, folder 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Fashion Group did not appreciate international designers, they still offered Parisian designs in their department stores, however they did emphasize the American designer's ability to create clothing that was particularly sensitive to an American woman's needs and lifestyle and truly believed that the life of an American woman was exceptionally different than the lives of women in other nations.

In October 1935 it was announced in the bulletin that a Fashion Group of Great Britain had been established. Though it had the same name, the two groups did not seem to consider themselves part of the same entity, they had similar goals but did not act as if they were all members of the same organization. In the May 1939 bulletin, Fashion Group published a small blurb about the British Fashion Group and the struggles they faced to achieve their goal "to revolutionize public taste."<sup>99</sup> The two groups may have had a rocky start, but eventually the British Fashion Group was firmly under the umbrella of New York's Fashion Group. Even in February 1956 Fashion Group did not seem sure of how to interact with international regional groups. In a bulletin from that year a page was titled "Regional Group News" announced the inaugural luncheon of the "Allied Paris Group."<sup>100</sup> Though the Paris group was announced in the bulletin, and best wishes were extended, there was a distinction made: no other group is labeled as an allied group.

### **Growing Pains**

Fashion Group faced some of the same struggles that other international groups had faced before. One of the biggest problems was the structure of the chapters and the hierarchy of the various regional groups. As shown by an invitation created by the

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<sup>99</sup> "The Fashion Group Bulletin," pg. 6, May 1939, Box 144, Folder 11, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>100</sup> "Regional Group News," Fashion Group, Inc. Bulletin, February 1956, pg. 5, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Archives and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.

London Fashion Group, each regional group was associated with the larger organization but clearly remained on a lower rung than that of the New York Fashion Group. The invitation stated that “The Fashion Group of London is part of the International Fashion Group which is a non-profit professional association of women in the fashion industry and fashion related areas.”<sup>101</sup> Fashion Group in New York was the head of the organization, it held the authority to approve or remove the regional officers and housed the executive board. Los Angeles Fashion Group wrote to the executive director in New York and confirmed the new officers and defended each officer’s ability and qualifications to hold the position. They closed the letter with a gentle, “We look forward to hearing from you regarding the approval of the Board of Governors.”<sup>102</sup> The various regional groups had to wait for approval of any nominations that the individual group had already made as shown by various documents that were sent to the groups; “Your Slate of Officers has been unanimously approved. Congratulations!”<sup>103</sup> was a common telegram and letter to come across in the archives. The Los Angeles Fashion Group had to wait for a reply from Fashion Group Headquarters in New York that confirmed that their appointments were okay before the elected officers could officially take control. Headquarters seemed to make approvals in a timely manner, but it could still be frustrating for some of the officers who were ready to begin work as soon as they were elected.

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<sup>101</sup> Night of the Stars invitation, 1995, Box 174, Folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>102</sup> Nadie Normandin to Eleanor McMillen, 21 March 1975, Box 174, Folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>103</sup> Edna Sivek to Nadine Normandin, 7 April 1975, Box 174, Folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

The members did not take the election of officers lightly; it was a serious process to establish a regional Group and to elect officers that would hold the position often for two or three years. Members did not get nominated without putting considerable time and effort into the group, as shown by the justification made for the nomination of Miss Marylyn Lobb to the position of treasurer; “Miss Lobb is affiliated with the Wool Bureau, and though a reasonably new member, has been involved with every major project we’ve undertaken in the past four years.”<sup>104</sup> The fact that Lobb was still considered a new member after four years speaks to how important it was to the members to be active within the organization. New members were not able to take high ranking positions until they had proven themselves on various committees and had helped with large events hosted by the Group. Holding an office at the regional level could advance one’s career and was something that many members wished to achieve even though it brought a lot of added work.

When women did become an officer they were reminded of what an undertaking the position entailed. For example, when Janet Plant was elected she received notification that said, “Congratulations on your election as Regional Director of the Los Angeles Fashion Group. It is an honor and a serious responsibility. You and your officers and board face a difficult task of leading the Los Angeles group to its former position of preeminence among regional groups.”<sup>105</sup> A lot of pressure was placed upon the officers to help create the best Group possible, one that was financially stable and able to host the many luncheons and events, as well as help launch and further careers of members. If the

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<sup>104</sup> Sylvia Sheppard to Eleanore McMillen, 1 November 1972, Box 174, Folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>105</sup> The Nominating Committee to Janet Plant, 9 September 1982, Box 174, Folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

officers were not able to carry out the duties of the position, they were asked to resign. In a letter written to Helene Spear, Casey Tolar wrote, “Historically, over the last two years, this was one of the reasons I had to ask for the resignation of Sally Goldsby for, as Secretary it was her responsibility to provide such minutes within a week of the meeting. She seemed to take for ever to do this, often as long as three/four weeks, and even erroneously minuted and not actioned properly. The Committee complained bitterly of this inefficiency.”<sup>106</sup> Other documents in the archives show similar stories; women that were unable to perform their duties efficiently enough for Headquarters or for the regional officers were removed. This shows that this organization was not just a group of women who gathered occasionally to lunch; these women had specific goals in mind and a timeline to achieve those goals.

The events that officers oversaw included regular meetings as well as large affairs such as galas or fashion shows, and often representatives from New York Headquarters were invited to them. When Lord & Taylor opened a store in the Philadelphia area, the regional director of the Philadelphia Fashion Group reached out to Dorothy Shaver, the president of Lord & Taylor, and wrote, “May we of Philadelphia Fashion Group extend our hardest welcome. We would like to date you up to speak at one of our regular monthly luncheon meetings near the time of the opening of your store.”<sup>107</sup> Shaver accepted the invitation and made a speech at the monthly luncheon, which was reported on by the local newspaper. An invitation to a representative from headquarters was an excellent way for regional directors to display the types of events they hosted, as well as

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<sup>106</sup> Casey Tolar to Helene Spear, 13 February 1991, Box 174, Folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>107</sup> Virginia McCone to Dorothy Shaver, letter, 8 March 1954, Box 7, folder 34, Dorothy Shaver Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

how well their chapter thrived under their leadership, it also gave headquarters an opportunity to evaluate how well regional chapters maintained Fashion Group goals and events.

International groups were required to gain approval for any appointments of officers as well. Archival records show many letters flowing between international groups and New York Headquarters that convey some frustration on both side. One letter, written to Helene Spear in London, shows some of that frustration. Spear had taken over duties as the director of London Fashion Group without gaining the approval of the Executive Committee and she received a letter from headquarters stating “This is the only way a Committee member can be appointed onto the Board and that is through the screening and interviewing of members until appointed to the Executive Committee by the Nominating board.”<sup>108</sup> It was clear that the international groups in particular were frustrated by the need to wait for approval from New York, which, combined with other complaints, led to some snarky letters sent back and forth. Even some of the domestic groups chafed at having to wait for approval from women who did not appreciate the climate in which the regional group was working.

Yet this did not prevent the hierarchy of groups found at the international level to be continued within countries’ own borders. International groups had a regional director but then below that main group there would be other groups that were watched over in other cities. A leader of the Mexico City Group wrote to New York, “One of the more important things happening is the creation of the first group outside Mexico City. This new group is beeing [*sic*] formed in Guadalajara, one city that has a strong fashion

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<sup>108</sup> Casey Tolar to Helene Spear, letter, 13 February 1991, Box 174, Folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

movement, where great moral quality women with a strong leadership capacity work.”<sup>109</sup> Mexico City Fashion Group heavily influenced the development of the smaller Guadalajara Group and oversaw the election of officials there and various other aspects of the establishment of the group. In an examination of various female led non-governmental organizations in North and South America, it can be seen that as groups grow they often tend to become more hierarchical and rigid: funding shifts, areas of responsibility are more explicitly defined, and the goals and purpose of the group evolve.<sup>110</sup> As shown, Fashion Group International experienced similar growing pains, the organization is non-profit and thus had to shift in order to maintain funding but also needed to become more rigid in order to keep making progress towards goals. More members meant more money needed to be handled, which created a need for accountants and lawyers to be associated with the group, as well as other professionals that do not fall directly in the fashion industry.

The various regional groups did not always appreciate the requirements placed upon them by headquarters; one of the largest problems seemed to be the requirement to pay dues. The international chapters were also required to pay dues, and the method and amount were often in debate. Letters between New York and London are a prime example. Headquarters wrote to the president of London Fashion Group, “I would further urge you to include the \$30 net that all non U.S. Groups pay to Headquarters in New York...with regard to expressing dues in Sterling not dollars, this is not something that

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<sup>109</sup> Maria Duran to Leonor Benson, 9 October 1990, Box 174, Folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>110</sup> Lisa Markowitz and Karen W. Tice, “Paradoxes of Professionalization: Parallel Dilemmas in Women’s Organizations in the Americas,” *Gender and Society* 16, no. 6 (December 2002): 950.

we do with other groups...”<sup>111</sup> The dues that were required of international groups seems to have put a strain on the relationship between New York and the groups. A letter, sent from the regional director in London to the Fashion Group’s headquarters shows that strain. The London Fashion Group believed that a decision had been made unilaterally by headquarters to increase the dues required, without taking into consideration the financial situation in the United Kingdom, or the fact that the London Group had little to no support from corporations.

The FGI does not have the industry or social cache in London, that it has in New York...In London, unlike New York, the majority of our members pay their own fees, and do not get them refunded by their companies. This means that we do not have a bottomless Corporate pocket to address.<sup>112</sup>

London Fashion Group believed that the domestic regional groups had an advantage. There was much debate whether the dues should be paid in American dollars or British pounds, not to mention there was an economic depression in London during the late twentieth century that put a strain on all members’ ability to pay.

The difficulty in collecting dues and finding funding is not unique to this particular organization. Dues are often not enough to meet the needs of the organizations, thus donations are accepted from sponsors. Sponsorship could be useful in obtaining enough money for the continuation of the organization but led to other issues. This was pointed out by Lisa Markowitz and Karen Tice in their work on dilemmas found across women’s organizations. They argued “[T]he need to comply with donor mandates complicates and increases staff workloads and...can serve to expand the social distance

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<sup>111</sup> Barbara Blair Randall to Helene Spear, 12 November 1991, Box 174, Folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>112</sup> Helene Spear to Leonore Benson, 30 October 1991, Box 174, Folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



between staff and stakeholders.”<sup>113</sup> As more money comes from donors in order to pay for directors’ salaries, to fund scholarships, and to host events, the more time directors must put towards paperwork to create full transparency of how those funds are allocated. This creates a larger bureaucracy in order to fill out all the paper work required.

The amount requested of each member was not the only problem. Regional chapters believed that preferential treatment was given to others and that caused friction particularly between New York, London, and Paris. New York grew frustrated as international groups failed to pay dues year after year. Maggi Hamilton, from New York, wrote to the president of Paris Fashion Group, “As you know, we have received nothing for 1980 or 1981. We have looked into the recent history of dues payment from the Paris chapter and find it is not in keeping with our policy of payments from the Regions...And, after you have informed us of the amount of services you will be requiring, we will renegotiate your dues for 1981.”<sup>114</sup> New York Headquarters believed that the dues were acceptable for all the services that were provided to members, which included access to the directory and the newsletter, but this remained a persistent problem as seen by the date in the letter.

Paris was the first group that decided to adjust their dues payments without express permission from New York Headquarters, over time Paris required members to pay less and excused dues more often to the horror of New York. In an attempt to place all the groups on the same tier, Fashion Group’s executive director stipulated that Paris must increase the dues owed until they were contributing as much as the other

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<sup>113</sup> Lisa Markowitz and Karen W. Tice, “Paradoxes of Professionalization: Parallel Dilemmas in Women’s Organizations in the Americas,” *Gender and Society* 16, no. 6 (December 2002): 949.

<sup>114</sup> Maggi Hamilton to Nelly-C. Rodi, 2 July 1981, Box 176, Folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

international groups. Once again Maggi Hamilton from headquarters reached out to the president of the Paris chapter, “For 1982 dues we will require will again increase the amount until Paris reaches the required dues structure of the entire Fashion Group Regional Groups. We cannot continue to have a lesser fee for Paris only.”<sup>115</sup> Paris Fashion Group appeared to have been granted a reduced rate when the group was not financially stable and had no intention of increasing the rate once stable. This caused some upset in London, who already believed that their dues had been increased without their consent, when it became known that Paris’ dues had not been forthcoming. London was able to use the distance between Paris and New York as leverage when it came to their own negotiations over due. Helene Spear of London wrote to New York, “The FGI does not have a Chapter in Milan; the relation with Paris is at arms length and they haven’t paid dues for the past six years. To eliminate London would most certainly raise questions about the “International” credibility of the FGI.”<sup>116</sup> If the international chapters withdrew their membership, Fashion Group would cease to exist as an international organization.

Difficulties arose due to language barriers and distance. In discussing the distribution of bulletins and news updates in the Paris Fashion Group, it was realized that the bulletins were not being consumed as much as the New York Headquarters hoped. Maggi Hamilton wrote to the Paris chapter, “You talked frankly about not using our services. Bulletins, News Flashes and Directories have been sent to you in numbers based on our membership count for Paris...Now, you’ve described the distribution on a

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<sup>115</sup> Maggi Hamilton and Lee Ennis to Nelly Claire Rodi-le Louet, 9 April 1981, Box 176, Folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>116</sup> Helene Spear to Leonore Benson, 30 October 1991, Box 174, Folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

table, at the door, at your meetings and the language barrier.”<sup>117</sup> Groups became frustrated with the fact that they owed dues to New York yet did not receive the same benefits as the domestic groups did. Bulletins and announcements printed by New York were released in English, this frustrated some of the groups that were in countries that spoke other languages. Though the correspondence between groups was in English, reading the letters makes it obvious that many of the regional officers were not native English speakers. They were at a clear disadvantage when it came to using the resources provided and discussing business with the executive officers. And while the officers may have had a working knowledge of English that did not mean that the general members of international groups knew any English. This became a particular problem when groups were established within Korea and Japan.

### **Structural Changes**

Even before Fashion Group established regional groups, its membership had grown so much that leaders deemed it necessary to create subcommittees according to the particular careers within the fashion industry. Millinery, interior design, accessories, and more subcommittees held their own meetings. In the annual report for 1952 membership was listed at 2,407. Of that number nearly thirteen hundred were members of the New York Fashion Group.<sup>118</sup> Subcommittees were a necessity, that way women who were active in various aspects of fashion could receive more direct feedback. As the subcommittees grew, each hosted a monthly meeting and members could attend specialized meetings according to the work they did. The New York Fashion Group aired

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<sup>117</sup> Maggi Hamilton to Nelly-C. Rodi, 2 July 1981, Box 174, Folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>118</sup> “Annual Report,” The Fashion Group Bulletin, January 1953, pg. 7, Box 145, folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

a panel discussion that was held in October 1949, hosted by Nancy Craig for the radio audience. During the live broadcast Craig said, “This is Nancy Craig again, gazing out at some 700 people, members and guests, gathered in the Biltmore Hotel at a luncheon of the Fashion Group. The Fashion Group is a large organization of women, all of whom are connected with the fashion industry, all of them skilled at their jobs which contribute to keeping the American woman the best dressed in the world.”<sup>119</sup> An audience of this size is unwieldy and explained the need for subcommittees according to field, where special events could still draw most of the membership, the monthly meetings could be more manageable. Also, the fact that Craig explained who and what Fashion Group indicated that the broadcast may have been listened to more than just people who were already affiliated with Fashion Group. This could have served to raise awareness of the organization and even serve as a way to draw more members in.

Though the international groups may have had their differences with the New York Headquarters, the members did want to remain part of the larger Fashion Group, Inc. because of the perks that were provided. One of the main benefits of being associated with Fashion Group International was the directory that was given to all members. The directory helped foster personal connections across borders and allowed women to create their own networks in any city that was represented. Maggi Hamilton from headquarters declared, “Without exception, including Tokyo and Korea, all groups have acknowledged the value of the Directory and other publications and have now been sending up-dated information.”<sup>120</sup> The directory, mailed annually, allowed women visiting various

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<sup>119</sup> Nancy Craig, Live broadcast of Fashion Group Luncheon, 13 October 1949, Box 94, folder 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>120</sup> Maggi Hamilton to Nelly-C. Rodi, 2 July 1981, Box 176, Folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

locations to make direct connections within the local fashion scene; it provided an instant network, without the time and footwork that non-group members would have had to invest.

New York Headquarters worked hard to make sure that the directory had the most up to date information for all the listed members, sending letters to regional officers requesting information on all members of good standing. Lee Ennis wrote, “Our 1982 International Directory will be going to our members later this year. We would like to have an up-date of our Paris Region to include in the Directory. What we have now is old, and I am sure out-of-date.”<sup>121</sup> The directory listed the name of each member, her place of employment, and her position within that company. This provided a wealth of information for any member that was interested in a particular city’s fashion scene or a specific aspect of the fashion industry, such as merchandising or interior design. The various groups communicated with each other regularly as shown by a letter from a member of the Los Angeles Fashion Group to the executive director of The Fashion Group in New York City. Nadine Normadin wrote, “It was so nice talking to you today and I appreciate your giving me the information on the Regional Director in Paris. I certainly hope I am able to reach her when there.”<sup>122</sup> The members were able to foster their own sense of community within the larger framework of the fashion industry. This was beneficial to members that may come from smaller regional groups, like the ones found in Cleveland or Dallas, but it also benefited members who lived in larger cities; for

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<sup>121</sup> Lee Ennis to Danielle Orsini, 1981, Box 176, Folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>122</sup> Nadine Normadin to Eleanor McMillen, 21 March 1975, Box 174, Folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

example, members who worked for larger corporations could court the buyers of department stores in various areas of the United States.

Women traveled and made direct contact with other members of Fashion Group across the globe; whether for business on their own or as part of a regional group trip women created networks that crossed borders. The directory provided a way for them to meet up with members and groups so that they could benefit from the local knowledge and participate in local meetings. In 1981, Paris Fashion Group planned to visit both the United States and Japan. The New York Headquarters took steps to assure that the Paris Fashion Group was able to visit specific firms: Revlon, Estée Lauder, Saks, Bloomingdales, Vogue, Glamour, Cotton Incorporated Fabric library, Ameritex, and the Fashion Institute of Technology.<sup>123</sup> One of the best ways for women to advance within the fashion world was to foster relationships that would provide them opportunities later. Women, even highly privileged women, often had a harder time rising to top positions because they had less access to mentoring and organizational information. Women traditionally were blocked from “career advancement opportunities such as networks, mentoring, and peer support.”<sup>124</sup> Fashion Group explicitly tried to provide those very things through membership; women would have the opportunity to find mentors and peers that would continue to support them as they rose to positions of power in their chosen field.

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<sup>123</sup> Nicole Totterreau to Helen Galland, 30 April 1981, Box 176, Folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>124</sup> Jouhararh M. Abalkhail and Barbara Allan, “Women’s Career Advancement: Mentoring and Networking in Saudi Arabia and the UK,” *Human Resource Development International* 18, no. 2 (2015): 155.

Fashion Group Headquarters also hosted regional directors meetings. The meetings drew all of the regional directors to New York in order to foster bonds among the directors, as well as guide the direction the regional groups move. At a regional directors meeting in 1953, seventeen directors attended from all over the United States, each director was introduced during the luncheon.<sup>125</sup> As Fashion Group aged, photos from regional directors meetings often showed a more diverse group. Regional directors were more likely to be women of color, especially the directors from California, Hawaii, and some cities in the south.

### **Conclusion**

Though Fashion Group International was similar to other women's organizations from the same period or earlier, there are key differences. The Fashion Group was not a trade union; it did not have the same goals as a union might. Working class women in labor unions have been able to improve wages and working conditions and protect themselves against management and create a certain amount of representation for themselves. Fashion Group was not invested in those goals.

Class inequalities *among women* are greater than ever before. Highly educated, upper-middle-class women—a group that is vastly overrepresented both in media depictions of women at work and in the wider political discourse about gender inequality—have far better opportunities than their counterparts in earlier generations did. Yet their experience is a world apart from that of the much larger numbers of women workers who struggle to make ends meet in poorly paid clerical, retail, restaurant, and hotel jobs; in hospitals and nursing homes; or as housekeepers, nannies, and homecare workers.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Virginia Pope, Speech given at Fashion Group Regional Directors Meeting, 18 June 1953, Box 76, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>126</sup> Ruth Milkman, *On Gender, Labor, and Inequality* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 2.

Fashion Group, for all that it did try to better the fashion industry for women, did not aim to help working class women. It is important to stress that the garment and factory workers were not the women that joined Fashion Group. The organization had a very specific group of women in mind, who already worked within a professional setting, when it developed aid programs, workshops, and lectures. That is not to say that the women who worked in the professional world of fashion did not face discrimination or were not underrepresented.

Even as regional groups were established, the overall tone of Fashion Group remained Eurocentric; Paris and New York were hailed as the fashion capitals that set the trends. Milan, the Italian fashion capital known for its own fashion week, has not ever had a Fashion Group established there, even though it did not emerge as *the* fashion center of Italy until after World War II and that emergence was greatly influenced by the United States. According to Merlo and Polese the rise of Milan was directly related to the United States' aid in the growth of Italian production, creation of a demand for Italian goods in the American market, and its support of Milan "in its challenge to Parisian dominance."<sup>127</sup> Some Italians did join the Paris Fashion Group or joined as independent members, which required special permission from headquarters. The majority of the chapters were founded within American cities and European countries: Seoul, Tokyo, and Mexico City are exceptions, with chapters established later. Though even before the establishment of chapters, fashion industries across the globe took notice of FGI, as shown by a letter Dorothy Shaver received from a Japanese department store. Y. Tsuchiya, a Japanese business man, wrote, "Japanese department store people are anxious

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<sup>127</sup> Elisabetta Merlo and Francesca Polese, "Turning Fashion into Business: The Emergence of Milan as an International Fashion Hub," *The Business History Review* 80, no. 3 (Autumn 2006), 421-423.



to know more details of your speech [*sic*]. We will be much obliged if you will kindly inform us about your philosophy in printed matter or pamphlet...<sup>128</sup> In the post-war era, the United States emerged “as a model society” and business people around the world were quick to adopt American business practices.<sup>129</sup>

Like other women led organizations that grew beyond their immediate locale, Fashion Group experienced the development of a structured hierarchy and the growing pains associated with that. Leaders had to create standards for the development of new chapters and address concerns and complaints that regional chapters had over how headquarters led Fashion Group. Even as Fashion Group International grew and changed during those first few decades of its existence, it still remained true to its original purpose: to help women navigate the fashion industry and rise to positions of power. It was able to maintain those goals by creating bonds that crossed both state and national borders, which allowed women to create the networks necessary to their success and allowed women to have a career in fashion no matter where they lived.

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<sup>128</sup> Y. Tsuchiya to Dorothy Shaver, letter, 9 April 1951, Box 7, folder 34, Dorothy Shaver Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

<sup>129</sup> Elisabetta Merlo and Francesca Polese, “Turning Fashion into Business: The Emergence of Milan as an International Fashion Hub,” *The Business History Review* 80, no. 3 (Autumn 2006), 424.

## CHAPTER THREE

“I am talking to probably the most knowing fashion audience that can be gathered together anywhere. You are the people who create, adapt, produce, sell and publicize fashion for a country that consumes more fashion than any country in the world;”<sup>130</sup> so starts Mrs. Ballard’s address to Fashion Group in March 1952. She attended the meeting to update members on the new trends that she had seen at Fashion Week in Paris. Fashion Group provided a way for women to help boost others in their fields. This was possible because Fashion Group hosted networking opportunities, options for continued education, and professional and personal support to its members, while at the same time maintained a superior attitude towards the average American woman and believed that she needed guidance when it came to good taste.

### **Networking Opportunities**

The luncheons that Fashion Group hosted were an integral part of how the organization helped members network, they provided a way for members to mingle with new people and new ideas. Luncheons provided a venue for new trends to be discussed, not just trends in what style of clothing were fashionable, but also trends in the economy and how post-war suburbia changed the way department stores interacted with customers. As the suburbs grew, there was rising concern about the future of the department store. In one speech, given at a cosmetics luncheon, a Mrs. Hodge Lane pointed out the rise of the supermarket and how it infringed upon the older department stores;

“This new type of departmentalized store, now called a supermarket, begins with food because food means traffic and traffic means sales. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this statement. But food is merely the foundation

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<sup>130</sup> Mrs. Ballard, Speech given at Fashion Group’s French Show, 12 March 1952, pg. 1, Box 76, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

around which the so-called junior department store is developing by leaps and bounds... And so around this number one traffic builder the supermarket is progressively adding one department after another... The true supermarket, the one that is destined more and more to revolutionize all merchandising is primarily to be found on the highways and byways of America.”<sup>131</sup>

Members of Fashion Group were businesswomen first. They are concerned with making a profit and understanding their customer base. Meetings were dominated by discussion of traffic and the desire for easy access to parking. Fashion Group members, though often found in large cities, worked to help each other understand the circumstances of post-war era United States and what women, whose role had shifted, looked for in an ideal shopping experience: an experience that was quick, convenient, and available during non-traditional business hours.

In the same speech, Lane emphasized the profits that could be made by selling products in supermarkets;

In 1951 supermarkets sold 8.5% of the total retail sales of Toilet Goods in the U.S. And yet, A&P, Kroger & Safeway, who have approximately 8,000 stores, have done nothing more than to make certain toilet goods laboratory tests in a few selected stores... I have recently made a comparative study of several toilet goods departments in department stores, variety stores, chain drug stores and I am, of course, familiar with the supermarkets. And I am firmly convinced that any toilet goods item which can be packaged can be sold in the supermarkets.<sup>132</sup>

Members had to adjust to new points of sale. Many of the women worked in large department stores in cities, or owned their own businesses, so there was a need to learn new ways to gain access to customers, especially as more brands became national and

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<sup>131</sup> Mrs. Hodge Lane, Speech given at Fashion Group Cosmetic Luncheon, 6 May 1952, pg. 5-6, Box 76, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>132</sup> Mrs. Hodge Lane, Speech given at Fashion Group Cosmetic Luncheon, 6 May 1952, pg. 8-9, Box 76, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

looked to create brand loyalty across the small towns of America. This quote is also interesting because it shows the rise of the supermarket, a single shop with plenty of parking that was able to provide anything a woman in the 1950s may need, that way she did not need to run to multiple stores downtown. This changed the way Americans shopped and the fact that that Fashion Group was concerned about supermarkets showed that change affected a wide variety of industries.

Research was presented at the regular luncheons. Florence Goldin, an advertising woman, addressed the millinery luncheon in early 1953 to explain how to sell more hats through print. In order to prepare for that meeting, Goldin conducted thorough research;

With the list of research questions set, we had the basis for our actual work. I made a few phone calls—lined up contacts from 57<sup>th</sup> Street to 14<sup>th</sup> Street—and we were ready to go. I, and my intrepid assistant ventured forth into the hallowed salons, eavesdropped in seething millinery departments and asked questions everywhere. That research program—believe me, limited though it was—was thorough. You can rely on the fact that it was unbiased and objective. I had no axe to grind in any direction, none of our clients is concerned directly with the millinery business. I was truly looking for facts that might affect advertising millinery, and we found them!<sup>133</sup>

She performed twenty-two interviews and found that of those women interviewed, twenty of them ranked flattery as the most important thing when they shopped for hats. Goldin argued that millinery, as a whole, had “lost sight” of the customer. This indicates that the consumer of post-war America had changing needs and wants and that as the hat declined, the millinery industry did not keep pace with those changes. Members addressed their anxiety about shifts in the market by inviting guest speakers; the speakers

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<sup>133</sup> Florence Goldin, Speech given at Fashion Group Millinery Meeting, 22 January 1953, pg. 3, Box 76, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

were often leaders in their fields and this allowed members to broaden their professional networks, which in turn allowed them to hopefully become more adept businesswomen.

At a cosmetics meeting two guest speakers discussed the packaging that cosmetic goods were sold in. The first speaker, Edgar Kaufmann of the Museum of Modern Art, compared good packaging to a museum; because of the connotations of the building itself people are drawn to it and often beautiful objects are found within. The second speaker, James Turnbull of Monsanto Chemical Company, talked about the new trends in plastics and the need for visibility and transparency. He argued that plastics is a great way to achieve visibility but that even other types of material need to label packaging clearly with full color images because self-service was a constantly growing trend. He described three different types of plastics (films, molded, and resins) and how each could be used in the packaging of goods.<sup>134</sup> The fact that organizers of the meeting invited two men to discuss packaging is significant. It shows that these women were interested in every level of the industry; this type of lecture would draw women from various areas of fashion, from the women who produced cosmetics to those who sold the finished product in department stores. Also the post-war era was marked by research and new developments. Geoffrey Jones argued that “Although branding and marketing was the basis of competitive success in the industry, product and process innovation was important in expanding demand. This ranged from the basic research which enabled advances in therapeutic toothpaste, anti-dandruff shampoos, and hair colouring, to constant experimentation in product formulations in creams and cosmetics, and testing of their

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<sup>134</sup> Fashion Group Report, May 1951, pgs. 1-2, Box 145, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

effects on animals.”<sup>135</sup> Part of the reason Fashion Groups networking opportunities were so helpful was that it allowed members to meet people in industries that not be traditionally associated with fashion. Members were interested in the new technologies that were produced after World War II because they wanted to have the best and most effective products, and they wanted to be able to package them in new and exciting ways that allowed customers to see exactly what they purchased.

In October 1952 Dr. W.E. Coughlin, who worked in the Textile Laboratory of Good Housekeeping Institute, spoke at the fabric meeting about man-made fibers and said, “These are only fibres, or yarns, and their use in any given fabric or construction is by no means an assurance of quality. We all should realize that many factors of prime importance enter into the performance of a fabric, and fibre content is but one of the important factors.”<sup>136</sup> Members were intent upon keeping up with the times while still producing quality products that would elevate the overall American style.

Fashion Group realized that they operated within a bubble and thus arranged for a special guest speakers from diverse fields and who had diverse roles in their industry. The Home Furnishings meeting in April 1956 hosted Dr. Ernest Dichter, president of the Institute for Motivational Research in Croton-on-Hudson, New York. He told his audience that “[t]here is a great conflict in American living between practicality and emotionality. Though today’s buyer may tell you she wants ‘practical’ furnishings, in fact she will respond to those things which best express her individuality.”<sup>137</sup> He argued that

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<sup>135</sup> Geoffrey Jones, “Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980,” *The Economic History Review* 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 132.

<sup>136</sup> Dr. W.E. Coughlin, Speech given at Fabrics Meeting, Fashion Group Report, 21 October 1952, pg. 3, Box 145, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>137</sup> Dr. Ernest Dichter, Speech given at Home Furnishings Meeting, 19 April 1956, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

the home furnishings industry had not taken advantage of these major shifts and did not cater to the American people's need to express themselves in all aspects of their home. This suggests that the membership of Fashion Group was narrow that it did not allow for representation of the average woman. Membership did include young women in early stages of their career, but was mostly centered in large cities and had a high concentration of education.

The research presented and the guests invited were all to help members become better businesswomen. The meetings helped members find exactly what consumers were willing to pay for. Maude Moody introduced the panel for a luncheon in 1952, "We felt it might be very interesting for members of the Fashion Group to have a consumer point of view or panel up here... We have Miss Colleen Roberts who is vice-president of American Airlines and the first woman to hold such a position in that field. She is a Mary Goodfellow customer."<sup>138</sup> The panels that were put together allow women in the fashion industry to meet and discuss what exactly consumers are looking for. The panel discussed shows that Fashion Group provided members with contacts in a variety of industries, but those contacts were not generally average women, as shown by the fact one of the panelists was the vice-president of American Airlines. It is clear that members wanted to understand what the average consumer looked for but there was a disconnect, their efforts to learn about the consumer left them with a skewed view because of the type of consumers they interviewed; a vice president of a major airline would not have the same shopping habits as a woman in Kansas who does the majority of her shopping at the local supermarket.

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<sup>138</sup> Maude Moody, Speech given at Fashion Group Luncheon, 16 January 1952, Box 76, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

A guest speaker at the accessories luncheon urged members to know their market, especially since the 1950s was a different market than what members had previously worked with, it focused on young professional women just on the cusp of marriage. Mary MacMahon addressed the accessories luncheon in 1952, “We lean particularly toward *Glamour* and *Charm* because... he picked “the girl with the job” for his principal market. He figured then that the young women employed in San Francisco would marry and build homes in the already started... And he felt “girl with job” and “girl gets married” made a continuous love story for any merchandising program.”<sup>139</sup> The designers often have the same type of woman in mind when they spoke of who they design for. Bonnie Cashin spoke at the regional directors meeting held in 1953. She said, “I specialize in a KIND of gal—who leads a KIND of life... I like dressing her unlimited, for all her activities. Design evolves out of the idea or the needs... and I’ve found my needs are usually those of other women. I travel a lot... and I like clothes that are easy traveling companions. I like entertaining at home. I like to dance a lot, and I love the theatre. So, I naturally think in these terms when designing.”<sup>140</sup> Again, members were concerned about knowing their customers and much of their energy went towards research about the type of customer they wanted to pursue.

Though Fashion Group maintained female only membership, men often spoke at luncheons. Men presented from various fields in order to help members have a well-rounded understanding of every aspect of the fashion industry. In March 1961 David

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<sup>139</sup> Mary MacMahon, Speech given at Fashion Group Accessories Luncheon, 22 July 1952, pg. 2-3, Box 76, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>140</sup> Bonnie Cashin, Speech given at Fashion Group Regional Directors Meeting, 18 June 1953, pg. 29, Box 76, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



Loehwing spoke to the Cosmetic Committee about the cosmetic industry's presence in the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>141</sup> Also in 1961, Fashion Group hosted a Children's and Young Juniors Show at the Hotel Astor, at which the author Evan Hunter was the guest speaker. His speech did not provide any insight as to the coming trends of children's fashion but it did not need to. The women of Fashion Group were women of the upper middle class, they were interested in culture.<sup>142</sup> Thus Hunter's speech about fathers and sons, the great gap between generations, and ruminations about the benefits of knickers was okay, the women themselves already knew about trends and fashion.<sup>143</sup> The purpose of Hunter's presence was to provide an opportunity for the women to enjoy a bit of culture and interact with professionals outside of their immediate business concerns.

From the earliest conception of the Fashion Group, there were connections to political figures. Some of the first luncheons hosted by FGI were attended by Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. In 1953 Representative Kenneth Keating, a republican from New York, spoke to Fashion Group about taxes;

I believe that our tax laws are quite unfair and unrealistic in permitting a wide range of business expense deductions...and this is a discrimination which probably hits the ladies harder than the men, I have never seen why the reasonable costs of nursery care for children, or a nursemaid or housekeeper or caretaker, should be forbidden when the taxpayer has to make some such arrangement in order to work. I have proposed adding this item to the list of permissible deductions...<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> David Loehwing, Speech given at Cosmetic Meeting Luncheon, 24 March 1961, Box 77, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>142</sup> The early membership included a number of upper class New York society ladies but by the late 1930s seemed to completely shift to fashion professionals.

<sup>143</sup> Evan Hunter, Speech given at Children's and Young Juniors Show, 11 May 1961, Box 77, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives, New York Public Library.

<sup>144</sup> Kenneth Keating, Speech given at Fashion Group Luncheon, 10 December 1953, pg. 4, Box 76, folder 8, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Keating went on to suggest that the luxury tax should not be applied to women's toiletries, lightbulbs, or on handbags that cost less than fifteen dollars. He also argued that taxes should not become such a burden that it keeps women from working; not only do some families need a dual income but women provided value in helping the economy grow. Keating of course addressed a room full of working women, women who were married with children, who purchased toiletries and had to find affordable childcare. The women of Fashion Group were interested in politics because the bills passed by Congress had a direct and very real impact upon their lives, both private and public.

Hollywood and the fashion industry have always been closely intertwined. The silver screen created some of the most well-known American designers and shaped the way the beauty industry grew as film became higher tech and more detail was seen on the screen. Members of Fashion Group had close ties to Hollywood and Los Angeles established a regional group in 1935; members included Edith Head, who designed the clothing for many movies, as well as Elizabeth Arden who was involved in the Powder Puff War in the 1930s, a race to create a makeup that filmed well in Technicolor. Hollywood already had a mutually beneficial relationship with the American marketplace and promoted goods in film, particularly targeting young women with disposable income, and Hollywood had a certain appeal because it was more accessible. This relationship was incredibly attractive to members of Fashion Group and many looked for ways to highlight their products in film.

The promise of Hollywood and the items shown was that if you had the income to purchase the items that lifestyle was within your grasp or as the advertisements for

Arden's Screen and Stage promised, "It could happen to YOU!"<sup>145</sup> Even as Arden was caught up in the Powder Puff War in an effort to create a product that would sell not only to production studios, but also to American women at large, she was part of an effort to define what the American standard of beauty was. In her article, Kristy Sinclair Dootson argued "That the advertisement for Arden's product promised 'subtle coloring' further implied that Gaynor's 'mild' form of Hollywood glamour was one that could easily be incorporated into one's everyday life and was in keeping with the general vogue for naturalism that year."<sup>146</sup> Fashion Group's goal of gently guiding American style was certainly achieved, in part, through the use of members' networks that were deeply entrenched in Hollywood.

### **Continuing Education**

Fashion Group, from its inception, was concerned with continued education. Members, many highly educated, had access to numerous courses through the organization. The bulletin, which was mailed to all members, often suggested new books that members may be interested in, continuing education courses, or exhibits at local museums that members might find particularly interesting. The organization also helped educate the next generation of fashion's editors, designers, and decorators; in 1951 it was announced that "In recognition of the splendid work the FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY is doing to train young people for the industry, our Board of Governors...voted to give an Eight Hundred Dollar, two year maintenance scholarship for a student beginning next fall, to be known as THE FASHION GROUP

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<sup>145</sup> Kristy Sinclair Dootson, "The Hollywood Powder Puff War": Technicolor Cosmetics in the 1930s," *Film History* Vol. 28, no. 1 (2016), pg. 113-114.

<sup>146</sup> Kristy Sinclair Dootson, "The Hollywood Powder Puff War": Technicolor Cosmetics in the 1930s," *Film History* Vol. 28, no. 1 (2016), pg. 117.

SCHOLARSHIP.”<sup>147</sup> As Fashion Group continued to grow, more scholarships were awarded for various institutions such as the Ely Honig Scholars “who were selected from students of [the] annual Fall Fashion Training Course...The five new winners will attend evening courses to advance in their branch of fashion. Our aim is to prepare these girls to take their places in the industry as fashion executives.”<sup>148</sup> This served a dual purpose of recruiting future members and creating a professional field. Fashion wasn’t just about technical skills, it was a serious industry that required advanced degrees and certifications.

In June 1963, Hope Skillman, former president of Fashion Group, gave a speech about the merger of Dallas Fashion Group and the Dallas Fashion Arts which was quite the accomplishment since there had been tension between New York and Dallas for several years and it made the Dallas regional group the fourth largest group. The merger showed how devoted Fashion Group was to education. Skillman informed members, “The Career Course, which will continue; and the Carrie Neiman Collection of costumes, plus important cottons from designer collections, has become an active Research Museum with a regular professional curator.”<sup>149</sup> The career courses, nearly all chapters offered them, were completely dependent upon members offering to teach them outside of their regular office hours and were an important aspect to helping educate future industry employees. The bulletin printed Skillman’s speech about the merger and explained for the other members why the merger happened and the goals of the merger.

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<sup>147</sup> Fashion Group Report, 15 March 1951, pg. 4, Box 145, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>148</sup> The Fashion Group, Inc. Bulletin, February 1956, pg. 7, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>149</sup> Hope Skillman, “Welcome to Membership,” speech, 13 June 1963, Box 77, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Skillman had said, “In our country most women in the future will work, 9 out of 10...I quote Department of Labor figures...The fashion industry is a logical one for women, and The Fashion Group can help in training (and even retraining) and feeding women into the industry. It can do this through its Career Course, through seminars, through work sessions which you men in the industry might set up in cooperation with The Fashion Group.”<sup>150</sup> These courses helped ease women back into the industry if they had left for an extended period of time in order to raise children, as well as helped women, both young and those who changed fields, who were just starting their careers in the industry.

Fashion Group was obviously concerned with educating the women that would continue to work in the fashion industry, but they also had an interest in the continued education of the communities in which they worked. In the February 1951 bulletin there was a section labeled Regional Groups—Recent Activities. Pittsburgh’s regional group organized a fashion history exhibit “which included a display...depicting the influence of transportation and communication on the fashion picture, sponsored at the Carnegie Library.”<sup>151</sup> Regional groups often hosted exhibits in partnership with local museums. This could be a great way to help Fashion Group’s reputation grow, generate future work for members, as well as help the general population understand the importance of fashion both historically and in the present.

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<sup>150</sup> Hope Skillman, “Welcome to Membership,” Fashion Group Newsletter, July 1963, pg. 15, Box 147, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>151</sup> “Regional Groups—Recent Activities,” Fashion Group Bulletin, February 1951, pg. 4, Box 145, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

The members never forgot that they were first a professional group, but if they had the extra resources members often found ways to contribute to their communities. One way was through the Fashion Therapy Committee, which began in San Francisco but soon spread to other regional groups. The committee provided “sessions on grooming, make-up, hair care, posture, and sewing” to patients in state hospitals who potentially had the opportunity to hold jobs in the future.<sup>152</sup> The New York committee was recognized by the Manhattan Society for Mental Health for the work they did with the local hospital. Dr. Oscar K. Diamond, director of Mental Hygiene at the Manhattan State Hospital said, “[I]n conjunction with other forms of therapy, this particular program has a definite value in re-establishing the personal integrity and self-image of the individuals involved.”<sup>153</sup> Even as Fashion Group adjusted to the current times, the core values of the group remained the same. Members tried to help create better a better community through their work with fashion, which is evident in this program.

In the later part of the twentieth century there is a marked difference in how Fashion Group interacts with opportunities to help society at large, Fashion Group was a member of the National Council of Women, which aimed to help improve the status of women around the globe. Hope Skillman called on the Dallas Fashion Group to be more active on a global level; “It has branches in 49 countries and a membership of about 10 million women!...One of its many functions is the campaign for the right of women to be

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<sup>152</sup> “Fashion Therapy Report,” Fashion Group Newsletter, June 1964, pg. 11, Box 147, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>153</sup> “Fashion Therapy Report,” Fashion Group Newsletter, June 1964, pg. 11, Box 147, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

educated... Why don't you, in the name of the Dallas Fashion Group, consider helping another woman of another country in this way?"<sup>154</sup>

Outside of the time Eleanor Roosevelt asked members to consider the working conditions in Puerto Rico, this is the first reference about helping women in other locations. This indicates that Fashion Group became more international minded, both in membership and in their approach to building stronger communities.

### **Professional and Personal Support**

Married women and mothers made up a large percentage of active members in Fashion Group throughout the twentieth century. These women found support among other members and were offered a chance to announce life events and discuss challenges. Hope Skillman spoke to the frustration of mothers whose every move is analyzed by pediatricians during a luncheon for children's wear;

If she likes a dress and says so she may be stifling her child's initiative. If she dislikes it and says so she may be frustrating her child's self-expression. If she says, "that's cute, dear," she may be treating her child like a doll. If she says, "that looks pretty on you" she may be daydreaming of the unfulfilled wishes of her own childhood. If she buys mother-and-daughter look-alike dresses to surprise Daddy on Father's Day she may be escaping to her own childhood or making a rival of her daughter so that she can destroy her.<sup>155</sup>

Skillman drew attention to the constant judgement that mothers are subject to. Obviously these societal issues could not be fixed by Fashion Group members alone, but the acknowledgement of the issues and the ability to commiserate with each other was refreshing for members. Also, as members became more cognizant of the judgement and

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<sup>154</sup> Hope Skillman, speech given to Dallas Fashion Group, 13 June 1963, pg. 8, Box 77, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>155</sup> Estelle Hamburger, Speech given at Children's Wear Luncheon, 9 May 1956, pg. 4, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

double standards, they became less accepting of it, which can be seen in how Fashion Group members become more vocal as time goes on.

There were some examples of women who chose to leave a job after marriage. In a bulletin from February 1956, in a section titled “Talking About Ourselves,” one such example is found, “Ann Howard was married in January to Cyril C. Morgan; resigning her job at “Parents” Magazine in June, and moving to Roanoke.”<sup>156</sup> This section showed that members were women with lives beyond their careers, it also showed that Fashion Group worked to foster pride in each member’s work. The ability to send in an announcement, about any aspect of their life or career, showed that this was a community of women who fully supported each other and encouraged each other to brag about their accomplishments. Members wrote in with announcements about starting their own firms, work anniversaries, awards received, and work promotions or moves. It also showed the breadth that was covered by Fashion Group membership; in the July 1952 bulletin, member Jessie Stuart of Simmons College Prince School of Retailing announced her latest published work and Bernice Chambers of New York University wrote about her newest project. Women who held membership in Fashion Group were savvy businesswomen as well as educators and academics. That same bulletin also announced the promotion to vice president of Leslie Munro, which was the first time a woman held that position in her firm.<sup>157</sup> The fact that members gained positions that women had not previously held, or were recognized for their accomplishments, indicates that the support found in Fashion Group made a real difference in these women’s lives. Of course women

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<sup>156</sup> “Talking About Ourselves,” The Fashion Group, Inc. Bulletin, February 1956, pg. 6, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>157</sup> The Fashion Group Bulletin, July 1952, pgs. 2-7, Box 145, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



can and have clawed their way to the top of male dominated businesses, but the consistency with which members achieved these promotions suggests that the networks and mentorship found in FGI was helpful.

In 1956 a section titled “Jobs Wanted” began to be printed in the bulletin. It was listed in the table of contents in February of that year, but did not consistently get listed each month. The section was for those who were looking for work, as well as those who knew of available positions; “If you are looking for a position...please include a detailed resume as well, which will be placed in our General Placement File, and call for a personal interview. If you know of any job openings, contact Miss J at The Fashion Group office. We may know of someone to recommend for the position.”<sup>158</sup> Members helped other members find work. This could be incredibly useful for young women that were just beginning their career in an industry that was known for rewarding those who had the right connections.

Fashion Group members worked to help other women find jobs within the industry and gave each other support and tips to women on the job market. Jessica Daves, who was editor in chief at *Vogue* as well as president of FGI, spoke at a luncheon in November 1953 about how to get a job in fashion publication. She covered everything from desired characteristics, to different ways to get an interview, to technique when it comes to interviewing and networking. She urged her audience to realize that fashion publication required more than just an interest in clothing by laying out general and specific skills that she looked for in new recruits;

These are, you may think, minor skills, but they are very often the handle by which you may pick up a larger opportunity. These are: the speaking of

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<sup>158</sup> “Jobs Wanted,” Fashion Group Bulletin, October 1956, pg. 4, Box 145, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

languages; the ability to type beautifully; the ability to take dictation...; the ability to sketch a little bit as an aid to your memory; the ability to speak on your feet...And lastly, the ability to write clearly—to use writing as a tool...Many people who do not intend to pursue writing as a career have the mistaken impression that it is not necessary to know how to write at all; but the ability to state clearly, in writing, the facts in a given case is valuable. I recommend it to everyone who wishes to pursue any sort of career.<sup>159</sup>

In her lists she ranked talent as third on general skills. She argued that the jobs that were available would be filled by women who were willing to learn and those that had skills that went beyond fashion, ones that could translate to and from other fields. Daves suggested that an interesting job, whether in fashion or another industry, would be a way of life, something that occupied your mind all hours of the day. Also, in her speech, Daves also listed the many positions available in the fashion publishing world, “[T]here are jobs for fashion editors; for fashion reporters who remember what they see, and see the connection; for writers; for people with all sorts of ideas—feature and fashion ideas, and from secretaries to these people. Almost everything of interest to women appears in *Vogue*’s [*sic*] pages, and anybody with bright ideas for those pages will have a hearing.”<sup>160</sup> Membership continued to expand for Fashion Group because of women who held positions of power, like Jessica Daves, reached out to young women and urged them to find positions in the industry and to help guide the new trends. Daves did not tell her audience that they would be able to find high positions immediately, she listed women who held power in 1953 and also the position that they entered *Vogue* with, but she

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<sup>159</sup> Jessica Daves, Speech given at Fashion Group Luncheon, 30 November 1953, pg. 2, Box 76, folder 8, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>160</sup> Jessica Daves, Speech given at Fashion Group Luncheon, 30 November 1953, pg. 7, Box 76, folder 8, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

argued that gaining experience would get women far and into even more powerful positions.

Paris continued to play a central role in the fashion after World War II, Dior released his New Look in 1947, and members of Fashion Group attended fashion week each year and reported back on what they saw. It became glaringly obvious to these members that men dominated the scene there. Carmel Snow, who at the time was the editor at *Harper's Bazaar*, made the Paris report at the Fashion Group's French Show in September 1956. She spoke of the different trends that she saw while in Paris, paid special attention to the colors, fabrics, and capes that many of the designers showed but she could not help but notice the lack of female designers; "It's curious that there are only two women dressmakers in Paris of top rank. One is Grès and the other is Chanel."<sup>161</sup> Fashion Group's primary goal is to promote women in the fashion industry and many designers of the American Look are women. Fashion Group often highlighted and honored female designers at special events, so the lack of female designers in Paris (though there were certainly more than two!) would certainly catch their attention.

In an effort to support members in all aspects of their life, Fashion Group would publish tips for health and wellness. In a bulletin from early 1939, some health rules for working women were printed: rules that included breathing correctly with good posture, wearing the proper shoes, and eating a healthy diet.<sup>162</sup> This was not a regular column in the bulletin, but every so often there would be a quick article about eating healthy or getting enough rest. Members were better businesswomen when they were healthy.

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<sup>161</sup> Carmel Snow, speech given at Fashion Group French Show, 21 September 1956, pg. 4, Box 77, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>162</sup> Fashion Group Bulletin, January/February 1939, pg. 8, Box 144, folder 11, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

In May 1956 Estelle Hamburger spoke at the Fashion Group's Children's Wear Luncheon about how the subsection of fashion had flourished in recent years. Children, it seemed all of a sudden, had entire fashion lines created for them, parents purchased new clothes for the changing seasons, and fashions changed from year to year. She mentioned the rise and fall of the poodle skirt and western inspired looks of Hopalong Cassidy and Annie Oakley, as well as the rise and the continued popularity of crop tops and Mouseketeer apparel. She specified that the new children's wear was not merely adult clothing scaled down to fit little bodies, it was instead a separate movement that addressed specific needs of children. Children did not subdivide their day in the same way as adults, so classifications of clothes had to be much broader: outdoor and indoor, asleep and awake. Hamburger also mentioned that clothing designed specifically for children gave children more agency, children who could choose the color of their dress or the style of pockets on their shirt felt more in control of their lives and environment. Hamburger was a member of Fashion Group, but her speech showed an interesting overlap in psychology and fashion that was vastly interesting to all members.

Hamburger mentioned how the children's fashion frenzy was part of a larger event in the United States. She stated, "Into this melee has moved a sturdy tribe once known by the descriptive term of statisticians. These are the folk who began by charting and graphing the rising birth rate with parallel graphs and charts of required increases in numbers of classrooms and teachers...Now they have added new clients who want them to ring door bells and find out the toy preferences of preschoolers, the color predilections of grade schoolers, and chart the complexion tints of junior highs for cosmetic starter

kits.”<sup>163</sup> Fashion Group constantly worked to address the new areas found in the fashion industry. Not only do these women hope to guide mothers as they choose back to school clothes, but this is an area that was becoming extremely lucrative. Fashion Group members are business women at heart and thus would be interested in any area that would help their business grow, and creating consumers out of the younger generations was a key piece of that growth.

Hamburger spoke directly to the business nature of the members when she addressed the fact that African American children also buy clothes and that it was a demographic that needed to be marketed to. She made a compelling argument, “It might be a reasonable recommendation if you, too, would come to grips with reality, facing up to inescapable facts, like the fact that one-tenth of the American population is negro, that white and negro children will soon be in the same classrooms throughout this country by law, if not by moral will, and that you better start taking becomingness to negro children into consideration when you work with color in clothes.”<sup>164</sup> Hamburger recognized the fact that money was left on the table when designers and stores did not market to the African American community. This also indicated that still, though photographs show models were more diverse, that membership of was still almost exclusively white. A more diverse membership may have drawn attention to these untapped markets sooner.

The issue of children’s fashion concerned more than just the people who designed the clothes and the parents who purchased them. Hamburger continued, “What is needed now is the warm-hearted, whole-hearted encouragement and support of buyers and stores,

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<sup>163</sup> Estelle Hamburger, Speech given at Children’s Wear Luncheon, 9 May 1956, Box 77, folder 1, pg. 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>164</sup> Estelle Hamburger, Speech given at Children’s Wear Luncheon, 9 May 1956, Box 77, folder 1, pg. 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

and by “stores” I mean store presidents, controllers, interior architects, display people, advertising writers and advertising artists, who will make it their business to understand these new fashion meanings in young clothes, and accept the responsibility to interpret them.”<sup>165</sup> This call to action garnered a response. In May 1964 Fashion Group hosted a children’s wear fashion show at the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria. In her speech, Mrs. Susan Rolontz introduced the thriving market of children’s fashion, “The children’s market of today is alive, alert, and hip to every facet of the fashion picture, from the Beatles to Balenciaga. Children’s wear manufacturers are as quick as manufacturers of adult clothes to interpret couture fashions...the children’s industry has taken its place in the world of fashion. The children’s business has become, in the truest sense of the word, a fashion business.”<sup>166</sup> As children’s culture played a larger role in society, the fashion industry responded to that growing culture. Fashion Group showed that it recognized that need and worked to be part of the shift that happened in the approach to children’s clothing and members were eager to benefit from the large profits to be made. Top designers in fashion became involved in designing children’s clothing; the fashion show hosted by Fashion Group in May 1964 had pieces designed by St. Laurent, which shows that children’s fashion was no chump change.

A report from 1965 showed the need to break the children’s wear industry into several groups. The report, titled *The Teen-Age Market*, detailed the percentage of the population that falls into certain age groups, the spending power of teens, and how much parents spend annually on teens in the household. The report dived into specifics of how

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<sup>165</sup> Estelle Hamburger, Speech given at Children’s Wear Luncheon, 9 May 1956, Box 77, folder 1, pg. 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>166</sup> Susan Rolontz, Speech given at Children’s Meeting, 14 May 1964, Box 78, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

many teens used certain types of cosmetics compared to women in other age brackets and how brand loyalty is cultivated in female teens. At the end of the report was attached Exhibit 2, which gave advice to Fashion Group members on how to advertise directly towards teenaged girls. Three experts gave their opinions on how to reach the market: Florence Brooks of American Girl, Aaron Cohen of Seventeen, and Howard Kaplan of Boy's Life. The report did not specify exactly which expert provided what advice, but some trends were made clear. Advertisers were encouraged to hook teenagers young so that they did not have to convert them later, to not talk down or be condescending towards teenagers, and to tap into the crowd following ways of teen groups. The report stated, "In dealing with this market, you must look toward the future. They will be adult users soon. It is easier to sell them on you[r] brand now than to try to switch them from another brand later on..."<sup>167</sup> This information was made available to all members of Fashion Group so that each member could use the information at her own business. As previously mentioned, many members were in competition with each other or worked for competing firms, but there seemed to be a culture of sharing beneficial information and limiting the competition to the market.

It was not only teenagers that Fashion Group was concerned with. In February 1965, Vic H. Scher of Sears gave a speech at the Cosmetic Meeting about "the exploding market of men's cosmetics" and he argued that men were not afraid to spend money on looking and smelling good, "Our Economist at Sears informs me that 58% of our male population is now 35 years young and younger...27% of our population is made up of the 15 to 35 year-age group—the group of influence and impact... These men, and the young

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<sup>167</sup> The Teen-Age Market, report, 1965, pg. 9-11, Box 78, folder 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

women who buy for them, have rejected the idea that a man has to smell like witch hazel and old cigars to be a man. The accent is on youth and the smell of youth is not stale.”<sup>168</sup> Men want to be pretty too and have money to spend, though members noticed that Scher specified that women are still made the decisions about what the men wore, thus the marketing would be directed towards young women in a way.

### **The Everywoman and Superiority**

Even as members of Fashion Group helped each other access opportunities that many women did not have, there remained a persistent idea that other women, women in the suburbs and middle America, did not have the capacity to make decisions without guidance. That guidance could come from Fashion Group, or it may come from the man of the household. Grace Gaynor spoke at a luncheon in 1952, “We keep our suburban stores open until nine thirty Thursday nights. Since most of our families have commuting husbands they need time to shop after dinner dishes and diapers. Couples like to shop together and we like that way too. When daddy is along better merchandise is purchased, and with less effort on the part of the sales person.”<sup>169</sup> This suggests that some members believed that the average woman needed help to complete the shopping and that when the man of the household was part of the purchasing decisions certain types of merchandise was purchased, without requiring the sales person to work as hard. This also indicates that store hours changed to accommodate the long hours of commuters.

Fashion Group members strived to be gatekeepers of new fashions, gently guiding the industry, and the nation as a whole, towards good taste. And although the members

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<sup>168</sup> Vic H. Scher, Speech given at Cosmetics Meeting, 11 February 1965, pg. 3, Box 78, folder 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>169</sup> Grace Gaynor, Speech given at Fashion Group Cosmetic Luncheon, 6 May 1952, pg. 6, Box 76, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



themselves were career women, some of whom never married, they often spoke of women in a way that implied women's only goal was to attract a man. Florence Goldin, vice president of Grey Advertising Agency, addressed the Toilet Goods Association in May 1957, "Today's woman is put together pretty much as Eve was, That is, she has the same basics'—physically—and probably some of the emotions too! She's still polishing apples to lure Adam—she always will! But she has changed, she was bound to, along with the changing personality of the times. Whereas Eve arrived as a whole woman in the fullness of maturity—and reached the stage of wife—(without competition I might add.) Today's woman starts taking shape as a money spending customer, at age twelve, four years earlier than she did ten years ago!"<sup>170</sup> Goldin not only said that women were still polishing apples to lure Adam, but she even called young single women "huntresses." She continued, "This is the most seriously competitive period in her life economically and personally, it's the period when she must set herself up in the business of life, found a home, and set a pattern of wage earning... If our Huntress manages her campaign successfully, before too many years she is a... wife!"<sup>171</sup> This attitude shaped the way members carried out their jobs: as marketers, designers, cosmetics innovators, the goal would be to convince women fashion would help her snare a man.

As Fashion Group strived to guide American fashion, it also had to adjust to larger societal changes. So although they may have condescended towards the average American woman, they also had to take into account that their designs sometimes were in

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<sup>170</sup> Florence Goldin, "The Changing Personality of Women as Cosmetic Customers," speech given before Toilet Goods Association, 7 May 1957, pg. 6-7, Box 77, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>171</sup> Florence Goldin, "The Changing Personality of Women as Cosmetic Customers," speech given before Toilet Goods Association, 7 May 1957, pg. 11, Box 77, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

response to the average woman's tastes. In March 1956 Jessica Daves of *Vogue* gave a speech at the Import Show hosted by Fashion Group, "We know that the life breath of fashion is change... These clothes [past years' styles] filled a need and influenced a great deal of our current design. But today we feel that fashion is moving toward a new warmth, the same new warmth that the best of the modern architects are beginning to demand in houses... We think it is a tremendous and refreshing change. And change it is."<sup>172</sup> There was a move towards more fluid lines in clothing, less strict delineation of when and where certain outfits could be worn, and a general move away from highly constrictive clothing, yet this was not removed from other shifts that happened at this time, namely the youth movement; "[D]espite enjoying unprecedented affluence, many American youth felt a deep sense of emptiness, malaise, and meaninglessness... Although the 'hippies' remained an extremely marginal phenomenon, countercultural sentiments spread widely, challenging many deeply-held mores."<sup>173</sup> This need to adjust according to the market was noticeable especially in the ripple of fear in the Fashion Group surrounding the sales of hats and Nancy White really go to the heart of the matter when she commented during the European Import Collection show in September 1964. She commented on the Yé Yé Girl of the 1960s that came out of France and said, "They flip and bounce and dance, are as lively as the straight, swinging hairdos that go with them. It's a question of what came first... The chicken or the egg. Did these fresh, new designers create the Yé Yés, or did the Yé Yés create them?"<sup>174</sup> There were larger

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<sup>172</sup> Jessica Daves, Speech given at Import Show, 16 March 1956, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>173</sup> "United States," in *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North*, ed. Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skærlund Risager, and Laurence Cox (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 36.

<sup>174</sup> Nancy White, Commentary during European Imports Collection show, 18 September 1964, Box 78, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

societal issues that Fashion Group responded to and it was not always clear who guided the new styles.

There is found in the Fashion Group's publications and guest speakers an extreme lack of interest in African American beauty culture, or really any culture outside of white America. In a speech given to the cosmetic subgroup in May 1956, Sarah Tomerlin Lee, vice president of Hockaday Associates in New York<sup>175</sup>, described the Lyrical Look which was the next big thing, "The silhouette reveals the natural feminine form. The coiffure is of poetic length...undulating in true feminine fashion or swept up in some gentle conceit. The skin fair—and clear of course—with a radiant bloom, perhaps a whisper of rouge. The mouth—warm and rosy. Eyes made poetic by the lightest use of tinted shadows..."<sup>176</sup> In February 1959, Miriam Gibson French, beauty editor of *McCall's*, gave a report to the Cosmetic Committee luncheon, "What precisely is the Lunar Look? What on earth has it got to do with the moon? Very simple. The Lunar Look is a subtle whitening of the complexion and lips to dramatize the color excitement of the eyes and the hair...paradoxically pearly and cool, colorful and warm. It has the daring of a moonshot and the true beauty of the Moonlight Sonata."<sup>177</sup> African American and white American beauty culture were divided during this time and the lack of consideration for black beauty, by some of the largest cosmetic companies, shows a lack of black membership, women who would have been able to speak up for broader color ranges.

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<sup>175</sup> According to a *New York Times* obituary from 1992, Hockaday Associates was an advertising agency in New York that was founded by Margaret Hockaday. The agency, founded in 1949, was known for irreverent slogans.

<sup>176</sup> Sarah Tomerlin Lee, Speech given at Fashion Group Luncheon, 24 May 1956, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>177</sup> Miriam Gibson French, Speech given at Cosmetic Committee Luncheon, February 1959, Box 77, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

The beauty ideal of post war America was thin, white, and extremely feminine.

According to Geoffrey Jones:

The American market was...perceived as homogeneous. The 'ethnic' cosmetics market, which overwhelmingly sold products specially formulated and marketed to African-Americans, constituted 2.3 per cent of the total US market in 1977.

The dominant discourse of ideal female beauty in interwar and postwar America was Caucasian. Non-whites were prohibited from participation in Miss America beauty contests for three decades after their inception in 1921...it was only in the late 1960s that African Americans could enter the national contest, and the first win was in 1984. Since 1921, over one-third of contestants have been blonde.<sup>178</sup>

The focus on white beauty by large companies made for limited options in colors and forced African American women to seek out beauty products within their own communities and to develop their own products so they would not be stuck with a bad color match.

The language used in speeches at the Fashion Group luncheons reflected the era. During the Paris Show of September 1956 Carmel Snow described the coming trends in hats; "It's a fur-hatted season. It looks like a Russian invasion. The Russian fur hat—pure Anna Karenina—is everywhere."<sup>179</sup> Also, the reports printed in the bulletin showed the overt opinion that the white Western world is the best. Dorothy Wallis, who founded *Women's Wear Daily*, visited Turkey in 1954 and wrote of her experiences, "She [Turkey] modernized her people's clothes, banning the veil and the fez. She has, and is continuing even more, to modernize her education...And in modern needlecrafts, young Turkish women are keeping up with the standards of their heritage...old patterns are being interpreted into modern clothes. When we consider that it is only 30 years ago—

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<sup>178</sup> Geoffrey Jones, "Blonde and Blue-Eyed? Globalizing Beauty, c. 1945-c. 1980," *The Economic History Review* 61, no. 1 (February 2008), pg. 132.

<sup>179</sup> Carmel Snow, speech given at Fashion Group Paris Show, 21 September 1956, pg. 4, Box 77, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

1923—that the Turkish women emerged from behind their veils to take part in world affairs, I think their progress has been amazing.”<sup>180</sup> Wallis’ tone was positive, she clearly believed that Turkey had taken steps to improve itself, yet also indicated condescension towards the traditions that Turkey had made efforts to remove.

Dorothy Shaver, an original member of Fashion Group, addressed the Los Angeles chapter in January 1956 and spoke with hope of the emerging renaissance across the United States, not just in fashion but in all creative fields. She argued, “We are witnessing the beginning of a new resurgence of the creative spirit. The dazzling shower of creative sparks we are seeing comes from an explosion that began at the dawn of the century, and now fills the whole sky over America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific...But a true renaissance can only take place when artist and audience are both inspired. In fact, the role of the audience is of vital importance...it is not a passive role at all, for artistic appreciation is really a highly creative art.”<sup>181</sup> This address shows that members from the New York chapter held prestige. They were women who held positions of power and graced the other chapters with visits from time to time. Shaver’s speech also showed the pro-America mentality that was held widely by members of FGI. Fashion Group specified that a goal was to move New York, and eventually other American cities as well, forward as a real contender for the position of fashion capital. Shaver used imagery that portrayed America as being showered in creative energy because of work that started in the early part of the century and used the term renaissance, as if to imply that the

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<sup>180</sup> Dorothy Wallis, “Turkish Fashion Show,” *The Fashion Group Bulletin*, August 1952, pg. 4, Box 145, folder 10, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>181</sup> Dorothy Shaver, Speech given at Los Angeles Fashion Group Luncheon, 6 January 1956, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

United States consumers and creatives were in a dark age before the twentieth century. It could be that finally, she believed, the United States came out of the dark shadows of London and Paris and produced quality fashion.

### **Stereotypes and Success**

Fashion Group was completely founded and operated by women, yet even as the men were invited to speak to a group of professional women, some still chose to make women the butt of their jokes. John Daly, a radio personality of the mid twentieth century, spoke at a luncheon in December 1952, “I was reminded of the difficulties which you certainly face because of points of view, and the rather mercurial nature of the principal clientele you serve, the Woman.”<sup>182</sup> Though the men did not speak with outright condescension, they often spoke to common tropes and seemed to treat the Fashion Group as if it were a tea party and the ladies were only out to socialize. At a cosmetic meeting luncheon in 1956 Howard Swiggett, a novelist and biographer, spoke about female beauty, “I am chagrined to have talked so much with nothing constructive to offer...My only point is that more lyrically beautiful women are needed if we are to make democracy live, have full employment, win the cold war and develop more misguided missiles. General Motors cannot provide the necessary know-how but I am sure this group will and we must remember that what is good for beauty is good for General Motors.”<sup>183</sup> Many of the male guest speakers seem uncomfortable and often start or end their speeches with a statement about how they had no information to offer the members. Also, like the speaker above, many suggested (or outright said) that female beauty was a

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<sup>182</sup> John Daly, Speech given at Fashion Group Luncheon, 10 December 1952, pg. 11, Box 76, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>183</sup> Howard Swiggett, Speech to the Cosmetic Meeting Luncheon, 24 May 1956, pg. 7, Box 77, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

necessity for society in America to function, and seemed to think that was the business that Fashion Group was in.

The women themselves self-deprecatingly commented on the female mind. Florence Goldin was asked to address the millinery subcommittee about how to sell more hats and she jokingly said “We should be familiar with the product itself—I didn’t have to go very far for that—being a frivolous female—and having been in the fashion business for umpty-ump years plus—I could answer that to start with.”<sup>184</sup> Carmel Snow ended her report of the Paris fashion week with a quote that seemed undermine the field of fashion;

I’d like to leave you now with a thought that’s been occupying my mind. I read once this cruel description of a fashionable woman: ‘She wore the livery of the highest fashion, but as one who dressed to inform rather than to attract...nothing she wore had been chosen by or for a man.’ The woman who answers to that description this year has only herself to blame. I can’t remember a time when fashion has been more deliciously feminine, or more frankly aimed to please.<sup>185</sup>

She reduced fashion to the frivolous action of attracting attention, when in actuality it the fashion industry was a major economic engine and a way to reflect personal and society’s ideals and morals. Kay Daly, the vice president and creative director of Norman, Craig, and Kummel, Inc., spoke at the cosmetic meeting in March 1961, “It’s tough for men of any age or training to understand what women think. Women are a little nutty. You either accept women’s nuttiness and turn it to advantage, or you don’t stay in the cosmetic business...”<sup>186</sup> The members of Fashion Group intelligent, driven, competent women,

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<sup>184</sup> Florence Goldin, Speech to Fashion Group Millinery Meeting, 22 January 1953, pg. 2, Box 76, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>185</sup> Carmel Snow, Speech given at Fashion Group Paris Show, 21 September 1956, pg. 5, Box 77, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>186</sup> Kay Daly, Speech to Cosmetic Meeting Luncheon, 24 March 1961, pg. 4-5, Box 77, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

they are successful businesswomen who find it necessary to demean women as whole. Even though a stated goal of Fashion Group was to promote women.

Yet at the same time members also took themselves and their work very seriously. Florence Goldin, president of Fashion Group, spoke to the Blumenthal Sales Meeting and bragged that “The Fashion Group has a membership of some 2500 of the outstanding women fashion executives in the country—membership including the Executive Editors of all the fashion books and fashion pages of newspapers—Virginia Pope included among them—Store Presidents like Dorothy Shaver and most of the top designers and the most eminent stylists in the country—all women who play major roles in influencing fashion in this country.”<sup>187</sup> Goldin just the year before called women frivolous, yet when she addressed the Sales Meeting it is obvious that she held these women in the highest regard and believed they were far from flighty. In 1954 the Ready-to-Wear Committee was listed in an effort to thank them for the effort they had put in to create the “credo” for fall fashion. These women held positions in all the major names of fashion and interior design: *Vogue*, *Charm*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Bloomingdales*, *Town and Country*, *Neiman-Marcus*, *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, and *Life*.<sup>188</sup> Not to mention some of the committee members were successful entrepreneurs. They knew they had power but for some reason had to tear themselves down every so often, possibly in order to make men more comfortable and because they had been socialized to apologize for taking up too much space.

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<sup>187</sup> Florence Goldin, Speech at Blumenthal Sales Meeting, 29 April 1954, pg. 1, Box 76, folder 10, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>188</sup> Ready-to-Wear Committee, 23 June 1954, pg. 1, Box 76, folder 11, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



The fact that Fashion Group took itself seriously is shown by the annual report that is published in the Bulletin early in the year. The report reflected back on the previous year and updated members about the state of the treasury; “Receipts from Membership Fees, Fashion Training Course, Luncheons, Interest on Savings, Royalty on our book, “Keys To A Fashion Career,” Miscellaneous Items: \$37, 564.08. Disbursements—Overhead (including Salaries, Rent, Stationary, Telephone, Postage, Insurance, etc.), Bulletins: \$32,761.98.”<sup>189</sup> Fashion Group operated as a non-profit but they had every intention of being a successful one. The organization celebrated twenty years of operating in 1951 and Virginia Pope, president of Fashion Group, believed it would continue to be successful.

### **Conclusion**

Former president Hope Skillman of Fashion Group addressed the Dallas Fashion Group in 1963; “A very basic tenet of The Fashion Group is that it is completely non-commercial. Its programs, its opinions, inclusion in its shows simply cannot be bought. This is a valuable guerdon in these days of all-too-casual acceptance of the package deals of pressure groups. It is this cherished feature of the Fashion Group which gives it immense strength and prestige. It is also this fact which makes it such an important showcase for the industry.”<sup>190</sup> Fashion Group had hit its stride in the post-war era: membership was high, the influence of the organization was far reaching, and they maintained a strong definition of the purpose of the organization. Skillman’s quote shows the concern felt by members as society shifted around them. During this period of quick

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<sup>189</sup> “Annual Report,” The Fashion Group Bulletin, January 1953, pg. 7, Box 145, folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>190</sup> Hope Skillman, Speech given to Dallas Fashion Group Luncheon, 13 June 1963, pg. 4, Box 77, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

change and political upheaval Fashion Group remained as a constant source of networking and educational opportunities and personal and professional support for its members. Yet, as Fashion Group thrived during this period, it maintained a superior attitude towards the average American woman and struggled to break the habit of perpetuating old gender stereotypes, even if only in speeches not in action.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Fashion Group wrote a brief history and attached it to their goals for the 1970s in the pamphlet handed out at the event honoring Coco Chanel in 1969. The goals marked a new era of Fashion Group and hinted that the immediate goals that had been created in 1931 had been achieved. Estelle Hamburger wrote, “[A] few stalwart independents, shared an idea that fashion-in-America could be advanced from an industry to a life-enhancing force, if women would be welcomed to positions of authority and influence, not to replace men, not to compete with men, but to help cultivate AMERICAN FASHION. What goals for The Fashion Group in the 1970’s[sic]? Concern with clothes as international language that needs no translation, with creative talents that recognize no boundaries, with fashion as part of the elixir of life, enjoyed by the many, extended through world-wide Fashion Professionalism.”<sup>191</sup> Fashion Group seemed to set a different standard for themselves and their luncheons during this period. In her farewell message in 1973, Fashion Group President Edie Raymond Locke reminded members that “we are an organization of business women, professional women and not a bunch of ladies giving tea parties and playing at being executives” and later described the “myth of feminine delicacy” as undermining women.<sup>192</sup> Fashion Group experienced drastic changes during this time and was marked by a period of fear and tension, more diversity in membership and fashion centers, and stronger political stances.

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<sup>191</sup> Estelle Hamburger, “Here is the Fashion Group,” Chanel Bulletin, 19 December 1969, pg. 15, Box 148, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>192</sup> “A Word from Edie,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 6 December 1973, pg. 4, Box 148, folder 8, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

## Fear and Tension

A fashion show of the European Import collections in September 1965 addressed the fact that fashion seemed to be in upheaval. Kathleen Casey, the editor-in-chief at *Glamour Magazine*, hosted and provided commentary at the event, “The conflicting reports in my opinion were understandable because that was Paris this year. The collections were as personal as the subjective way that the press reviewed them and perhaps being personal and individual is what has happened to fashion. Certainly for now there is no reason to believe today’s women will become slaves to a single trend even if it is strongly presented.”<sup>193</sup> This marked a shift in a few trends dominating the industry. The end of the 1960s brought more than the end of the single trend;

By the end of the Sixties, all of these defining features of post-World War II America had broken down. The cold war had begun to thaw... And a hot war still raged against communism in Vietnam... the loss of global economic hegemony and the bursting of the postwar boom might have been even harder to accept. Since World War II, the dollar had been the world’s currency, the global economic stabilizer. But by 1970, the all-powerful greenback faced sustained attack as foreign investors dumped dollars, driving down its value and forcing the United States to take extraordinary steps to preserve the international monetary system.<sup>194</sup>

The counterculture movement of the 1960s, which continued in different forms in the 1970s, disrupted the fashion industry’s control of trends and created an environment where no single fashion dominated a season or year. No longer were people interested in following trends, but instead they saw their fashion choices as a form of social expression

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<sup>193</sup> Kathleen Casey, speech given at European Imports Collections show, 10 September 1965, Box 78, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>194</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 6-7.

and a way to express their individuality.<sup>195</sup> Helen Van Slyke spoke to the Fashion Group in April 1963, “She [Mrs. Kennedy] has inspired millions of American girls to wear good looking, simple little sheaths and to put pillboxes on the back of their heads. But...she certainly cannot be classified as this kind of molder-of-fashion... Women are eternally interested in what other smart women wear or use. But they are no longer slavishly addicted to a specific look—like so many gingerbread ladies stamped out with a cookie cutter.”<sup>196</sup> This caused stress among Fashion Group members.

In response to why she thinks there has been a slow shift away from drastic annual shifts in fashion trends, Geraldine Stutz of Henri Bendel answered “I think it’s a who—the Contemporary Woman, circa 1966. And...I’m not just talking about the woman who lives in the East 60’s, lunches at Orsini’s and, hopefully, comes around the corner to Bendel’s afterwards. This is the era of the great leveling—money, leisure, exposure, television and travel have produced droves of aware, assured women all over the country...the slow gear-shift in clothes fashion is happening because this confident Contemporary Woman is no longer willing to change her clothes because somebody snaps his fingers.”<sup>197</sup> Fashion Group members had previously struggled to understand what the consumer wanted, often they were disconnected from what average women in America looked like, but beginning the mid-sixties the women seemed to begin to worry less about what they thought fashion should be, and accepted that the industry had

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<sup>195</sup> Jenna Weissman Joselit, *A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 195.

<sup>196</sup> Helen Van Slyke, “The Changing Faces of Beauty,” speech given to Fashion Group, 24 April 1963, pg. 6, Box 77, folder 11, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>197</sup> Geraldine Stutz, Speech given at Cosmetic Meeting, 10 February 1966, Box 78, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

changed in a permanent way. The stepped away from trying to peddle hats to all consumers.

It is important to remember that Fashion Group operated during the Cold War and that their views were formed in an environment of fear and distrust of anything that seemed undemocratic and often members tie democracy to capitalism. They believed that America was the best and that it offered something truly unique and freeing to the fashion world. Estelle Hamburger wrote a review of the Spring 1964 American Ready-to-Wear Show;

Ours is a business, a great American business...American fashion is a business...nineteen billion dollars' worth of business in women's and children's apparel alone...American fashion is a world force. It symbolizes the freedom of American women. It promises to women of other countries and cultures a form of escape from their shackling traditions of centuries. The Russians may shout about their triumphs in science and claim ultimate world triumph of their ideology, but their women would trade a little triumph for American clothes and shoes. The Japanese may be transforming their country into a modern marvel of steel and electronics, but modernization, to their women, means shedding their subjugated status, along with their kimonos.<sup>198</sup>

These statements about Russia and Japan show that Fashion Group members had a sense of superiority towards those countries and possibly fear of cultures so different from their own. Also, this quote showed the belief that capitalism and business was the basis of a strong democracy and the way that women could find liberation. Members honestly wanted to learn more about other cultures, but that did not translate into an acceptance of cultural equality.

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<sup>198</sup> Estelle Hamburger, "The American Business of Fashion," Fashion Group Newsletter, December 1963, pg. 7, Box 147, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Hamburger continued that American fashion learned much in recent years: better use of technology, more awareness of all levels of fashion, and more sophistication due to travel, art, and diversity. She argued that the American fashion business had more work to do; in order to have better business, the American fashion industry needed to better understand the societal changes that were taking place, better understand the American woman who purchased fashion, and learn more about the stores across America that sell fashion. Hamburger believed in American exceptionalism, however she also believed that American fashion could conduct better business, which would lead to higher profits and more global influence.

The senior vice president of Neiman-Marcus in Dallas spoke at the Cosmetic Meeting of February 1967. He predicted that the modern cosmetic industry would not be able to continue as it was, “We can assume that our capitalist system, modified by socialization, in restricted areas, will continue to prevail to one degree or another. Work weeks will continue to decline, and disposable consumer income will continue in the trend it has been moving in the past thirty years.”<sup>199</sup> Some of his predictions were truer and there were changes that influenced the entire industry. He suggested “The future of the retail business as we know it today is just as unpleasant, and will eventually evolve into two classifications of stores. One will consist of the mass merchandisers, dealing in tonnage rather than taste, and held by a very small handful of huge corporations. At the other end of the scale, we would like to hope there will be a small group of fine specialty stores, dedicated to unusual and deluxe merchandise, and even rarer in this distant day, to

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<sup>199</sup> Michael H. Thomas, speech given at Cosmetics Meeting, 14 February 1967, pg. 3, Box 78, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

deluxe services.”<sup>200</sup> There was a fear of the complete transfer over to automated and lack of personal touch. Thomas commented on the use of machines in department stores, the introduction of credit cards, and the ability of customers to help themselves to mass produced products. He stated, “Our joint challenge is to continue to find ways of improving our already high standards of fashion leadership, combined with personalized service, and to apply the technology of electronics to becoming not only more efficient cost-wise, but more capable of rendering greater satisfaction to our customers.”<sup>201</sup>

Members, as well as others in society, feared that Americans’ obsession with automation would lead to a decline in jobs, which was real fear. New York had steadily lost apparel jobs to Southern states between 1947 and 1975, by the end of the period New York’s share of national employment dropped from thirty to twelve percent, even though the nation as a whole experienced a rise in apparel jobs.<sup>202</sup>

Fashion Group members constantly worried over the future of fashion. In November 1970, a show was presented to display the coming trends of Spring 1971. The commentary provided for the show argued that there would be no more “fashion-for-fashion’s sake.” That the clothing shown “reflects collective trends based on two strong premises. One: We are influenced by the waves of involvement that wash around us today. Two: There is a vitality in the ideas that have been produced this Spring for the

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<sup>200</sup> Michael H. Thomas, speech given at Cosmetics Meeting, 14 February 1967, pg. 5, Box 78, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>201</sup> Michael H. Thomas, speech given at Cosmetics Meeting, 14 February 1967, pg. 18, Box 78, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>202</sup> Florence Palpacuer, “The Globalization of New York’s Garment Industry,” in *A Coat of Many Colors: Immigration, Globalization, and Reform in New York City’s Garment Industry*, ed. Daniel Soyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 50.



incredible variety of consumer tastes now expressing themselves across the country.”<sup>203</sup>

Lee Hogan Cass, American Ready-to-Wear Committee chairman, provided commentary during the show and for each trend held up an external factor that helped shape the trend: the colors were a direct response to pollution, clothes that leave the form completely bare reflected involvement in the Liberation Movement, and the mystic prints were a response to the public’s desire to escape from reality.<sup>204</sup> Fashion was directly connected to political and social movements of the day and it showed an overt interest by fashion designers in societal issues. Counter culture movements used fashion to express their beliefs and the fashion industry was quick to capitalize upon those trends.

Even as the Fashion Group aligned the fashion industry with the liberated body, it used the movement to further business. At a fashion show titled “The Liberated Body” in May 1970, the commentator Sheila Ley, a fashion consultant and co-chairman of the Fashion Group Committee, said “If you’ve got it, flaunt it. If you haven’t got it, get it. This is the age of the body. Not just any body. But the BEAUTIFUL BODY. Toned. Sleeked. Scented. Re-sculpted. The liberated body. Today’s body. Feels free, unconfined, uninhibited, natural...Times have changed...that’s what’s liberating today’s minds and bodies.”<sup>205</sup> Fashion has always told women what is wrong with their bodies and has offered ways to correct it. They seem to equate liberation with the display of the body, but then specify that the body on display should meet very specific standards of beauty.

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<sup>203</sup> Lee Hogan Cass, “Fashion Spring ’71: Total Involvement,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 6 November 1970, pg. 1, Box 148, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>204</sup> Lee Hogan Cass, “Fashion Spring ’71: Total Involvement,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 6 November 1970, pg. 1-2, Box 148, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>205</sup> Sheila Levy, “Commentary and Report,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 15 May 1970, Box 148, folder 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

More so than in previous decades, in an effort to create more business, Fashion Group members keyed into groups that were underrepresented in the market. Previously that had meant creating children's wear. In 1975, there was a response to the call for more sizes to choose from. A mini meeting series was launched to address the need for plus size and half-sized clothing. It was necessarily framed in positive terms but members recognized that more inclusivity meant larger profits. A report of the event stated, "The first of the current series of mini-meetings sponsored by The Fashion Group presented some surprising and big profit news on big ready-to-wear sizes... These sizes... account for 16% to 29% of the 80 million women in America."<sup>206</sup> It is an interesting conundrum that Fashion Group members found themselves in. In 1970 they spoke of the ideal body, and that concept was something that persisted, yet they also realized that there was a market that could be tapped into, that many American women in fact did not have the ideal body, and that more size inclusivity would lead to larger profits.

The members were not the only ones to experience fear and tension during this period. Several of the male speakers exhibited fear about women and the power they exercised. At the cosmetics meeting in February 1966 a speech was made by Mr. James Laver of the Victoria and Albert Museum in which he argued that the patriarchy was quickly dying and was being replaced by a matriarchy. Laver theorized, "We are seeing the emergence of the first matriarchal society and the interesting thin[g] is it may be irreversible. Matriarchies tend to uncover, so perhaps the 'erogenous zone' will shift to the men... When the matriarchy is fully established, women will be interested in just two

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<sup>206</sup> "The Big News in Large Sizes," Fashion Group Bulletin: Mini Report, 10 September 1975, pg. 1, Box 148, folder 10, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

kinds of clothes—blue jeans and maternity dresses.”<sup>207</sup> Laver believed that women’s fashion was to become obsolete due to the fact that women would no longer need to use fashion in the same way they had historically done, women throughout history had chosen clothes based on the “seduction principal,” that is dressed in a way that would attract the opposite sex, in order to draw a mate. Whereas men dressed according to the “hierarchical principal,” a way that showed their material wealth, in order to show their ability to provide for their mate. As the matriarchal society emerged women would use cosmetics and fashion differently, he even argued that class-conscious clothes would disappear.<sup>208</sup> This belief that society was in the process of becoming a matriarchy displayed his fear of females in power. Also, Laver addressed a room full of fashion professionals, how he had the gall to tell them that fashion would become obsolete is fascinating. Later in his speech Laver said, “a woman without make-up looks uncooked!”<sup>209</sup> The casual sexism found in male speaker’s speeches remained consistent, judging from the many speeches presented, it would seem that men did not believe Fashion Group was an organization of business professionals.

### **Diversity**

Though Fashion Group had established the first international regional group in 1956 in Paris, the creation of a regional group in Mexico City in 1963 was unique. Previous to Mexico City other international chapters were found in places that were more Eurocentric: Canada, France, and Australia. Fashion Group Mexico City hosted their first

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<sup>207</sup> James Laver, Speech given at Cosmetic Meeting, 10 February 1966, pg. 2, Box 78, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>208</sup> James Laver, Speech given at Cosmetic Meeting, 10 February 1966, pg. 3-4, Box 78, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>209</sup> James Laver, Speech given at Cosmetic Meeting, 10 February 1966, pg. 4, Box 78, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

fashion show in February 1963 and show highlighted traditional Mexican garb made from handwoven and mass-produced fabrics. Marian Stephenson Patmore, a founding member of Fashion Group, and Eleanor McMillen, executive director, attended the show. Patmore wrote an account for the bulletin;

The exclusive couturiers as well as big-scale manufacturers were represented in a well-balanced exhibition...Efficient manufacturing techniques have been brought from north of the border, making it possible to achieve smart, well-made clothes at prices that are realistic...All through the exhibition it was apparent that Mexico is as modern as it is ancient, that the same blend of tradition and progress is being evinced in its fashion world as it demonstrated in its architecture...<sup>210</sup>

The article had a tone of condescension that was not present when talking about other regional chapters, for instance there is no mention of progress when Paris or London are the subjects, and Patmore also suggests that Mexico relied upon the United States to be a guiding force for production. However, the very fact that Mexico City established a regional group made it possible for other non-western cities, which may not have been considered fashion capitals, to create a regional group. Even if regional chapters were not established, certain areas gained more recognition by members for their significant contributions to the fashion world. Geraldine Stutz of Bendel's praised the diverse clothes that came from all regions, "There are terrific clothes—full of fresh, bright, interesting ideas—pouring out constantly from designers all over the world—Paris, Seventh Avenue, London, Italy, Spain, Tokyo—in more variety than ever before, at every kind of price."<sup>211</sup> This was the one of the first times Tokyo was heralded as a fashion hub

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<sup>210</sup> Marian Stephenson Patmore, "Newest Regional Group is in Mexico," Fashion Group Newsletter, May 1963, pg. 2, Box 147, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>211</sup> Geraldine Stutz, Speech given at Cosmetic Meeting, 10 February 1966, Box 78, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

by a Fashion Group member and indicated the organization was becoming more international.

Fashion Group hosted Cultural Exchange shows starting in the 1960 which were sponsored by the U.S. State Department. Ben Weiner of the State Department had been invited as a special guest to the Children's Show in 1963 and became interested in Fashion Group, he believed he could use their fashion shows to further put America on display. Eleanor McMillen provided a brief explanation of how the shows came about in her article about the Mexico City show, "He revealed he was interested because it was high time that our American Ready-to-Wear industry put its best foot forward in showing our way of dress to the rest of the world—our technological improvements in fabric, the comfort, the fit, the vast distribution, the great range of styles, the sizing, the fashions at various price levels, which are unique in clothing people."<sup>212</sup> These shows grew out of the fact that the United States was interested in fighting communism in every way possible.

Mexico City was the first embassy to host a show but the program soon grew; Fashion Group presented a fashion show in the American embassy of foreign countries, and then played host to a show from that culture back in New York. The exchange show in Scandinavia (the show toured four different cities before returning to New York) promoted the idea that America's history of immigration is why the United States produced such good quality ready-to-wear material;

Perhaps it is because America has been the 'melting pot' of people from many countries, inheriting the traits, trades and talents of each nationality, that it has been able to develop the ready-to-wear industry which is now the first in New

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<sup>212</sup> Eleanor McMillen, "The American Embassy Show in Mexico City," Fashion Group Newsletter, March 1966, pg. 4, Box 147, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

York City... , first in New York State, and third largest in the land. Polish immigrants brought tailoring techniques. Italians had a special flair for lavish embroidery. The French brought an instinctive deftness for cut and drapery. Germans, Scandinavians, Dutch and British newcomers were adept in engineering....Subtle fusings of all these characteristics, plus the necessity of Americans, by virtue of the size of their country, to visualize things in terms of mass and vast distribution, combine to make what is known as the 'ready-to-wear' fashion industry.<sup>213</sup>

Though it romanticized the story of immigration in the United States, and contain a certain amount of truth, it was clear what type of immigrant was appreciated by Fashion Group members.

In September 1971 the president of the Fashion Group, Marjorie Deane of Tobé Associates, explained that the exchange shows were not intended to create markets in the various locations but instead to help each nation to become better acquainted through the "universal language of fashion."<sup>214</sup> The two exchange shows that Deane directly oversaw in 1971 took place in Paris and Athens and the models that accompanied the show were supposed to show the average American. In a Bulletin that recapped the shows' success, Deane wrote about each model, where she came from and a little about her life, and it displayed how diverse the models were; the models included women who were African American, mothers, students, a Native American model who had been educated on the Shennecock reservation in Long Island, and was one of the most diverse line ups that had walked in a Fashion Group show. The fashions that were shown were provided by the regional groups from around the United States in an effort to show how trends are adopted and adapted in various regions, all in an effort to give an honest representation of

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<sup>213</sup> Kittie Campbell, "American Ready-to-Wear –Wherever," Content article 3, Box 54, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>214</sup> Marjorie Deane, "How the U.S.A. Dresses Today," Fashion Group Bulletin, 17 September 1971, pg. 1, Box 148, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

how American women dressed.<sup>215</sup> The cultural exchange shows happened regularly and in all portions of the world. In 1973, Tokyo hosted an exchange show by the Fashion Group and then presented a show just a few months later. The regional group in Tokyo helped in making the exchange possible and the show in New York, which highlighted historical and modern Japanese fashion, had demonstrations of Japanese music, swordsmanship, and film.<sup>216</sup>

In 1972, Fashion Group hosted an American Indian fashion show at the Americana Hotel in conjunction with the American Indian Cultural Program. The show was introduced by Doris Antun, a co-chairman of the Fashion Group Committee. Antun explained that members had demanded a show about the indigenous peoples of the Americas and explained the purpose behind the show; “Our purpose has been simple and direct—to be honest, to set the record straight, and to introduce you to the culture, sensitivity and sophistication of the Indian community.”<sup>217</sup> The other co-chairman of the Fashion Group Committee for this event was Clydia Nahwooksy. Nahwooksy served as Director of Indian Awareness at the Smithsonian Institution according to the notes created for the event. The fashion show was different than other shows because the commentaries were done mostly by Clydia Nahwooksy, who spoke of oral traditions, architecture, dances, and the environment of various groups, and the commentary about the fashions that were being modeled was done by Dr. Frederick Dockstader, the director of the Museum of the American Indian.

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<sup>215</sup> Marjorie Deane, “Paris and Athens: A Tale of Two Cities,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 5 October 1971, pg. 1-2, Box 148, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>216</sup> “Japan Show is a Hit,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 6 December 1973, pg. 1-2, Box 148, folder 8, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>217</sup> Doris Antun, Speech given at Cultural Exchange Show, 4 December 1972, pg. 1-2, Box 48, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

The show modeled both traditional and contemporary clothing and the models were American Indians. Doris Antun only gave the commentary when it was the contemporary clothing modeled and the contemporary clothing was modeled by white models, Antun pointed out that finding the clothing for this particular show was more difficult because the clothing came from places like Oklahoma City or the San Juan Pueblo coop in New Mexico.<sup>218</sup> Previously, when Fashion Group presented different cultures, it was through the lens of a white member who had either visited the area or had seen the culture portrayed in the styles of Paris. This event showed an effort to work with people within American Indian cultures and to give a well-rounded representation of that culture. Even the menu reflected the various cultures that were represented in the fashion show, each course was from a different region. Though this is significant because it marks a change in how Fashion Group interacted with people of cultures that they take design inspiration from, it still indicated how much cultural appropriation was present in the fashion industry and how much work needed to be done. All the guests wore their best Southwestern jewelry. Also interesting, topless women walked the runway which just seems out of character for this group.

The fashion show ended on a political note. Fashion Group had never shied away from politics but the organization had never seemed to be interested in politics beyond topics that would directly influence the members or their businesses. The American Indian Cultural Exchange show ended as Clydia Nahwooksy gave a brief update of events in Washington, D.C. and read statements made by Native Americans about their situation and their hope for the future while slides of native faces played behind her. The

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<sup>218</sup> American Indian Cultural Exchange Show, 4 December 1972, Box 48, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



last quote that Nahwooksy read was from an “Indian Grandfather;” “I think we will still win. I think there are enough people who wish to understand the Indian mind, that we are not going to harm anyone, that we are a peaceful people, we are not aggressive people...I believe that we will survive. I still believe we will survive. That is our dream.”<sup>219</sup> The fashion show does not end with a call to action in the sense it does not ask Fashion Group members to donate money to a cause, but it does push members to think about the state of the American Indian and what the government had done, or not done, to improve that state.

Further proof that this was a new era for Fashion Group was the African Culture Show in 1977. Though it was not an official exchange it highlighted African culture, African textiles, traditional dress, hairstyles, imagery, and a picture of modern Africa were all shown. A special committee was created to put together the event, The Fashion Group African Committee, and was chaired and filled with African Americans, both from inside Fashion Group and outside the group: educators, employees from *Essence Magazine*, representatives of the African-American Institute all served on the committee.<sup>220</sup> Similar to the Mexico City show, this showed an attempt to include voices of the culture that was on display. Appropriation had been a persistent problem since the ages of Enlightenment and Empire “during which all the world was made over to fit the intellectual, economic, and cultural requirements of first Europe, then the United States.”<sup>221</sup> So this effort to allow community members be part of the development of a

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<sup>219</sup> Clydia Nahwooksy, Speech given at Cultural Exchange Show, 4 December 1972, pg. 26, Box 48, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>220</sup> “Africa!...Images...Impact...Influence,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 13 December 1977, pg. 1-3, Box 148, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>221</sup> Peter Shand, “Scenes from the Colonial Catwalk: Cultural Appropriation, Intellectual Property Rights, and Fashion,” *Cultural Analysis* 3 (2002), 52.

fashion show about Africa was significant. It was meaningful not just for Fashion Group, but the fashion industry as a whole, especially since members of Fashion Group created industry standards.

Not only did Fashion Group expand and begin to represent more cultures during the period of international exchange shows, members also began to work with local groups who were underrepresented in the fashion industry. In 1969, Fashion Group cosponsored the Youth Improvement Class with the Mayor's Volunteer Coordinating Council. The program hosted a series of classes, called the Dorothy L. Wallis Youth Opportunities Course in honor of the past Fashion Group president, over twelve weeks for girls between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. The girls all came from the Manhattan neighborhood of East Harlem and covered topics like diet and health, skin care and make-up, hair, speech, posture, fabric selection, accessorizing a wardrobe, and preparation for a job interview. The goal of the courses was "to develop self-appreciation, confidence and poise and to expose the girls to job opportunities which exist in the fashion industries."<sup>222</sup> This displayed an effort to foster an interest in fashion in young girls who were from less privileged backgrounds, who were more likely to be women of color, and who could potentially bring diverse views to the fashion industry.

Some common problems continued through this period. The first was that the programs that were put in place during the late 1960s put a financial strain on Fashion Group. In order to fund the programs like Fashion Therapy (a program that helped prepare women with mental health issues for the job market), the teenage fashion courses

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<sup>222</sup> Lois McLaughlin, "Fashion Classes for Harlem Teens with Become a Continuing Program," Chanel Bulletin, 19 December 1969, pg. 17, Box 148, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

in Harlem, and the Embassy exchange shows, the New York Group needed to think of a creative way to earn money. The solution members settled upon was the Flea Market and Auction. Everything that was sold or auctioned was donated by members or manufactures, even the venue and refreshments were donated. The Flea Market and Auction succeed which begged the question of whether the event would become an annual affair; “Probably! The industry rallied, the crowd had a ball, and The Fashion Group netted almost \$12,000...”<sup>223</sup> The bulletin from September 1970 announced the second annual Flea Market and Auction and promised even more goods to choose from. Later the main fund raiser became a black tie gala. The first was held in September 1976, tickets were sold and the evening also featured a silent auction with original designs created by top designers.<sup>224</sup>

Another problem was that the idea persisted that regional chapters were secondary to New York. Regional directors met in New York annually and divided their time “between reports from key figures of The New York Group on various aspects of the working of The Fashion Group, and ten-minute reports from the various Regional Groups... The Regional Committee had recommended a pattern of certain information to be included in each report... Each Director, of course, added specific activities of her own group. In this way, the audience was given a well-rounded picture of the highly different problems and opportunities indigenous to the many parts of the country in addition to Australia, Canada, Honolulu and Mexico, in which The Fashion Group has branches.”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Patricia Shelton, Fashion Group Bulletin, 1 March 1969, pg. 1, Box 148, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>224</sup> Marjorie Deane and Mary Joan Glynn, “The Fashion’s Group Salute to the Third Century of America was a Black Tie Gala Evening,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 21 September 1976, pg. 1, Box 148, folder 11, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>225</sup> “Regional Directors’ Meeting,” Fashion Group Newsletter, June 1965, pg. 9, Box 147, folder 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Directors attended workshops as well, they discussed problematic areas like finance, membership, and programming with other directors as well as the New York leaders. Members took notice that communication between regional groups was stunted and that regional groups were very separated from New York members. In June 1975, the Buddy System was introduced, which called on New York members to serve as hostesses of the Regional Directors, which allowed for a more personalized visit for the directors during the annual meeting. Later, that program was expanded when each New York Regional Committee member was assigned three Regional Directors who they had to contact “on an informal basis to channel industry news and information from other groups.”<sup>226</sup> The program was known as Regional Intercom and tried to strengthen the bonds between the regional groups and make regional activities more visible.

### **Politically Aware**

Fashion Group was politically active, while members had always been close to political figures, this was a new level of engagement. It encouraged members to research legislation that would affect their work and their incomes. In February 1965 special male guests were invited to the luncheon and asked a series of questions by Jerry Jontry, senior vice president and advertising director at Esquire Magazine. Congressman John Lindsay participated and was asked about the taxes upon women’s products; “The 10% excise tax on women’s cosmetics is one of the great sources of resentment by women who feel that lipstick and face powder and cleansing cream, to say the least of it, come under the heading of absolute essentials...Men don’t seem to suffer any particular resentment at the tax on these things, but do you feel that there is any hope of having this annoying and

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<sup>226</sup> “Regional Intercom,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 15 October 1975, pg. 4, Box 148, folder 10, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

burdensome tax lifted from the whole cosmetics field?”<sup>227</sup> The fact that men did not seem to resent the tax could stem from the fact that men did not have the same pressure when it came to their grooming habits. The group even formed a Legislative Committee in order to “look into certain federal laws and regulations which affect members of the Fashion Group adversely.”<sup>228</sup> The committee reported on women’s ability to deduct certain clothing purchases if they were used for work events and childcare. Also the committee reached out to the National Council of Women to see if the two groups could work together on certain proposals. This was a significantly more active role than Fashion Group had previously taken; though members had been concerned with legislation from the start, often they had been content with just listening to a speech on various topics.

Fashion Group showed a marked interest in every level of fashion production and became concerned with the decline of apparel production within New York. On November 16, 1972, a national demonstration hosted by the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union in support of the Burke-Hartke Bill was attended by New York congressmen, a state senator, and Mayor John Lindsey. The demonstration took place across twenty-seven states and 115 cities to “protest the rising flood of apparel imports.”<sup>229</sup> The slogan of the demonstration was Keep America Working. According to a document labeled “Background” the demonstration was in reaction to the rising numbers of imports; “Between 1966 and 1971, for example, the number of imported brassieres increased 91%; imported skirts and blouses by nearly 110%; imported dresses

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<sup>227</sup> Question posed to Congressman Lindsay, Cosmetics Luncheon, 16 February 1965, Box 78, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>228</sup> Margaret S. Bearn, “Legislative Committee Report,” Fashion Group Newsletter, March 1966, pg. 12, Box 147, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>229</sup> “Fact Sheet,” Box 101, folder 16, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

by 115%; imported women's and girls' slacks by 176%; imported sweaters for both sexes by 201%; women's and children's coats by 359%; and imported women's and children's suits by 386%.”<sup>230</sup> The background also included a reminder that in 1961, President Kennedy had launched a seven point program in order to help the textile and apparel industries and one point that was introduced dealt with “controls to be negotiated with foreign countries to moderate the inflow of competitive products.”<sup>231</sup> The Burke-Hartke Bill would follow international agreements made with Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and Hong Kong. There was a fear found among laborers that multinational corporations would destroy the textile industry and Fashion Group provided information about the arguments for and against the bill. An article from written by Gus Tyler outlined the fear of multinationals, “A multinational corporation has the power to influence, if not dictate, national policies that it desires and to nullify, if not veto, practices it does not like. The awesome power resides in its readiness to locate capital, technology, administration, manufacture, merchandising and other vital business operations wherever it pleases and to remove these resources from lands where it is displeased.”<sup>232</sup> Fashion Group did not formally take a stance, but the material suggests that members did not approve of the bill.

During the 1970s, Fashion Group members were up to date on current affairs and often contacted officials to attend luncheons as guest speakers. It was a time marked with political debate and calls to action. In February 1972, a guest speaker at the Cosmetic Meeting was Dr. Albert Kligman who was a professor of dermatology and worked with

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<sup>230</sup> “Background”, Box 101, folder 16, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>231</sup> “Background,” Box 101, folder 16, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>232</sup> Gus Tyler, “Multinationals: A Global Menace,” *The American Federationist*, July 1972, Box 101, folder 16, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Kligman spoke about the future of the cosmetics industry, how it had grown exponentially in the previous twenty-five year (mostly as a byproduct of the chemical industry) and how cosmetics are a “legitimate division of health science.” He argued that cosmetic care was a socio-economic problem, one found across the globe, and that cosmetics should be under the regulation of the FDA in order to create better products that consumers could trust, which in turn would strengthen the entire industry. He believed that in order for stronger research to be conducted the FDA needed to regulate the detergents, fragrances, and bleaches used in products and that as higher quality goods were produced, more people would have access to products that truly treated skin problems.<sup>233</sup> This is particularly interesting since many members worked for corporations, who traditionally want less government oversight.

Also in 1972, the Fashion Group hosted female political activists at a luncheon in October because, according to Chairman Barbara Ohrback of the Butterick Fashion Marketing Company, “We, who contribute so mightily to the economics of this country, want and should be effecting the political and economic decisions that affect us and our world...Independent, energetic, aware, affluent, successful. How we direct these strengths, individually or as a group, can only be determined by our knowledge of the facts and issues.”<sup>234</sup> Speakers included Eleanor Norton, chairman of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, and Liz Carpenter and Jill Ruckelshaus, both representing the National Women’s Political Caucus’ National Policy Council. The

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<sup>233</sup> “Beauty: Three Fresh Views,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 11 February 1972, pg. 1-2, Box 148, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>234</sup> “Political Activists Address the Fashion Group,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 12 October 1972, pg. 2, Box 148, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

speakers called members of Fashion Group to become involved in the movement for women's equality; whether that was through the donation of money, time, and labor, lobby for the Equal Rights Amendment, or file complaints over discrimination based upon sex. The audience at the luncheon held more than just members of Fashion Group; special guests included nominees for Congress, Marlene Sanders, an ABC correspondent, Betty Freidan, the founder of National Organization for Women, and Elinor Guggenheimer, founder of Day Care and Child Development Council of America, as well as others and reflected the a more politically active Fashion Group.<sup>235</sup>

### **Bicentennial**

The bicentennial celebrations in the United States provided an opportunity for Fashion Group to reevaluate their position and examine the direction that the organization was moving. In 1972, Fashion Group members aligned themselves with other women's organizations around the country in order to guide the way that women would be represented during the bicentennial; this alliance of women's organizations was known as the Women's Organization Coalition and representatives of each group met regularly. The coalition had specific goals in place and worked with a variety of women in order to achieve those goals. In a memo from Perdita Huston, the coordinator of women's participation in the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, it was specified that it "is constituted of, by and for women: To promote active involvement of all women representing all races, classes and creeds, in common cause with other groups excluded from full participation in life, as catalysts and leaders in all dimensions of the American

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<sup>235</sup> "Political Activists Address the Fashion Group," Fashion Group Bulletin, 12 October 1972, pg. 2-5, Box 148, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



Revolution Bicentennial observation.”<sup>236</sup> Groups that were represented at the coalition meetings included the National Organization for Women, Americans for Indian Opportunities, the Black Women’s Caucus, and the Intercollegiate Association of Women Students; this was in an effort to represent every woman’s story during the celebrations. A specific goal of the Women’s Coalition was that individuals would be served instead of institutions. This activity fit into this new era of Fashion Group, as members were more concerned with representation, both for themselves as well as for those in other communities.

The Bicentennial era seemed to spur Fashion Group members to be more inclusive in their history of the fashion industry. In a piece titled “Development of the Fashion Industry,” submitted to the Bicentennial Committee, the author addressed the long history of cramped quarters and long hours that garment workers experienced; “Seventh Avenue, as we know it today, began in 1916...Few of these buildings from which these manufacturers moved from were entirely fireproof...a tragic fire cost the lives of 146 workers, mostly girls who were unable to escape from a locked door. The shocking exposure of the conditions under which these girls worked resulted in new laws concerning safety and factory inspection and employment of women.”<sup>237</sup> The history did highlight the labor conditions of the early twentieth century, but this did not mark an increased interest in the labor conditions of the 1970s. Fashion Group was never a trade union, however members seemed oblivious to unions that did exist for the nonprofessional workers in the fashion industry. During the Bicentennial there seemed to

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<sup>236</sup> Perdita Huston, 11 October 1972, American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, Box 99, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>237</sup> Josephine Watkins, “Development of the Fashion Industry,” pg. 6, 2 January 1974, Box 101, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

be an effort made by members to acknowledge more levels in the fashion industry and to shine light on employees of every income, especially in pieces written about the history of the fashion industry. Members were sure to include information about the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and how it aided seamstresses and other working class women.<sup>238</sup> The work for bicentennial celebrations brought Fashion Group into close contact with a wide range of women, both professional and those of the working class.

During the preparation for the bicentennial celebrations Singer, the producer of sewing machines, approached Fashion Group about granting the organization a \$100,000 grant in order to produce a documentary about the past two hundred years of fashion history. The offer sparked debate among members as they had to decide upon the future direction of Fashion Group, as well as consider the values of the organization. Some members believed that the opportunity to create a documentary would help further Fashion Group's mission to educate the public, and with the help of the grant money would not put any extra burden on the finances of the group. Others worried that if Fashion Group accepted the money to create the documentary their tax status of non-profit organization could be put in danger. Also, some were concerned that the entire project would be tainted with commercialism, which would run directly against the values of Fashion Group; Singer would run the documentary on TV and the Fashion Group would have no say in which sponsors would be advertised during the broadcasting. A memo sent by the new president of Fashion Group, Rita Perna, in January 1974 tried to ease members' concerns over the grant;

I have it on the authority of Mr. Sperling, Fashion Group counsel, and Mr. Dubin, the Montgomery Ward counsel, that no tax situation is immune from review or

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<sup>238</sup> Josephine Watkins, "Development of the Fashion Industry," pg. 7, 2 January 1974, Box 101, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

has a predictable outcome. Growth in any undertaking requires prudent risk and a good deal of courage. In this moment of enormous change, Fashion Group must grow and meet the same challenges that the rest of the industry faces... It is to our advantage that Singer can distribute the film 'for exhibition on a non-commercial basis by TV stations, schools, libraries, museums, and educational groups free of charge.' This constitutes an exposure far greater than we could achieve even with the utmost cooperation of all our Regional Groups... FG has the right to make its own film in its own way for its own purposes. The film is the property of FG. The contract states, 'FG is to have complete and exclusive control over the contents, format, artistic direction and production of both the film and the show'... For TV use, Singer has the right to edit and to establish exposure dates in consultation with FG. They will bear all expenses of editing and distributing. They will obtain all necessary clearances and approvals. FG has the right to preview the TV version. FG has the option to be credited as producer and supplier of the film.<sup>239</sup>

It was settled that a documentary would be produced, the film would be twenty minutes long and would specifically mention Singer and his first machine during the appropriate time during the film. As production of the film progressed the Fashion Group reached out to John Lindsay, who had previously been a guest at a cosmetics luncheon during his tenure as a congressman. He also served as mayor of New York and Fashion Group members thought he was an appropriate choice for narrator of their documentary; "We want a distinguished leader who realizes the importance of the Number One Industry in the City and the State, with charming good looks, charisma, etc., with which you are endowed. Would you be willing to do the commentary, the voice-over on this 20-minute film?"<sup>240</sup> The final script showed that John Lindsay consented to be the narrator of the film.

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<sup>239</sup> Rita A. Perna to The Fashion Group, 10 January 1974, pgs. 2-3, Box 99, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>240</sup> Letter from Eleanor McMillen to John Lindsay, 17 January 1975, Box 99, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

The film debuted on April 18, 1975 which was the official beginning of the national bicentennial celebrations. It marked two hundred years since Paul Revere's ride. The final product was titled *The Spirit of American Fashion: 1776-1976* and was followed by a fashion show of American fashions from 1820 to the 1970s modeled by Fashion Institute of Technology students. Also, Broadway was represented by two stars of the show *Shenandoah* sang while wearing recreations of period costumes. The Fashion Group bulletin that reported on the show and film had a two page spread showing the FIT students in their period pieces. Though these women were not necessarily members of Fashion Group, it is important to note that the students were diverse, women of color were involved in the show.<sup>241</sup> And if they remained in the fashion industry, were potential members.

Because the women of Fashion Group were not fashion historians, the film was made possible by extensive research and working with other professionals. In a letter to William Ruckelshaus, the head of the Bicentennial Commission, Fashion Group let it be known that they wished to contribute to the American Bicentennial Commission and that Fashion Group worked closely with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, among others.<sup>242</sup> Fashion Group received the position of an official contributor to the bicentennial celebrations. In the American Bicentennial Monthly, which was the official publication by the Bicentennial Council, Fashion Group's film and fashion show was mentioned as "a barometer of manners and mores" alongside the material that was

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<sup>241</sup> Fashion Group Bulletin, 18 April 1975, Box 99, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>242</sup> Eleanor McMillen to Mr. William D. Ruckelshaus, 6 February 1974, Box 99, folder 8, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

produced by the Butterick company which fittingly focused more on the construction of the historical fashions.<sup>243</sup> The guest speaker was Bess Myerson as a representative of Fashion Capital of the World. A former Miss America, she was the first and only Jewish American to be granted that title. She served as the first Commissioner of the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs and later worked in consumer protections law. Fashion Group consistently, throughout its history, found interesting trailblazing women to speak at events. Though Fashion Group was understandably interested mainly in fashion professionals, they did acknowledge and network with professional women in all fields.

During the bicentennial celebrations, Fashion Group hosted an annual luncheon for the regional directors, which included the international chapters. This served as an opportunity to discuss bicentennial activities that could be attended by members around the country, like Operation Sail which made harbor in various American cities, as well as discuss the direction that Fashion Group would like to move in. In a memo sent out to the regional directors, Rosemary Murtry pointed out that women are more similar than different;

To think of us all—busy homemakers, business women—acting as volunteers to forward an idea. An idea of women working together, sharing information, helping each other, knowing full well it will ultimately come back to us. Women have the same problems, no matter what country, language or color. Let us think in unifying our thoughts, our purposes, our projects. The changing world, economically, politically, technologically and culturally through our music, our theatre, our arts, affects the way we think, the way we buy our consumer products, and the way we live. To unify our programs—meetings of information in fabrics, textures, colors, clothes, homes, travel, crafts. To help women in jobs—to lift our heads to realize what we need to know to complete with Harvard Business Grads.

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<sup>243</sup> The American Bicentennial Monthly, Vol 1, no. 1, January 1975, pg. 9, Box 99, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

When we read the results of the International Women's Year, we realize we have overcome many basic difficulties. Most of us have achieved our liberation in whatever degree we want. We are fortunate in being able to work together and share together, and it is in this light that I wish to welcome this International Group.<sup>244</sup>

There is a tone of inclusiveness that had not previously been found before among the women. Though Fashion Group remained separated and still exclusively served women in the fashion industry, they saw themselves reflected in the United Nation's International Women's Year of 1975 and worked hard to be involved with the larger narrative of the bicentennial of the United States. The leaders of Fashion Group were eager to participate in celebrations like Operation Sail, and encouraged the regional groups on the coasts to participate as well, but the New York office also used to it highlight the importance of New York in the fashion industry. Rosemary Murtry spoke at a luncheon in 1976 and she said, "You are here to see the viewpoint of the Committee on New York's Number One, and our State's Number One Industry—our tremendous, vigorous and growing Seventh Avenue. Our Industry which has done much to create an "American Look" at every price line with rapid distribution to all the stores across our vast country."<sup>245</sup> The tension that marked this period is found in all aspects of Fashion Group's activities, the fear of lost jobs was real and so leaders took every opportunity to emphasize the importance of the New York fashion industry.

The members worked to place women in all levels of the fashion business. In November 1974 the Fashion Group hosted a day long symposium for executives in fashion and related industries. The title of the symposium was "Women in Management:

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<sup>244</sup> Rosemary Murtry to Regional Directors, 3 June 1976, Box 99, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>245</sup> Rosemary Murtry, speech given at American Ready-to-Wear Meeting, 4 June 1976, Box 99, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Your Time has Come!” and the participants tried to answer the age-old question of why more women did not run major corporations. Speakers at the three panels held during the symposium included representatives of business schools, presidents of large corporations, self-employed, and the editor-in-chief of *Mademoiselle* and were both male and female. The speakers had different theories on why women did not hold positions of power, and not all believed that it was because of systemic practices that favored men; Mildred Custin, president of Bonwit-Teller, argued that women were capable of holding managerial positions but that “women may not be willing to commit themselves to total responsibility.”<sup>246</sup> Others believed that the reason women did not rise to managerial positions was because of societal conditioning; Pauline Magee-Egan, a professor of psychology at St. John’s University, spoke about how women are pre-conditioned against success because schools, parents, and society as a whole reduced their self-image to three things: extreme passivity, low self-esteem, and low need for achievement. The only way women would rise to positions of power was if women had access to training to overcome these limitations, which could be accomplished through business courses but more importantly through female mentorship.<sup>247</sup>

This topic continued to be debated as members tried to help women achieve higher positions, a second symposium was held in 1975 and focused heavily on the fact that women often do not have the training to work with money. Even when women owned their own business, they may not necessarily know what happened in the

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<sup>246</sup> “How to Make it to the Top,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 8 November 1974, pg. 3, Box 148, folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>247</sup> “How to Make it to the Top,” Fashion Group Bulletin, 8 November 1974, pg. 3-4, Box 148, folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

accounting department.<sup>248</sup> The second symposium focused more on the actions that women could take to advance their position and there seemed to be less debate about women's aspirations and willingness to put in long hours. The Fashion Group continued to find ways to bring the topic to light. In 1977, Fashion Group held a special luncheon during New York City's official "Women in Business" week. The luncheon focused on the lack of women in managerial positions, the gap between men's and women's wages even though women earned more college degrees than ever before, and the societal beliefs that women had to work against, such as there are positions should not hold or that it is hard to work for women.<sup>249</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In early 1975, the Fashion Group's bulletins reflected a rising concern over the state of the economy. January's bulletin was entirely filled with guest speakers' outlook for the 1975 economic situation. The speakers, all male, addressed the topic from their specific field. There was much debate and no consensus among the panel.<sup>250</sup> In March's bulletin, the pages were filled with excerpts from the speeches given by Drs. Margaret Mead and Peter Wolf. Both of the speakers were well renowned, published, and leaders in their fields and both were hopeful that any shortages that occurred during the recession would ultimately be good for society at large, however they believed the positive

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<sup>248</sup> "Management Experts Tell Women how to get More Exec Rewards," Fashion Group Bulletin, 17 September 1975, pg. 1-4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>249</sup> "Women in Business—Now in Orbit," Fashion Group Bulletin, 29 September 1977, pg. 1-2, Box 148, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>250</sup> "1975 Economic Outlook," Fashion Group Bulletin, 10 January 1975, pg. 1-4, Box 148, folder 10, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



outcomes may not arrive for more than a year.<sup>251</sup> Just as the early members invited economists to speak at the first luncheons about the effect the stock market crash of 1929 had on the fashion industry, the women of 1975 were concerned about the recession and whether America would find itself in another depression and what it would mean to their work.

Tension and fear marked this period of Fashion Group's history. American society experienced upheaval and it was reflected in the organization's activities. While it was a difficult time in many ways it was also the period that saw Fashion Group become more diverse, more vocal about political matters, and provided an opportunity to break free from a narrow definition of trends.

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<sup>251</sup> "Shortage Environment May Lead to Better Life," Fashion Group Bulletin, 13 March 1975, pg. 1-4, Box 148, folder 10, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Results of a survey take of Fashion Group taken in the early spring of 1991 were published in the bulletin that fall and they (taken from the 1200 respondents out of the 5500 membership) gave insight as to where members worked, their attitudes towards the industry, their finances, and personal lives. The results indicated that 40% of the respondents were self-employed and that “you get through the ‘glass ceiling’ by owning your own company. 72% of respondents who classify themselves as CEO/President/COO/Partner/Chief Designer own and operate their own business. One of the primary reasons for going into business is to remove limits on achievement.”<sup>252</sup> The survey also showed that many of the members made more than \$100,000 a year and often married later in life, after the age of thirty-five, and eighteen percent of the respondents had never been married. Also, more than half the respondents reported that women had to work harder than men to advance and that their membership had been a worthwhile career move.<sup>253</sup> The survey indicates that leaders of Fashion Group needed to reacquaint themselves with who the members were, both in their professional and business lives.

The survey results showed the leaders of Fashion Group that membership had shifted and guided the goals that were created during the last decades of the twentieth century. Fashion Group during the late twentieth century continued to face changes in the market and consumer base as a new generation gained purchasing power, had the opportunity to establish new goals and structure to reflect the changes in society, and were faced with new technology that changed the very nature of business. Although

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<sup>252</sup> “The FGI Member Today,” FG, Bulletin 5, October-November 1991, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>253</sup> “The FGI Member Today,” FG, Bulletin 5, October-November 1991, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Fashion Group adjusted to new trends, the values of the organization remained constant. It continued to help professional women achieve success in the fashion industry.

### **Constant Change**

In September 1979, Fashion Group members met for a Working Woman Presentation. A speech from the meeting addressed the fact that more married women were full time employees than stay at home mothers and the days of the breadwinner husband were behind them. The speaker stated that only one in six households had a male breadwinner and that only one third of American households were made of nuclear families of man/woman/child.<sup>254</sup> These new trends in American society caused problems for marketers because it forced them to find new ways to reach customers. One new demographic the marketer suggested was the Career Girl, a polished woman who purchased high end clothes and accessories, which to a certain extent existed. The speaker pointed out that “As many as two million women make over \$15,000 a year...However, 39 million make less than \$15,000 and the median is \$8,814.”<sup>255</sup> The Career Girl was not the average working woman, she made more and was able to spend more of her income on herself. Women spent more than they earned, simply because they were the primary spender in the household on items like groceries and toiletries. She also pointed out that there were many non-monetary benefits that women found in working outside of their homes: social interactions and a sense of identity. The argument of the presentation was that marketers need to understand the many types of women who work and how they spend their money in order to create the best marketing campaigns and

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<sup>254</sup> “Working Woman Presentation,” September 1979, pg. 2, Box 84, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>255</sup> “Working Woman Presentation,” September 1979, pg. 2, Box 84, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

foster new relationships with a changing customer base. In many ways the Career Girl is reflected in the membership of Fashion Group, however membership was heavily made up of women who were middle aged, so the Career Girl highlighted in the presentation was a new generation of professional woman who was raised with different expectations of fashion and careers.

The economic climate of the 1980s brought change to the fashion industry. The structure of companies started to change and the emergence of the “Consumer Driven Hybrid” which, according to the opening address by Carol Farmer at a Fashion Group forum, was part-retailer and part manufacture created to address the changing habits and attitudes of the adult baby-boomers.<sup>256</sup> These companies were marked by merchandise that conveyed a sense of value because was high quality yet fairly priced. Also, these companies did not just design a line of clothes, but branch into “point-of-difference merchandising” which carried the label across “every classification from apparel to accessories to candy...”<sup>257</sup> An example of the effective use of point-of-difference merchandising was presented by Stephen Watson, CEO of the Dayton-Hudson Department stores, when he described his store’s label, Boundary Waters, as more than the usual in-house label, it instead became the label of “attitude products.”<sup>258</sup> Products covered every classification and could become the basis of a particular lifestyle that consumers tried to convey, a consistent esthetic that could be displayed throughout a wardrobe and throughout the interior design of a home. This was similar to the work done

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<sup>256</sup> Fashion Group Forum, “The Vertical Club,” 15 January 1987, pg. 1, Box 89, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>257</sup> Fashion Group Forum, “The Vertical Club,” 15 January 1987, pg. 2-4, Box 89, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>258</sup> Stephen E. Watson, “Speech to Fashion Group,” 15 January 1987, pg. 8-9, Box 89, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

by Fashion Group in the 1930s and 1940s to create more cohesive trends, an effort to encourage companies to produce items that did not clash. This is different though because it is a single brand that produces everything a home may need, from kitchen accessories to children's clothing. It was in the very nature of Fashion Group to be interested in these changes and learn how to conduct better business through them. The late twentieth century saw meetings with guest speakers just as every other era of FGI had.

While vertically integrated companies were not identical they shared many similar features. This is a moment in time when large companies began to lose regional connections, small regional department stores were absorbed into larger conglomerates, and a homogenous type of retailer emerged. The vertical companies are found nationally and each store, whether it is found in New York or Arizona, looked the same; if stores wanted Esprit merchandise on their floors, they had to meet exacting standards set by the company and Benetton created a “unique system of 300 small-but-sophisticated sub-contractors...And while owners pay no franchise fee they must design stores as specified and buy Benetton merchandise from a regional distributor—another subcontractor who is not a Benetton employee.”<sup>259</sup> This was a moment when the modern “mall stores” were created; “The Gap’s Mickey Drexler revamped the old jeans-store image...75% is private label, manufactured in the Far East, sold in cheery renovated stores and shown in classy catalogs that are in themselves hybrids—they’re just to look at, not order from.”<sup>260</sup> This showed a drastic shift in the industry. A consistency was created that provided all consumers the same shopping experience across the country. This consolidation led to

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<sup>259</sup> Fashion Group Forum, “The Vertical Club,” 15 January 1987, pg. 2-3, Box 89, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>260</sup> Fashion Group Forum, “The Vertical Club,” 15 January 1987, pg. 2, Box 89, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

stress among the members because as production shifted and smaller stores were absorbed by a handful of larger ones, there was a fear that their job security was threatened. The speaker at the Fashion Group forum in 1987 said that there was “A new breed of cynical baby-boomer consumers, raised with high expectations, doomed to be left unfulfilled because of declining discretionary dollars, rising expenses. Today’s consumers at all income levels have become brand-disloyal pragmatists ‘out to bet the system,’”<sup>261</sup> The forum explained how five brands addressed the shifting needs and wants of the consumer, all five brands still exist today: The Limited, The Gap, Esprit, Benetton, and Ralph Lauren. This showed the development of a cohesive American shopping scene.

Fashion is and has always been about consumption, but with the introduction of Coca-Cola clothing lines by Murjani fashion became corporate advertising. Joel Horowitz, president of Murjani, spoke at Fashion Group’s Forum and said, “The Coca-Cola clothes concept began back in 1983. We do a lot of research at Murjani... The research was extremely positive and indicated that the market for Coca-Cola clothes would be very, very big. We believe this constituted a breakthrough in the licensing field since it is the transfer of a brand’s selling power to a totally new and unrelated product category.”<sup>262</sup> Fashion shifted to advertising for other products and created a need to form business relationships across industries. Members continued to stay up to date about the newest practices in marketing and branding. Fashion Group members had often fostered relationships across industries, but this new trend of using licensed content for clothing marked a bigger need to establish further ranging partnerships in order to create lines for

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<sup>261</sup> Fashion Group Forum, “The Vertical Club,” 15 January 1987, pg. 1, Box 89, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>262</sup> Joel Horowitz, “Speech to Fashion Group Forum,” 15 January 1987, pg. 6, Box 89, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

fashion brands with no fashion brands. Previously, members fostered relationships with Hollywood in order to promote their products within film or with the aid of starlets, but during this period it was a shift to actually printing characters and products on the clothing items themselves.

A speech given by Margaret A. Gilliam, vice president and senior security analyst of The First Boston Corporation, at the Fashion Group Forum argued the structure of the fashion industry was changing;

Over the years, we have seen a number of department store companies disappear from the scene, but the takeover activity is aggravating the trend as retail companies sell off their weakest divisions, many to disappear as individual entities...Further, the need to streamline operations within the department store industry, combined with its ongoing concentration, suggest that there is going to be more centralization and corporate involvement in merchandising. This means that the more profitable labels in department stores are going to command more real estate...the weaker brands are going to face increasing difficulty sustaining themselves.<sup>263</sup>

The centralization of department stores caused members to worry about the continued loss of professional jobs. New York had lost apparel jobs since the postwar era, but the loss was exacerbated in the late twentieth century by the fact that it was accompanied by increased imports of apparel from Asia and Latin America.<sup>264</sup> Garment production had started to shift away from New York in the postwar years and moved to the American South, where large factories could be built for high-volume production. Also, the changing nature of the fashion industry caused concern among members because as the larger department stores purchased smaller ones, positions like buyers and marketers

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<sup>263</sup> Margaret A. Gilliam, "Speech to Fashion Group Forum," 15 January 1987, pg. 2, Box 89, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>264</sup> Florence Palpacuer, "The Globalization of New York's Garment Industry," in *A Coat of Many Colors: Immigration, Globalization, and Reform in New York City's Garment Industry*, ed. Daniel Soyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 50-51.

were consolidated as well. Members saw certain positions becoming obsolete and other positions becoming less available. This only accelerated at the end of the century. By the late 1970s, many of the United States based firms had closed their shops and contracted sewing work in low-wage, offshore markets, especially in Southeast Asia. Job loss rates increased through the 1990s and much of the globalization of the market was driven by firms in developed nations, not by the developing nations.<sup>265</sup>

The Fashion Group had no choice but to join a larger globalizing movement. In November 1987, Fashion Group hosted an International Ready-to-Wear show for spring/summer 1988, which highlighted designs from Milan, London, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, and Moscow.<sup>266</sup> Fashion Group had always looked to Europe for current trends, but this era marks a broadening of their international trends, and is distinct from the shows that previously showcased fashions of other countries. The offerings now were part of the ready-to-wear collections which meant that they were for American's consumption and not just a way to showcase foreign cultures. This continued the trend of greater diversity and representation that began in the 1960s and 1970s.

Some of the earliest meetings hosted by Fashion Group concerned the stock market crash of 1929. The women were concerned what affect it would have on the fashion industry, in New York and across the country. In 1988, Fashion Group members were still concerned about the stock market, in January of that year a special guest speaker, Walter F. Loeb of Morgan Stanley & Co., spoke to them about the "events

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<sup>265</sup> Jane L. Collins, "Mapping a Global Labor Market: Gender and Skill in the Globalizing Garment Industry," *Gender and Society* 16, no. 6 (December 2002), 928.

<sup>266</sup> Transcript of commentary from International Ready-to-Wear show, 13 November 1987, pg. 1, Box 89, folder 6, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



subsequent to October 19, 1987, when the stock market crashed” and “what the effect was on retailing and how we reacted then, and how we view it now.”<sup>267</sup> His speech offered assurance that the market would recover quickly and pointed to the sale of retail holdings as proof that there was movement and retail would persist.<sup>268</sup> The growth of the market was connected to globalization. Loeb said, “I look for more globalization in the 1990s. Already, communications have become global... We are in a shrinking world, where systems have been standardized.”<sup>269</sup> The economy was, of course, important to members of Fashion Group, but they also paid close attention to other world events. In a call for nominees for honorees for the Night of the Stars, Fashion Group’s annual black-tie event, members were asked “to represent as many regions and countries as possible. We should also consider recognizing talent from the Eastern European countries as a timely issue.”<sup>270</sup> The prediction that globalization would continue through the 1990s proved true. In the bulletin of June/July 1994, an article was published that summed up key points made at the Going Global program that FGI hosted. The program explored what issues companies faced as they moved into a more global marketplace and how American corporations could gain brand recognition around the globe. One of the speakers at the program, Grady Means of Coopers & Lybrand, argued that “in the current and future global marketplace, technology will be the major enabler.”<sup>271</sup> Global markets

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<sup>267</sup> Walter F. Loeb, Presentation to the Fashion Group, 14 January 1988, pg. 1, Box 89, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>268</sup> Walter F. Loeb, Presentation to the Fashion Group, 14 January 1988, pg. 8, Box 89, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>269</sup> Walter F. Loeb, Presentation to the Fashion Group, 14 January 1988, pg. 14-15, Box 89, folder 7, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>270</sup> “News from Nine Rock,” FG, Bulletin 1, March 1991, pg. 4, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>271</sup> Kelly Bevan, “Going Global,” FGI Bulletin, number 3, June/July 1994, pg. 2, Box 150, folder 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

had existed for centuries and the fashion industry was a key player in those markets, as technology boomed the American fashion industry took advantage of an opportunity to find even more markets to join and dominate.

As the nation continued to struggle with recession in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Fashion Group dedicated much of the space in the bulletin and time during luncheons to guest speakers who could speak on how businesses could survive the slump and how women could use the recession as an opportunity to aggressively expand into new markets. Member Stephanie Silk wrote “Since the natural reaction of many businesses is to tighten-up spending and try to weather out the storm during tough economic times opportunities abound for companies willing to take the initiative...”<sup>272</sup> In February 1992, Fashion Group highlighted some of the key points presented by two guest speakers from companies that were doing particularly well despite the recession: Tom Fields from Wal-Mart and Jim Nordstrom of Nordstrom’s.<sup>273</sup> Fashion Group members had weathered many downturns in the market, some more serious than others, but they consistently looked to professionals outside and inside their field in order to gain insight on the best way to continue business despite economic uncertainty.

Fashion Group always reflected the times and constantly worked to expand the consumer base, which meant that it had to find ways to reach historically neglected populations. The topic of the fifth industry focus program in September 1988 was “From Stepchild to Cinderella: An Overview of Special Sizes.” The co-chairs included Mary

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<sup>272</sup> Stephanie Silk, “The ‘Less’ Decade: Our New Reality,” FG, Bulletin 1, April 1992, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>273</sup> Kathleen Beckett, “Secrets of their Success,” FG, Bulletin 1, February 1992, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Duffy of Big Beauties Little Women, which was a division of Ford modeling agency, and Hara Marano, the editorial director of *Vogue's* "Fashion Plus," a series of advertorials published between 1986 and 1988.<sup>274</sup> Other speakers included the executive vice president of Liz Claiborne, Jay Margolis, and a principal of Kurt Salmon Associates, an international consulting firm specialized in consumer products and retailing. Members of Fashion Group were surrounded by specific sets of beauty standards and the topic of this particular program pointed out that many women were not being marketed to in a meaningful way due to those narrow standards. Duffy wondered in her speech,

If sometimes we're not simply addressing the wrong customer in the wrong way... That Special Sizes, in fact, represent a great large number of the norm in this country, and that we are giving them inadequate floor space, inadequate merchandising, inadequate depth and selection, insufficient advertising and editorial coverage, and that for our failures here we are paying a high price at the cash registers as these customers find us often all too easily resistable [*sic*] because of what we simply are not giving them... [P]aying attention to this customer and merchandising to her with the same enthusiasm that you use for the 'missy' customer will, in fact, enhance your profits, and that is, what we all know, what we're in business for.<sup>275</sup>

The program included information about the amount of money to be made in plus-size fashion and how the market was so thirsty for a wider range of sizes that designers and department stores had guaranteed customers. The pressure to create a wide range of sizes showed how Fashion Group members adjusted to the market in order to increase profits. By offering more representation, members were able to increase business.

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<sup>274</sup> Eleanor Douglas, Transcript of presentation at "From Stepchild to Cinderella: An Overview of Special Sizes," 15 September 1988, pg. 1, Box 89, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>275</sup> Mary Duffy, Transcript of presentation at "From Stepchild to Cinderella: An Overview of Special Sizes," 15 September 1988, pg. 3-6, Box 89, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Members did believe that increased representation and access to quality clothing in a wider size range was important beyond the boost in profits. There was an emphasis placed on how the women who wore the “Special Sizes” led active lives, were professionals, and craved clothing that functional and attractive. Hara Marano spoke at the Special Sizes event, “[A] new understanding of what healthy is is broadening the ideal. Now all women are realizing you can be petite and powerful, you can be big and healthy, and of course the way women feel about themselves effects their interest in fashion. I mention this because a common thread that runs through retail success today is the ability to get into the psyche of the customer. Dressing today is a form of self-expression.”<sup>276</sup>

More women participated in the work force during this period, the employment rate for women began to accelerate during the 1970s and though it slowed during the 1980s the percentage of women in the workforce continued to rise, which required women to purchase professional clothing and also gave them their own income. Also, the wage gap between men and women began to narrow, in 1980 women earned sixty percent of what men earned and by 1990 women earned seventy-two percent.<sup>277</sup> Women earned their own income due to higher numbers in the work force and there was a marked decline in home sewing during the 1980s due to a lack of time and the image of homemade clothing was less polished.<sup>278</sup> The discussion of representation and fashionable pieces in a broad range of sizes was a topic that the fashion industry needed

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<sup>276</sup> Hara Marano, Transcript of presentation at “From Stepchild to Cinderella: An Overview of Special Sizes,” 15 September 1988, pg. 8-9, Box 89, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>277</sup> Ann Mari May and Kurt Stephenson, “Women and the Great Retrenchment: The Political Economy of Gender in the 1980s,” *Journal of Economics Issues* 28, no. 2 (June 1994), 535.

<sup>278</sup> Rita C. Kean and Catherine O. Levin, “Orientations Toward Home Sewing,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1989), 28.

to address as more women, many who were not straight sizes, chose to purchase ready-to-wear clothing. This was not the first time that Fashion Group attempted to respond to underrepresented markets, members in previous decades had addressed the need to market to African Americans, older women, and non-straight sizes, but it shows the persistence that Fashion Group showed in obtaining those markets. Marano said, “[T]he fact is that an enormous number of potential customers, both petite and large size, are simply not yet participating in the fashion market. We at Fashion Plus conducted a survey...a whopping 40% said they don’t go into stores for what they want. They do go to dressmakers or they sew for themselves...to get the quality and the chic styles that they want...”<sup>279</sup> Those women spent often spent more money to find the proper fit and quality. A brief explanation of why plus-size fashion boomed at the end of the 1980s was provided by *Fashion Plus* and included information about new understandings of what it meant to be healthy, new roles that women occupied, shifts in how plus-size fashion was labeled, and even referenced the women’s lib movement. The report stated, “the women’s lib movement has helped all women gain a pride of self. They are no longer hiding if they don’t meet some arbitrary standard of beauty. What’s more, the standard of attractiveness has itself relaxed to acknowledge more diversity of style.”<sup>280</sup> The momentum of plus sized clothing did not persist, as seen by the trends of the 1990s and the sickly thin look that became known as Heroin Chic, but it does show that Fashion Group was part of the

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<sup>279</sup> Hara Marano, Transcript of presentation at “From Stepchild to Cinderella: An Overview of Special Sizes,” 15 September 1988, pg. 11-12, Box 89, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>280</sup> “Background: Why the Boom in Large-Size Fashions?,” *Fashion Plus*, September 1988, pg. 2, Box 89, folder 12, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

larger movement and effort to expand the beauty industry, a process was laborious and is still ongoing.

In an effort to expand the beauty industry even more, Fashion Group's industry event in December 1988 addressed the need to focus on older women. Titled "Age Power: Where the Money Is," the speakers focused on middle aged women. One speaker, Frankie Cadwell, said, "Her most productive, her most enjoyable, her most inquisitive middle years have been extended. Her old age has been postponed...24 million. That's 20% of America's female population. 55% of these women are employed...They hold higher level, higher paying jobs than have ever existed for women before."<sup>281</sup> Just as with plus-size fashion, Fashion Group members interested in breaking into the large potential earnings marketed towards women in their middle age. Women who had finished raising children, who had high paying jobs, and who were interested in purchasing luxury goods. Fashion Group was interested in changing the way that people perceived age, after all many of the members were women of a certain age. Members again realized they had a massive market to tap into and that women valued their style through every stage of life, by targeting older women they could gain significant profits.

Fashion Group began to focus on haute couture again in the 1980s. There was a resurgence of interest in luxury items and luxury branded items during the late twentieth century, and members were interested in being at the forefront of that resurgence. The late twentieth century brought a revival to haute couture marked by Yves Saint Laurent's couture collection in 1976, though it had a long way to go before Paris couture houses

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<sup>281</sup> Frankie Cadwell, Transcript of presentation at "Age Power: Where the Money Is," 1 December 1988, pg. 2-3, Box 89, folder 14, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

gained their footing again. The revival continued as Karl Lagerfeld became Chanel's designer in 1983 and Christian Lacroix opened his own salon in 1987.<sup>282</sup> A speaker at the couture show of 1987 said, "By some magic, a new fervor has permeated the collections. Similar trends appear at many houses... The Fashion Group is proud to bring you highlights from this epochal fall and winter season. It is the first couture presentation here in twenty years."<sup>283</sup> Americans found a new interest in luxury items and luxury brands were eager to profit. Luxury branded items, mass produced by haute couture brands, flooded the market during this era. During the 1970s Fashion Group had moved away from some of the standard presentations and shows and did not present a couture show in twenty years, but as haute couture began to reestablish itself with fresh names Fashion Group reacquainted themselves with the shows and the officials. The president of the Chambre Syndicale, Jacques Mouclier, was an honored guest at the Spring/Summer 1990 European Haute Couture Collections presentation of the Fashion Group International. The Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne governed the world of haute couture, the organization set the rules and regulations for houses considered *haute couture* and was established in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>284</sup> Haute couture was not the only thing Fashion Group had moved away from during the 1970s, in June 1988 Fashion Group "addressed itself to the home furnishings and design world..." for the first time in over

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<sup>282</sup> Transcript of speech presented to Fashion Group at Couture Fall/Winter 1987 Presentation, August 1987, pg. 2-3, Box 89, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>283</sup> Transcript of speech presented to Fashion Group at Couture Fall/Winter 1987 Presentation, August 1987, pg. 3, Box 89, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>284</sup> "Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne," Box 101, folder 15, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

six years.<sup>285</sup> During this period Fashion Group seemed to return to many of the early activities of the organization.

### **Goals and Structure**

In many ways, the Fashion Group of the early 1990s resembled the early years of the organization's existence. Fashion Group remained dedicated to promoting continuing education for young women and provided scholarships for future industry workers. Fashion Group hosted a show of the European couture collections in August 1988, and the "proceeds of this event will go to the benefit of the Fashion Group's Foundation Fund, and we've been very interested in building up the Foundation Fund..."<sup>286</sup> The Foundation Fund provided the funds for scholarships for women who attended the Fashion Institute of Technology or other design schools. By providing opportunities for education, Fashion Group helped more women join the industry at the managerial level. Fashion Group also continued to help women network; at the annual meeting in December 1988 "A networking reception hosted by our career counseling committee will follow."<sup>287</sup> Opportunities to network was an integral part of membership, especially as the industry rapidly changed at the end of the twentieth century. In the October-November 1991 bulletin, members were asked to participate in a Santa Claus Club; "This is an OPEN CALL to all New York members who want to participate in this effort. Our only objective is to make an underprivileged child's Christmas wish to Santa come

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<sup>285</sup> "The Fashion Group's Fourth Industry Focus: 'In Pursuit of Style, the Fashionable Object,'" Program Report, 7 June 1988, pg. 1, Box 89, folder 10, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>286</sup> Colombe Nicholas, Transcript of presentation at "In Pursuit of Style: The Fashionable Object," 7 June 1988, pg. 1, Box 89, folder 10, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>287</sup> Colombe Nicholas, Transcript of presentation at "Age Power: Where the Money Is," 1 December 1988, pg. 1, Box 89, folder 14, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



true.”<sup>288</sup> This was one of the first community service activities that Fashion Group did, and they continued to provide presents for children that would not have them otherwise and give by to their communities.

Though there was some consistency in the objectives of the organization, Fashion Group had to change in order to remain relevant. In 1988 an amendment was filed to change the name to Fashion Group International to better reflect the structure of the organization. In the first bulletin of 1991, the Fashion Group president made a call to action for members;

The Fashion Group International, the most powerful organization for women in the fashion and beauty industries, is calling upon our members to take a leadership position for growth during the next 60 years. Together, we can accomplish these goals:

1. Develop a five-year “blueprint for success” or marketing strategy which will include surveying our membership within the next few months and placing new emphasis on the growth and health of our Regional Groups.
2. Expand the reach of the FG Foundation through the efforts of an Advisory Board in the following three areas:
  - a. Participate in October’s Breast Cancer Care Month with a special mammography program.
  - b. Initiate MBA and other executive training scholarships for FGI members.
  - c. Develop funds for our Archival Restoration Project (to be housed at New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology).An advisory board is currently being formed to help us achieve these goals.
3. Extend all services of career counseling to emphasize retraining and target unique job opportunities.
4. Educate, inspire and inform through quality programming everywhere. Produce a “Night of Stars” that is the glamour event of New York’s fashion and beauty world.

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<sup>288</sup> “News from Nine Rock,” FG, Bulletin 5, October-November 1991, pg. 4, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

5. Improve our visibility and credibility through an aggressive, global public relations program.<sup>289</sup>

The goals show that Fashion Group shifted their focus outward as there was an emphasis placed on the growth and public image of the organization. Leadership wanted to survey the members so they could better understand how to help the Regional Groups, work to educate and inform their communities, and improve the visibility of Fashion Group.

These goals required heavy marketing and development of events. The new goals also displayed the continuity of member's dedication to key values, specifically continued education for members and career counseling.

In an effort to expand the Fashion Group Foundation, members participated in Breast Cancer Care Month with a special mammography program. In an article in the March 1991 bulletin members were informed that Fashion Group was “embarking on a program of consciousness raising about a disease that poses a threat to all women—breast cancer. We hope the project we are initiating in New York will serve as a pilot for all other regional groups in the United States. As a benefit of membership...we have asked Memorial Sloan-Kettering to bring its BE SMART! Mammography Screening to The Fashion Group Headquarters here in New York.”<sup>290</sup> This is an interesting parallel to what black activists achieved in beauty shops. Tiffany Gill wrote about how beauty salons were used as a way to disseminate information to the black female population, she argued that the beauty shop was the one place that the women did not feel guilty about taking care of themselves and that trust was built between the salon and the customer, thus they

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<sup>289</sup> Barbara Tober, “Message from the President,” FG, Bulletin 1, March 1991, pg. 2, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>290</sup> “BE SMART! About Breast Cancer,” FG, Bulletin 1, March 1991, pg. 3, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

were receptive to learning about the importance of self-exams and regular mammograms, as well as getting information about sexually transmitted diseases and birth control.<sup>291</sup>

Whereas the beauty salons had used this method for the entire twentieth century, Fashion Group had not previously used its platform in quite this way, had not previously directly involved itself in this manner.

The goals listed in the first bulletin of 1992 are similar to the previous year, Fashion Group remained invested in trying to help find a cure for breast cancer, tried to expand global membership, and continue to provide better networking opportunities. A new goal that was set forth by the president, Kay Unger, was to “institute programs that will help us cope with modern issues like sexual harassment.”<sup>292</sup> This new goal showed that members had worked their way into positions that were dominated by men and that societal values had begun to change. Sexual harassment had of course been an issue previously, but the new focus on it indicates that it was no longer something that would be tolerated. Fashion Group tried to address the issues with a special program that included panelists from diverse work backgrounds: an author and reporter, a former senior vice president and member of the Corporate Executive Council, an attorney in labor law, and a national coordinator for the Fund for the Feminist Majority. The women spoke of all aspects of women’s experience in the workforce; topics like the wage gap, lack of advancement, harassment and discrimination, and being encouraged to take a back seat were all brought up. One of the panelists, Phyllis Burke Davis, the member of the Corporate Executive Council, said,

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<sup>291</sup> Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 129.

<sup>292</sup> Kay Unger, “Message from the President,” FG Bulletin 1, February 1992, pg. 2, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

I think women got talked into believing that the war was over, that the fight was over. When women tried to get laws or implementation of laws that were on the books, we were told we were asking for quotas. What foolishness. What they were denying and what they were lying about and what they were cheating us with was to say we wanted quotas. We wanted numbers guaranteed. What the establishment wanted was a guarantee that their quota, their 98% white male, was not going to be disturbed...the glass ceiling is not a natural phenomenon. It's a manmade.<sup>293</sup>

Fashion Group had been formed to help women advance in the industry, but during the late twentieth century members looked to government support to help women advance. The members were obviously frustrated with fact that these issues were so persistent, the organization had worked for over sixty years to help women gain authority, yet they still had to fight the same battles. It is worth noting that women had fought against sexual harassment for years, the law just moved slowly. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex, an amendment that explicitly prohibited sexual harassment was not added until 1972. Even after it was made illegal, harassment persisted and many women have gone to court in order to fight back.<sup>294</sup>

Much like previous bulletins, the ones published in the 1980s and 1990s included a section that celebrated and announced events in members' lives. The events were limited to career moves, unlike previous bulletins that included more personal announcements, but included women from the New York group as well as across regional groups. The bulletin also listed open positions in the industry anywhere in the nation, specifically ones that were well paying and upper management: for example, a teaching position at the Ray College of Design in Illinois or a director of stores which had the

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<sup>293</sup> Phyllis Burke Davis, "Are You In Charge of Your Career?," FG, Bulletin 4, August 1992, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>294</sup> Vaughana Macy Feary, "Sexual Harassment: Why the Corporate World Still Doesn't 'Get It,'" *Journal of Business Ethics* 13, no. 8 (August 1994), 651.

potential to become the regional vice-president at a “major upscale retailer.”<sup>295</sup> The new requirement to post a job in the Job Bank was that it must be on an executive level and the members must supply the opportunities for the other members.<sup>296</sup> The success of the Job Bank rested solely on participation by the members. A new feature in the bulletins of this period was the “Career Counseling Corner” column. The column covered everything from the job search to an unexpected termination to changing career paths and was an offshoot of the Career Counseling Workshops, where members could speak with professionals about networking, resume building, and do exercises to help them grow as professionals.

In 1993 the Fashion Group bulletin introduced a new column called “Talk Cents.” Its purpose was to help members understand the basics of personal finance; “We hope to help you understand and manage your finances more successfully by providing you with comprehensible definitions of key financial terms, reading suggestions, tax tips and a wide range of other useful information.”<sup>297</sup> It had previously been mentioned that women lacked financial literacy, even when they owned businesses, and so this resource was to help members become more literate both in their personal and business finances.

Fashion Group worked to maintain close relationships with regional groups. An annual Regional Director’s Conference was hosted by New York. In May 1991 the conference was “attended by 89 representatives from 39 regions worldwide (and three

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<sup>295</sup> “The Inside Track,” FG, Bulletin 1, March 1991, pg. 2, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>296</sup> “News from Nine Rock,” FG, Bulletin 1, March 1991, pg. 4, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>297</sup> “Talk Cents,” FG, Bulletin 1, February 1993, pg. 2, Box 150, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

non-regional groups.)”<sup>298</sup> At the conference, the FGI president outlined the goals that she had set before Fashion Group for the year and the regional directors were able to attend a variety of seminars. This was an important opportunity for the directors because it allowed them to gain new knowledge about the industry, but it also allowed them to network and make connections with members across the globe and with the women who held top positions in New York. The new goals set in the early 1990s focused on better relations with regional groups and part of that was open communication with regional directors. This was a key factor in helping Fashion Group to increase membership globally.

New York Fashion Group members continued to be guests of honor at regional events. Mexico City Fashion Group celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 1992 and invited Lenore Benson, who served as the Executive Director of the Fashion Group. In a letter to Lenore Benson, Fashion Group Mexico invited members from headquarters to attend a gala dinner in celebration of its thirtieth anniversary.<sup>299</sup> Activities across borders were similar to the events held in New York, such as Night of the Stars, an event to honor members of Fashion Group International and recognize outstanding figures within the industry. London hosted a Night of the Stars gala in 1995 to aid the British Red Cross on its one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary. The event drew support from within the fashion world as well as out; Diana, Princess of Wales offered her support as a patron the British Red Cross. The evening was filled with food and drink, a fashion show, and an awards

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<sup>298</sup> “Meeting the Challenge: A Report on the Regional Directors’ Conference,” FG, Bulletin 3, June 1991, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>299</sup> Lili de La Vega to Lenore Benson, 22 January 1992, Box 174, Folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

ceremony that honored the deputy editor of *Vogue* as well as various international designers.<sup>300</sup> Not only were large galas similar but so were the meetings that were held by each regional group. Paris Fashion Group, in 1981, outlined the events that were intended to be held over the year. Meetings included topics like ready-to-wear, both Paris and American, fabrics, and a meeting titled “How the young consider Fashion?”<sup>301</sup> Rodi, at the end of her letter, asked when the New York Fashion Group will be holding their own American ready-to-wear meeting “as we need this date to decide of the definitive period of our trip to U.S.A.”<sup>302</sup> The event calendar for each regional group was sent to New York in order to gain approval; this allowed New York to synchronize various groups’ calendars so that any traveling group could be sure to visit during events that caught their attention. Judging from the calendars found in the archives, membership across borders offered a similar experience.

Fashion Group’s connections to the political world and Hollywood remained. At the 1991 Night of Stars both Barbara Walters and Audrey Hepburn attended, the first as the emcee and Hepburn as one of four honorees for her “contributions to the betterment of the world through volunteerism, in addition to [her] extraordinary impact on the world of fashion, beauty, style and design.”<sup>303</sup> In the FG bulletin from October 1992, more than a page was dedicated to answers from both George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton “to

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<sup>300</sup> Night of the Stars invitation, 1995, Box 174, Folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>301</sup> Nelly-C Rodi to Hellen Galland, 6 March 1981, Box 176, Folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>302</sup> Nelly-C Rodi to Hellen Galland, 6 March 1981, Box 176, Folder 9, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>303</sup> “The Night of Stars...with Heart,” FG, Bulletin 6, December 1991, pg. 3, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

questions of importance to FGI members today.”<sup>304</sup> The issues that were presented to the candidate included women’s health care, overseas manufacturing, childcare, gender discrimination, and entrepreneurship. Fashion Group published both candidates’ answers and reminded members to vote and become involved in local women’s activist organizations. After Clinton was elected, Fashion Group published a column in April/May 1993 to help members understand how to lower their taxes under the new administration.

Another political and business concern of the early 1990s was NAFTA. Mexico City had established a regional group in 1963 and Fashion Group members had hosted Mexican members, as well as made visits to Mexico. The trade agreement was concerning to Fashion Group because it potentially provided a whole new market to mass produce for; “Mr. von Gal pointed out that the U.S. and Canada consider their consuming population at 100% of total. For Mexico, however, it’s one-third to one-half of the population, or 30-45 million, a market anyone would like to have.”<sup>305</sup> This continued the work that had been done during the 1970s to become a more politically active organization.

Fashion Group was created for women by women. The events were attended by men and the male designers were highlighted during shows, but membership was exclusively female. In December 1992 some members questioned whether membership should remain female. Annette Golden wrote, “All groups regardless of region, age,

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<sup>304</sup> Pamela Altman Brown, “Bush vs. Clinton: Issues, Answers,” FG, Bulletin 5, October 1992, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>305</sup> Margot Bobroff Wolf, “Frontliners on NAFTA,” FGI Bulletin, number 1, February/March 1994, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 4, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.



professional status or length of membership overwhelmingly agreed that FGI should continue to strive for the advancement of women...A small majority of members want to maintain a Women for Women organization...For the immediate future, the organization membership will not change its gender criteria.”<sup>306</sup> Members wanted to maintain a focus on the advancement of women, it concerned some members to allow men membership, as men’s membership could bring new goals, focus, and leadership to the organization. It was not until 1997 that men were allowed membership in Fashion Group International.<sup>307</sup> Even after men joined FGI, women still maintained the power within in the organization. The elected president has historically been female, though men have held other positions within the organization’s government, and focus remained on women’s advancement.

Previously, there had been little acknowledgement of the limited representation in Fashion Group. Membership was not limited to white women, which is known because there are pictures of regional directors meetings and women of color are present, however the majority of membership is filled by white, middle to upper class women. After deciding to maintain membership for only women, Annette Golden, the president-elect of 1992, did announce that “our immediate plan is to develop a strategy to increase our current membership so it is more reflective of the demographics of the female population. In order to attract aspiring fashion professionals at an early career stage and keep them throughout their professional lives, we are establishing several new categories of membership.”<sup>308</sup> This opened membership to women who were still students and to those

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<sup>306</sup> Annette Golden, “Looking Forward,” FG, Bulletin 6, December 1992, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>307</sup> According to Margaret Hayes, in interview at FGI Headquarters, New York, 26 September 2017.

<sup>308</sup> Annette Golden, “Looking Forward,” FG, Bulletin 6, December 1992, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

who had recently started their careers. Fashion Group actively pursued membership during this period, which was different than mid-century when the membership grew rapidly.

Fashion Group celebrated sixty years of existence in 1991. Throughout the years, Fashion Group had to find ways to structure the community of members as it grew, both in membership and across geographical space. In a June 1992 call for recommendations for the Nominating Committee in order to elect officers members were reminded of the by-laws and the requirements placed upon candidates; “The by-laws of the organization state ‘The Board shall consist of 19 directors, composed of the president, the president-elect, treasurer, treasurer-elect, secretary, secretary-elect and 13 other directors elected by the members of the Group’ ...Each candidate will be considered for ability, for contributions to The Fashion Group, both past and potential, and also for her administrative qualities...Consideration should also be made of the time required and the availability of a member for meetings, especially the regional representatives.”<sup>309</sup> In 1992, Fashion Group International moved from the office space in Rockefeller Plaza where the organization had offices since 1934.<sup>310</sup> The early 1990s were a time of change for Fashion Group, they moved physical location and also rewrote their mission statement and worked to “redefine our organization so it truly becomes the ultimate resource for every segment of the fashion business.”<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Letter to Fashion Group Members from Lenore Benson, FG, Bulletin 3, June 1992, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>310</sup> “News from 9 Rock,” FG, Bulletin 5, October 1992, pg. 3, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>311</sup> Annette Golden, “A Letter from Annette,” FG, Bulletin 1, February 1993, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 3, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

## **Fashion and the Environment**

The newsletter of the late 1980s and the 1990s was printed on recycled paper. This was noted on the front page of each bulletin and indicated that Fashion Group members were concerned with a wide range of issues. In 1990, at the Fashion Group International Foundation's conference, members addressed climate change and fashion's role in the degeneration of the environment.<sup>312</sup> As part of the new format of the bulletin, a regular section was added called Love the Earth, a brief column that highlighted and applauded the efforts of various businesses' attempts to have less of an impact on the environment. In March 1991 the column listed the steps that Liz Claiborne, Inc. took "to begin to address a wide range of environmental issues" which included a recycling program, sponsorship of educational programs, and working to reduce packaging and shipping waste.<sup>313</sup> The column also mentioned two leaders of the "cosmetics industry with environmentally-sound policies..." and how the Body Shop not only refused to use endangered plant species in its products but also vocally advocated against animal testing.<sup>314</sup> The fact that environmentally sound practices were highlighted and debated by Fashion Group showed that the members were part of a larger discussion, one that of course affected their business practices, but also a discussion about the quality of life for earth.

Fashion Group worked with other organizations in order to address environmental matters. In June 1991, Fashion Group's Program Committee News included information

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<sup>312</sup> "Fashion Group International Finding Aid," Revised 2007, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>313</sup> "Love the Earth," FG, Bulletin 1, March 1991, pg. 2, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>314</sup> "Love the Earth," FG, Bulletin 1, March 1991, pg. 2, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

about an event hosted in conjunction with the Liz Claiborne Foundation, titled “Gearing Up for the American Outdoors, A Celebration of Our National Parks” held at the Museum of Natural History; “The Fashion Group hosted a continental breakfast and live presentation...An environmental committee is forming within the Program Committee to work towards a second anniversary event to be held in the General Assembly at the United Nations on Earth Day.”<sup>315</sup> In 1992, Fashion Group hosted a program, Caring for the Earth: What it Takes to Make a Difference, in conjunction with the United Nation’s Environment Programme. The key note speaker, Dr. Noel Brown, regional director of the UN’s Environment Programme for North America, specified five key areas that people should focus on: population, consumption, water resources, waste disposal, and existing damage. Every key point directly related to Fashion Group members. Dr. Brown argued that not only did the fashion industry use raw materials and create water waste polluted with toxic chemicals, but that the fashion industry should use its position of influence to communicate environmental values to consumers.<sup>316</sup> The 1990s saw the rise of fast fashion, which amplified the amount of pollution caused by the fashion industry. According to an article published by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences,

[P]olyester, the most widely used manufactured fiber, is made from petroleum... The manufacture of polyester and other synthetic fabrics is an energy-intensive process requiring large amounts of crude oil and releasing emissions including volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, and acid gases such as hydrogen chloride... The EPA, under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, considers many textile manufacturing facilities to be hazardous waste generators... Cotton, one of the most popular and versatile fibers

<sup>315</sup> “Program Committee News,” FG, Bulletin 3, June 1991, pg. 4, Box 150, folder 1, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>316</sup> Diana Burke and Laura Kruger, “Earth Alert ’92,” FG, Bulletin 3, June 1992, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 2, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

used in clothing manufacture, also has a significant environmental footprint. This crop accounts for a quarter of all the pesticides used in the United State...<sup>317</sup>

It is interesting that members were concerned with the effects of the fashion industry on the environment because they worked in all areas of the industry and worked for corporations that were responsible for the pollution. As more companies moved production to other locations and produced lower quality items, they contributed more to the environmental degradation.

### **Technology**

Fashion Group had to navigate the drastic changes brought by the internet. In 1995 Fashion Group published two articles about what it meant to be online and how that could be used in the fashion industry. Thuy Vuong wrote in the bulletin that “Over 20 million people are already on-line with an estimated 150,000 new members joining every month. The market is growing at an incredibly fast pace, and soon the profile is expected to look like the general population, with being on-line a ‘must have’ like owning a telephone or fax machine.”<sup>318</sup> Two longer articles introduced the concept of the internet, but Fashion Group also included a regular column titled “Cyber Threads” to help members understand computers and the make digital world less intimidating.

Also, as Fashion Group approached the end of the twentieth century there was concern about the future of fashion. These concerns looked similar to other points in time when Fashion Group had specific meetings about the decline of formal wear and shifting locations of shopping centers. These were once again highlighted in 1995. In the bulletin

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<sup>317</sup> Luz Claudio, “Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 115, no. 9 (September 2007), <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/ehp.115-a449>

<sup>318</sup> Thuy Vuong, “Driving into Cyberspace,” FGI Bulletin, number 2, February/March 1995, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

from June/July 1995, the main article was about the twenty-first century shopper and “the deflationary environment in which prices are actually falling, only the third time in history that this has ever happened. This will continue, along with price sensitivity, the shift away from department stores and increased import competition against the dollar.”<sup>319</sup> Members were also concerned with how little growth there had been in sales within the industry and it was suggested by Carol Farmer, a consumer trend analyst, that the static growth was caused by casual Fridays. She was quoted in the bulletin and said, “Casualization was cited as one factor. It all began when IBM introduced ‘Casual Fridays’ ... And ever since, there has been a growing blur between casual wear and business attire... Consumers spend less money on suits and career wear, while purchasing more relaxed pieces with the versatility to function in and out of the office.”<sup>320</sup> Casual Fridays were not the only villain, it was also suggested that the fashion industry was out of touch with Generation X and did not know quite how to connect with the younger generation, which was a problem that Fashion Group had faced before.

## **Conclusion**

Fashion Group International continued to adjust according to the societal trends, a habit that allowed the organization to thrive for over sixty years. The late twentieth century was a time that Fashion Group was able to maintain the progress made during the 1970s in regards to diversity and inclusion, but also a period when members were able to revive some of the spirit of the early years of Fashion Group. Members resurrected some

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<sup>319</sup> Margot Bobroff Wolf, “Satisfying the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Shopper,” FGI Bulletin, number 3, June/July 1995, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>320</sup> Marianne Camarda, “Women’s Apparel at a Crossroads,” FGI Bulletin, number 4, August/September 1995, pg. 1, Box 150, folder 5, Fashion Group International Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

of the early events, but were also able to maintain a very modern organization due to members' adoption of new technologies and interest in the current events of the day.

From its inception in 1928, Fashion Group aimed to help professional women gain a foothold in the fashion industry. Through education, network development, and reevaluation of membership, the organization was able to help members achieve their professional goals. Also, Fashion Group helped bring American design to the forefront of the fashion world. New York is firmly anchored as a fashion capital, and members of Fashion Group emphasized the importance of American designers, specifically female designers. That emphasis has shifted in the past few decades, noticeable in the advent of the Rising Star awards which recognizes the contributions of emerging talents. The work to create space for women in positions of power, help diversify the professionals in fashion, and to create fashion for a wider range of people has helped create a more inclusive fashion industry. The Rising Star awards had an all gender category for the first time in 2020 and in recent years fashion shows during New York's Fashion Week have included more women of color, people of diverse abilities, and a wide range of body sizes. There is still work to be done in the fashion industry, especially in body inclusion and in regards to the environment, but Fashion Group has shown a dedication to those topics throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

Fashion Group continues to exist today and currently has over five thousand members globally. The goals presented on the Fashion Group International website state reflect the original intentions of the founding members, but now the goals specifically state that the organization supports both men and women who work in fashion and related

industries.<sup>321</sup> The president of Fashion Group is still female, Maryanne Grisz was named president August 2019 after the death of Margaret Hayes in early 2019. Grisz entered with three key initiatives. She wants to survey Fashion Group members, connect more closely with regional groups, and to strengthen partnerships in New York.<sup>322</sup> These initiatives are similar to previous ones set before Fashion Group and show that the organization remains dedicated to serving fashion professionals achieve their goals.

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<sup>321</sup> “The FGI Mission, Goals and Foundation,” The Fashion Group International, Inc., accessed 2 April 2020, <http://fgi.org/index.php?news=645>

<sup>322</sup> Rosemary Feitelberg, “Fashion Group International Names New President, CEO,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, accessed 2 April 2020, <https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/fashion-group-international-names-new-president-ceo-1203238188/>



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