

Changing Women's Fashion and Its Social Context, 1870-1905*

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Résumé/Abstract

Cet article émet l'hypothèse que plusieurs facteurs sociaux ont provoqué d'importants changements dans la mode vestimentaire féminine vers la fin du XIX^e siècle. L'auteur a surtout puisé sa documentation dans des revues destinées aux femmes et au grand public. Ces sources, rarement exploitées, donnent un aperçu intéressant de la vie quotidienne de l'époque. De plus, elles démontrent clairement l'influence de l'éducation, des soins de santé, des sports, des travaux hors du foyer et de la rareté des domestiques sur la mode victorienne. En conclusion, l'auteur suggère d'autres aspects de la relation mode – contexte social qui devraient faire l'objets d'études plus poussées.

This article suggests that several social factors resulted in major changes in female dress, towards the end of the nineteenth century. Research is based primarily on magazines for women and others for the general public. This largely neglected source provides a colourful glimpse of daily life in the period under study. The publications clearly demonstrate influence on Victorian fashion of sport, work outside the home, concern for health, lack of domestic servants, and education. The author concludes by suggesting other aspects of the relationship between fashion and its social context which could not be considered in this paper.

An issue that historians have not yet adequately explored relates to the interrelationship between a society's activities and the artifacts peculiar to it. It seems logical to assume that such linkages exist. The objects that people produce are extremely significant media through which people interact with each other and with their environment. If values or norms were altered, then it seems likely that the artifacts would have to accommodate those shifts. In tracing this dynamic, the choice of an appropriate artifact to study and a suitable time frame is essential. Among the more promising forums is women's dress, spanning the period from 1870 to 1905. Researchers have already documented ideological and institutional shifts within those decades, so some measure of cultural change is clear. At the same time, fashion underwent some striking modifications. Since clothing is a very personal reflection of one's lifestyle and one's outlook, it must contain important messages about its consumers as individuals. Furthermore, given the strong pressure to conform to current fashion, the character of the range of clothing deemed socially acceptable should make telling statements about the society it caters to. The challenge lies, here, in discovering which factors, in general terms, seem to have been most influential in shaping late nineteenth-century women's dress. There is virtually no evidence to support an analysis of an individual's choices, so a study based on a larger, albeit anonymous, Canadian population is necessary.

Providing suitable documentation is an important question. A fair amount of secondary material is available on the subject of women's dress. Of either an analytical or a purely descriptive nature, the work done to date forms an invaluable resource. More important, a wealth of primary material has remained from the late nineteenth century. Photographs, newspapers, and magazines are numerous. Of these women's magazines and general interest magazines are perhaps the best source.¹ They present idealized images that were aimed at appealing to a broad market of consumers. This effectively provides a homogeneous base from which to operate and eliminates any idiosyncratic elements which a photograph may capture. The regional or local bias of a newspaper is avoided because magazines theoretically depend on a much broader geographical circulation. Unfortunately little is known of the women who purchased and read the magazines. It is assumed that those with an income sufficient to permit expenditures on luxury items were regular readers. Many working-class women, then, were probably not actively involved. Also, the readership must have been fairly large, a fact which seems self-evident since the magazines continued to be published. The periodicals used in this research are exclusively English-Canadian,² published either in Toronto or in Montreal. Although several, such as the *Ladies' Journal*, contained considerable American and British content, they were aimed at a Canadian readership.

Even a brief survey of magazine fashion plates reveals the significant modifications in women's clothing that took place in the late nineteenth century. By 1870 fashion had begun to move from the full crinoline to the

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crinoline, a structure that shifted the bulk of the skirt behind the hips. The front of the skirt still remained full for an apron-like draping was attached. The bodice was invariably form-fitting and wide sleeves were typical. Heavy trimmings ornamented the entire costume. For outdoor wear bonnets were popular. They tended to be small, but were trimmed with an eye to minute, even fussy, detail. In the 1880s this image was modified. The fullness of the crinoline disappeared as the bustle became fashionable. This projection was much more contained than the former structure, so a sleeker silhouette was achieved. Drapings remained over the hips, but were less stylized than the apron-like panel of the previous decade. Sleeves appeared much slimmer, while the bonnet appeared larger. This trend toward a more controlled line continued to 1890. The drapings over the hips disappeared, and trimmings seemed less flamboyant.

By the 1890s, a number of noteworthy developments were clear. The tailored suit was emerging as acceptable female day attire. A jacket, blouse, simple skirt with no bustle, and often a tie of some sort characterized the new style. This more severe outfit was echoed through the fashion plates of the period. Of significance as well was the gigot, or leg-of-mutton, sleeve. Furthermore, hats were well established by this time. These are distinguished from bonnets by their larger size and an absence of ties. Finally by 1905 fashion had clearly shifted from the ornate, full styles of the 1870s. The early 1900s saw the entrenchment of a larger hat, flowing contours of the skirt, and the familiar S-shaped figure. The corset thrust the hips behind and the chest forward, a posture that was further accentuated by a very loose bodice. Sleeves, after a few years of control, swelled in proportion though they were less stylized than a decade before. In sum, the woman of 1905 appeared taller and slimmer than her 1870 counterpart. The contours of the dress, as well as its trimmings, became less ostentatious, and the effect certainly seemed to be more comfortable.³

Contemporary women's magazines also provide invaluable clues as to the rationale underlying these changes. One of the stronger influences, reaching back to the early 1870s, was women's associations. This phenomenon began with the formation of religious and missionary societies. These groups, though disunited and with a purely local base, were only the first step toward broader organizations. In the next decade the secular associations began to rise in importance. In the 1880s the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Young Women's Christian Association, Girl's Friendly Society, and Dominion Order of King's Daughters, to name some, made their appearance. Artistic and literary associations were also prominent. By the 1890s the Aberdeen Association and Women's Art Association were added to the list. The latter were unique for they were firmly committed to action on a national level.⁴ Undoubtedly it was due to these or-

ganizations that women's consciousness was heightened by the turn of the century. This in turn may be strongly associated with the rise of the suffrage movement. A similar awakening was noted in rural areas. By 1907 the Women's Institutes of Ontario had a membership of 10,000.⁵ It was here that information on domestic science was disseminated and again a stronger group identity seemed to emerge. Nellie McClung felt that through these associations, rural or urban, women were "gaining a philosophy of life, which is helping them over the rough places of life."⁶ McClung went on to relate clothing to a reaction against this new sisterhood:

The absurdly tight skirts which prevented the wearer from walking like a human being make a pitiful cry to the world. They were no doubt worn as a protest against the new movement among women, which has for its object the larger liberty, the larger humanity of women.... They do not want rights - they want privileges - like the servants who prefer tips to wages. This is not surprising. Keepers of wild animals tell us that when an animal has been a long time in captivity it prefers captivity to freedom, and even when the door of the cage is opened it will not come out - but that is no argument against freedom.⁷

It was no coincidence, then, that as the suffragettes became more prominent dress came to appear less restrictive. The woman of the 1870s looked elegant in her parlour, but the 1905 woman wore a dress suggesting action. This woman was not hampered by an excessively tight or heavy skirt, but favoured instead a simple gored style. Significantly, the S-shaped figure was a dynamic posture. It seemed to embody movement, vivacity, and progress. To be able to leave the home and travel to meetings, functional clothing was necessary.

An analysis of women's dress in the late Victorian period would be incomplete without mentioning the effect of the dress reform movement. This pressure group had no connection with Amelia Bloomer, who made her appearance in the 1850s. The emphasis now lay not so much on changing the dress itself but rather its internal structure and undergarments. The attack on the fashions of the early 1870s could be particularly scathing:

Our ordinary dress provides two tight-fitting waists, either of which suffices to force the vital organs beneath it out of place and upon each other. In the underwear, the corset reigns supreme; in the outer dress, the plain or biased waist is usually buttoned as tightly over the corset as it can possibly be drawn. Beneath such compressions, what becomes of the action of the diaphragm, the lungs, the heart, and the stomach? Then, again, every one of the lower garments has a binding fastened around the waist, and this binding is composed of a straight piece of cloth folded double. Drawers, undershirts, balmoral, dress skirt, over skirt, dress

waist, and belt, furnish, accordingly, sixteen layers of cloth girding the stomach and the yielding muscles situated in that region... [A] belt of iron, two inches wide, welded close about the body, could hardly be more unyielding.... The weight of our clothing increases every year; and, if much more is added, women will be compelled to maintain a sitting posture the greater part of the time, in order to render their dress enduring. Skirts, in their best estate, require considerable cloth; and the greater number of them are made of the heaviest material commonly worn, – viz. cotton cloth, with the addition of trimmings. The dress skirt is long, and doubled by an over-skirt; and, ... the material of the dress is heaped on the breadths, in the form of puffs, flounces, and plaits. Add to this burden heavy cotton, linings, facings, and “skirt protectors” at the bottom, and the weight can only be described as enormous.... Then, as to the suspension of clothing from the shoulders. Of course, all the garments worn above the waist hang from the shoulders by necessity; but all the lower garments, as now worn, hang from the hips, and have no connection whatever with any piece above... It is this dragging down – not upon the hip-bones themselves, but upon the front and unprotected portions of the body which they enclose – that produces the chief harm.⁸

The resulting image is hardly one of a healthy, comfortable outfit. Another perceptive question directed itself to the question of lighter underwear itself. In the August 1891 issue of the *Ladies' Journal*, Dr. Andrew Graydon wrote: “Did it ever strike you that the corset was a very warm article of dress, and, withal, not a very clean one, after a few days wear in summer time?”⁹ Indeed by the 1890s modifications in the corset could be seen. It remained form-fitting, but began to shrink in size. By 1905 the corset may have demanded an awkward stance, with both chest and hips thrust in opposite directions, but it was noticeably smaller. In terms of the weight of the material, a reduction in the volume of the silhouette entailed a lighter dress. Appearances, however, are deceiving, for beneath the loose bodice was a boned underbodice,¹⁰ and such devices as skirt protectors remained. Nonetheless, appreciable adjustments must have been felt. In an interview with the *Canadian Magazine*, Lily Langtry exclaimed: “I look back on my pictures showing my hourglass figure with positive amazement. How could I ever have thought I was getting my share of life in these prison corsets.”¹¹ Admittedly, at the time those supporting the status quo vigorously opposed dress reformers, who had a reputation for extremism. One of the final eulogies was pronounced in 1908.

There is no reason to fear that the freak who smokes cigarettes, drinks whisky and soda and wears a coat of masculine cut is likely to be imitated by any large number of her sisters... There was once a “rational dress” organization which was going to in-

duce women to wear a plain uncorseted costume, ugly and sensible shoes and altogether be a practical and uninspiring person. However, this society does not seem to flourish, if indeed, it exists today... The frilly feminine is in the majority, and is likely to crowd the dress displays.¹²

Perhaps the aims of the reformers were not realized completely, but fashions did seem to change for the better by the turn of the century. This movement's real strength lay in the social climate it created in which health was stressed and less passivity in terms of dress was encouraged.

The role of sports was one vehicle for fashion changes in the late nineteenth century that is traditionally favoured by material historians. As women were moving more rapidly into athletics, clothing became less confining. In the 1870s exercise for women was synonymous with walking;¹³ few other activities were acknowledged. Beginning in the 1880s and climaxing in the following decade, the list of acceptable female sports expanded tremendously. Dancing, skating, and swimming were included toward the end of the century;¹⁴ by 1903 golf, bowling, hockey, and curling were no longer scandalous.¹⁵ All of these were important but none could hold a candle to the bicycle. It was stated that

the triumph of the woman cyclist over prejudice, timorousness, bruises and discomfort of various sorts in pursuits of her dear pastime, has brought her more than the applause of an amused world – it has brought her steady nerves, brisk circulation, lost youth, brilliant eyes and strong muscles; her lungs, her heart and her head have gained, and to those who believe health helps every way, her eternal welfare is also the surer for it.¹⁶

Lavish praise undoubtedly. The result of a healthier, more active lifestyle was a new image of womanhood. By 1891 the claim was advanced that “Girls of today are taller, stronger, and in every way more perfectly developed physically than the girl of the past decade... [It] is the more noticeable to see straight, supple, strong women of graceful proportions in fashionable society.”¹⁷

Comparing the fashion plates of the inactive woman of 1870 with the energetic woman of 1905, the increased emphasis on the verticality of the figure is clear. Throughout the fashion magazines of the late nineteenth century new sporting outfits appeared. Bathing suits (which were seen already in the 1870s) became less restricting, as figures 1 and 2 indicate. Special tennis suits appeared and the wheeling suit made its debut. The bicycling, or wheeling, suit is of greatest interest, for it echoes the development of the tailored suit for women (see fig. 3). It is thought that the severity of this sporting outfit strongly influenced daytime dress. At the same time it was developing, dress was being divested of many of its frills. One of the more fascinating effects of bicycling related to the corset. In



Fig. 1. The bathing suit of the 1870s. At this time women did not actually swim. Instead, they lounged on the beach and dipped in and out of the water. From *New Dominion Monthly*, July 1870, p. 54.

1895 the Crompton Corset Company of Toronto advertised a new corset. Described as a "long waist" model, it was nevertheless "shorter below the hips and at the front, which will commend it to lady cyclists."¹⁸ By 1905 the corset had become even smaller, perhaps due in part to this impetus from the bicyclists. Its peculiar S-shape seems to have roots elsewhere. In 1905 *Canadian Good Housekeeping* ran an article on breathing exercises. Correct techniques were described, emphasizing a "combined downward and outward movement." Certainly the woman of the period wore a bodice that hung down and away from the chest. The article also affirmed that posture was crucial to health. "To carry one's self well, chest forward, abdomen receding, head up and chin in, it is absolutely necessary to have a strong chest, strong muscles at the back of the leg, and a muscular yet relaxed spine."¹⁹

Only exercise could produce a fit body and this ideal posture. In sum, then, women's sports had helped produce a more severe, more slender cut in women's dress, as well as a new, peculiar posture.

A further noteworthy factor was the rise in women's employment. By the early 1900s the young single woman could work outside the home without facing insurmountable opposition. By this time some women had found that it "does not pay, in even pocket money, to sit around and play sunshine for the family, just incidentally, while waiting to be married."²⁰ Already reflecting this phenomenon by 1890, a *Ladies' Journal* article on the correct wardrobe addressed the woman "living in a city or small town, ... fond of social life or a recluse, ... at home or in business."²¹ Magazines also began to include articles listing



Fig. 2. The bathing beauties of 1897. By the turn of the century, it had become acceptable for women to swim. From *Canadian Home Journal*, August 1897, p. 12.

acceptable employment for women. A description of Ottawa in 1892 illustrated the impact of women in the labour force:

There are now more women employed in stores than men, quite apart from the work-rooms. In general offices the sexes may be said to be equally divided. Three-fourths of all the teachers in the schools and in music are women. Twelve years ago there were not ten women in the Government service; whereas to-day there are hundreds.²²

Certainly financial independence was a goal, but jobs were also said to have been taken so that women "could wear neat clothes and enjoy some measure of variety."²³ The issue of dress and the work environment can be further explored. An image arose of the ideal "Woman in Business," a serious, precise, and prompt individual. Her clothing became a crucial element in her characterization. "She is

careful to avoid being conspicuous in her manner. Dresses plainly. Does not try to ape the 'lady', with gaudy imitations in gowns and jewels."²⁴ The simple, tailored suit was her trademark (see fig. 4). In daily contact with men on an impersonal level, her costume seemed to follow masculine styles closely. The blouse paralleled the shirt, the jacket had clear masculine roots, the slimmer skirt related to pants, and even a tie or ribbon was worn about the collar of the blouse. This trend carried over into day dress for women who did not work.

Associated with the increase in women's employment was yet another phenomenon. As early as the 1870s note was made of the decline of the domestic servant. The loneliness and low status of domestic service was blamed for this,²⁵ but there were other stimuli. It was felt that young working class women

learn to read easily, and they quickly avail themselves of the cheap literature of this country and they sink themselves into it ... [T]hey have many lofty ideas ... [E]very girl, no matter how humble her family, thinks she may some day marry a rich man and become a fine lady ... So in order to be fit to be a fine lady when the golden time comes, no girl ever wants to be rubbed with the smut of domestic drudgery ... [T]he young woman who is thrown upon her own resources will work at anything rather than go out to service in a household. A shop, a factory, and sometimes a much worse place is preferred.²⁶

The housewife was left to her own devices. She did profit from ready-made products which by the 1890s were enthusiastically peddled by companies such as Eaton's,²⁷ but in any case she had to become actively involved in housework. Accordingly their dress reflected this. Mobility, and hence simplicity, were necessary, as figure 5 indicates. The 1890 housewife was advised to "be sure before

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into buying shoddy bicycles
made by unknown manu-
facturers when you can pur-
chase the World Renowned
Dust and Water Proof

Cleveland

FOR \$75 AND \$100.

H.A. LOZIER & CO
TORONTO, ONT.

Protected by a Strong Home
Guarantee. No vexatious de-
lays and Expense for Repairs.

AGENTS EVERYWHERE.

Fig. 3. The costume of these female cyclists is strikingly masculine. From *Canadian Magazine*, July 1897, p. xxxi.



Fig. 4. These illustrations for an article on the businesswoman reflect the subdued, severe lines of her costume. From *Canadian Magazine*, September 1903, pp.408, 409.

leaving your room each morning that your dress, although never too nice for housework, is scrupulously neat and arranged with some eye to beauty."²⁸ Dress progressively came to assume a more functional character because its consumers led a more active life.

Finally, the role of education was central to the evolution of women's dress. In 1870 the approved education for a young lady included languages, some sciences, history, and music if she were particularly talented, but there was no question of applying her knowledge. Education was only a safeguard, preventing her from falling to "foolish novels, silly conversation, petty scandal, sensational dress, etc."²⁹ By the 1880s though, a reversal was in progress. In 1883 a Women's Medical College was founded in Toronto, and in the following year another opened in Kingston.³⁰ These woman doctors were expected to pursue missionary work in the Orient and India, but apparently by 1890 several were practising in Toronto itself.³¹ By 1904 the universities were seeing a rise in female students. "Toronto ... boasts no less than 338 women taking a university course in the four universities open to them ... [University College, Victoria, McMaster, and Trinity].

Their class standing is good, and a number are special mathematicians, although their best work seems to lie in the languages."³² In this milieu women formed a minority and naturally tended to take male figures as their role models. Much as in business circles, female dress tended to pattern itself on cleaner masculine lines. The *Canadian Magazine*, for instance, ran articles on women and education, and the accompanying photographs reflected these subdued dresses. Also of importance was the curriculum of girls' residential schools and colleges. Physical fitness was consistently stressed. The twelve schools in Toronto



favoured croquet, tennis, bicycling, basketball, golf, and even cricket.³³ Certainly this facet of a girl's education was aimed at cultivating a life-long interest in sports, an activity which was already associated with the adoption of more comfortable, sleeker clothing. Furthermore, throughout the period 1870-1905 there was emphasis on the need for female education in domestic economy.³⁴ Domestic servants became more scarce, and women were taught to cope with household chores alone. As these women were prepared for an active role, their dress was modified. Finally, due to the expanding horizons for women beyond the household, dress did not regress to the unwieldy styles of the mid-nineteenth century. This situation was recognized by Nellie McClung who harshly criticized the cage symbolism in women's dress in the context of a degraded status for women. Education was the escape route from the household. Clearly, then, women's education alone brought no unique developments in dress, but it reinforced the effects of sports, the work environment, and dress reform movements.

Despite these dramatic changes, some elements in women's clothing and female social roles were not altered.



FASHIONS FOR THE KITCHEN.

COOK.—"LOR', JANE, I WOULDN'T BE BOTHERED WITH THEM 'TRAINS' EVERY DAY! I ONLY WEARS MINE ON SUNDAYS!"

JANE.—"THAT MAY DO FOR YOU, COOK; BUT FOR MY PART I LIKES TO BE A LADY WEEK-DAYS AS WELL AS SUNDAYS!"—*Punch*.

Fig. 5. Certainly the cartoonist was ridiculing the maid with social pretensions, but he also underlined that it was impossible for women to be active if they wore fashionable clothing. From *New Dominion Monthly*, April 1877, p.480.

For instance, fashion continued to reflect conspicuous consumption. Thorstein Veblen characterized this as "the function of woman, in a peculiar degree, to exhibit the pecuniary strength of her social unit by means of a conspicuously unproductive consumption of valuable goods."³⁵ An indication of the cost of a dress of the 1870s can be found in the *New Dominion Monthly*:

Your daughter gives 40 cts a yard for tarlatan, but she requires fifteen yards. Well, only \$6; then four yards satin at \$1.50 for edging; \$10 for flowers and head-dress; \$10 more for lace; twelve yards silk for underskirt and waist at \$1.25; making of dress, \$5.00, and we have a total of \$52 ... Now, how long can this dress last? Not more than four times at the most, if white, and once or twice longer if coloured; but fashion says a dress should never be worn more than twice, and ... [it can also be damaged by] crushing, tearing and soiling.³⁶

Inevitably, the complete wardrobe of the elegant lady could be quite costly.

She has many changes of thickness and thinness in woollen, cotton, and linen. She has changes of shoes, hosiery, and undershirt, for in and out of doors, for cold weather and dry. She has flannel suits and tailor-made cloth dresses, Mother Hubbard wrappers, which are seen only in the privacy of her own room, and princess wrappers in which she may be seen by intimates. She has walking and visiting costumes, dinner and evening dresses, toilets particularly adapted to the opera or theatre, and others in which she may receive a few friends for a quiet "at home".... Then of wraps there are a dozen, each of which is necessary to the woman of position who goes and comes.... Fans, gloves, shawls, umbrellas, parasols, are all a necessary part of a woman's impediments.³⁷

It is true that by 1905 dresses became more subdued in silhouette and less heavily trimmed. Even so, such extravagant accents as lace insets were prominent features. Furthermore, many dresses throughout the period were composed of several different kinds of fabric. In order to be

cleaned, the stitching had to be removed and the fabrics sorted and cleaned separately.³⁸ The process was costly and time-consuming. By today's standards these dresses are remarkably ostentatious.

Other areas which changing fashion did not affect included the picturesque aspect of dress and modesty. Firstly, the skirt remained the distinctive feature of female attire. The abbreviated or divided skirt (essentially a fad) could not challenge its supremacy. The skirt proper was decisively proclaimed as the "popular and suitable garment for women."³⁹ Also the length of the skirt did not change drastically. It never climbed much higher than the ankle, nor did it fall far below the shoes (except for trains). In this respect an unchanging concept of decent dress prevailed. Commentary on children's fashion reveals this clearly: "it is immoral, and tends to weaken all ideas of modesty and virtue in a child's mind, or rather hinders their development, for the poor little legs to be exhibited to, or above, the knee."⁴⁰ Skirts remained long because they were essential to public decency. Another element that did not change was the firmness of the clothing. The corset was the prime symbol of this. A writer declared in 1873 that "corsets (without tight-lacing) are a necessity. They give not only a physical, but a moral support to our backs; with them we feel strong and erect; without them we are as limp as rags and utterly worthless."⁴¹ By the turn of the century corsets became smaller and were abandoned for strenuous sports. Nevertheless, they endured in daily dress, apparently because women continued to consider them essential to health and comfort. An integral feature of the close-fitting bodice was the small waist. An 1884 article stated that women enjoyed the sensation of being "girdled about the waist, when at work, on the principle that the athlete feels better than he can explain when he prepares for a feat by buckling on a broad belt."⁴² However, the small waist remained as a sign of beauty rather than for health reasons. In addition to tight lacing, a wide variety of devices were used to create the illusion of a diminutive waist. Voluminous sleeves were used at various periods to suggest this. Bulky skirts and full busts, by sheer contrast, also created a tiny waist. The complete dress had to be well-fitting. "Loose dresses have a tendency to make young women careless.... To be sure, they are [comfortable], but [are not as] ... becoming and picturesque as more closely fitting garments. Dresses may be comfortably loose without being on the free-and-easy order."⁴³ Finally, despite modifications in the silhouette the ideal woman's dress retained fluid and curved lines. To the end of the century a distinct image of femininity emphasized those characteristics. "She has not an angle anywhere. She is graceful, bending in mind as in body; ... neither rigid nor narrow. She is a woman who glides gracefully through life."⁴⁴ The basic dimensions of the dress in terms of length, contour, and line, did not change radically. Standards of decency and beauty appear not to have been altered.

Finally, intense criticism of fashion, distinct from the dress reform movement, pervaded the years from 1870 to 1905. This self-analysis and introspection were typical of the period. Technological change, prosperity, and social mobility had brought a degree of materialism to English-Canadian society. A survey of magazines confirms this development for it was frequently mentioned. The fashions of the 1870s had to withstand heavy attacks. For instance, the bonnet was ridiculed as "that meaningless little nutshell outrageously decked with bunches of ribbons, flowers, feathers, which gives at present to our wives and daughters so alarming a look of insanity." The numerous frills and puffs on the dress itself were criticized as "inventing ways to cut good stuff into useless shreds." Even the color scheme was characterized as hopelessly garish.⁴⁵ These attacks continued. By the beginning of the twentieth century the enormous hat was under fire because it was too cumbersome. Skirts trailing in mud and snow were deemed both unhygienic and inelegant.⁴⁶ Also, the unfortunate woman cyclist of the 1890s had plenty to complain about. Skirts tended to blow up in the wind, and attempts to fasten them down proved uncomfortable. A dress could be dangerous for if it caught in the pedals the bicyclist suffered "a toss which she took weeks to forget."⁴⁷ Many of these critical articles on fashion are amusing reading, but they are not superficial. They indicate a sustained interest in their contemporary material culture.

In sum, changes in women's dress seem strongly linked to ideological and institutional forces. The striking shift toward less heavy ornamentation and a sleeker silhouette were undeniably associated with sports, the business world, women's associations, and the servantless housewife. The dress reform movement as well as the unstructured but unending criticism of dress demanded a consideration of health in female dress. Finally, the educated woman who appeared at the turn of the century seemed unwilling to regress to an unwieldy outfit. By today's standards dress was still uncomfortable and cumbersome, but a clear evolution had occurred.

There are facets of women's fashion not studied in this paper. In terms of the artifacts themselves, colour and fabric (particularly texture) were omitted. Information concerning these elements is hard to assemble for nineteenth-century Canadian fashion magazines included no colour plates and written descriptions were too vague. Colour is especially difficult to evaluate. With few contemporary sources to consult, analysis must depend heavily on psychology. This demands a firm grounding in the field if reliable conclusions are to be drawn. In a more intensive study of fashion, these factors would have to be considered.

There are also several social elements that were not discussed. The bias of the individual fashion designer re-

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mains unclear. It is difficult to find biographical material on influential, but anonymous, commercial designers. The influence of elites such as the British royal family was also neglected. It is not known to what degree these fashion trend-setters actually initiated changes in dress by this time. Closer to home lies the issue of religion. A 1905 article in the *Canadian Magazine* attributed simpler dress styles to the example set by the Salvation Army.⁴⁸ To establish this link further research would be necessary.

The issue of sexuality raises peculiar problems. Secondary material is of some value, but much of it tends to be either imprecise or too imaginative.⁴⁹ Needless to say few direct references to sexuality can be found in contemporary sources, particularly magazines. However, what little there appears is promising. In 1875 the *New Dominion Monthly* printed an article decrying the unhealthy structure of female dress. A lack of exercise, poor diet, and tight unyielding clothes were singled out. Uterine disorders and difficult childbirth were thought to be the result: "In this condition, no wonder so many ... [women] look upon childbearing with repugnance, and die in the attempt to become mothers."⁵⁰ Thus the distaste Victorian women are thought to have displayed toward sex gains another dimension. On the other hand, fashion has traditionally been envisaged as a mechanism for sexual allure. Evening wear during this period strongly contrasted with day dress. At night, necklines plunged, skirts clung, and bare arms were exhibited. The significance of this inconsistency has not yet been adequately explored.⁵¹ The nineteenth-century magazine is an unsatisfactory medium through which to study sexuality and so this topic has not been examined in the present article.

The last element is the effect of clothing itself in shaping personal attitudes and thereby contributing to social change. Psychological analysis would be useful here as well. Diaries might be invaluable as a primary resource. Unfortunately, the subtlety of the relationship bars the formation of unequivocal conclusions. Logically, links must exist; empirically, claims are likely to remain purely tentative.

Women's dress is not the only artifact that profits from an analysis stressing the broader social climate. The furniture of the 1870s, for instance, echoed the same basic design elements as women's dress of the period.⁵² Certainly this was not coincidental. Both were products of the same society and inevitably reflected the same influences. Architecture, another example, seems likely to respond to the mentality of a society. Painting and sculpture can also be added to the list. There are endless possibilities. By joining the perspectives of social and material history, a deeper appreciation of the social significance of artifacts can be gained as well as a fuller understanding of the character of the social climate itself.

1. The eleven magazines consulted are *Canadian Good Housekeeping* (Toronto), 1905; *Canadian Home Journal* (Toronto), 1896-97; *Canadian Illustrated News* (Montreal), 1870-83; *Canadian Magazine* (Toronto), 1893-1908; *Canadian Monthly and National Review* (Toronto), 1872-78; *Canadian Queen* (Toronto), 1890-92; *Dominion Illustrated* (Montreal), 1888-91; *Ladies' Journal* (Toronto), 1884-96; *Lake Magazine* (Toronto), 1892-93; *Massey's Magazine* (Toronto), 1986-87; *New Dominion Monthly* (Toronto), 1870-77.
2. The term "English-Canadian" means that they are published in English, and hence aimed at the English-speaking Canadian market.
3. Several useful surveys of nineteenth-century fashion have been published within the last twenty years. Of note are: Katherine Brett, *Clothing Worn in Canada: Changing Fashions in the Nineteenth Century*, National Museum of Man, Canada's Visual History, vol. 41 (Ottawa, 1980); Katherine Brett, *Women's Costume in Ontario (1867-1907)* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, University of Toronto Press, 1966); and C. Eileen Collard, *Clothing in English Canada Circa 1867 to 1907* (Burlington, Ont.: C. Eileen Collard, 1975).
4. Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Setting the Stage': National Organizations and the Women's Movement in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History*, eds. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), pp.88-89, 93.
5. Jean Graham, "The Women's Institute," *Canadian Magazine*, February 1907, p.400.
6. Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: McClelland & Allen, 1915), p.43.
7. McClung, *In Times Like These*, pp.92-93. McClung was actually referring to the hobble skirt, which was fashionable ca. 1910, but the same argument certainly holds true for the restricting styles of the 1880s.
8. "Dress and Health," *New Dominion Monthly*, December 1875, pp.451-52.
9. Dr. Andrew Graydon, "To Keep Healthy This Summer," *Ladies' Journal*, August 1891, p.7.
10. Collard, *Clothing in English Canada*, p.40.
11. M. MacLean Helliwell, "Woman's Sphere," *Canadian Magazine*, June 1904, p.179.
12. Jean Graham, "Where Woman Lingers," *Canadian Magazine*, November 1908, pp.77-78.
13. Faith Rochester, "Going Out-of-Doors," *New Dominion Monthly*, November 1873, pp.313-14.
14. Harriet Prescott Spofford, "Girls Should Exercise," *Ladies' Journal*, December 1889, p.8.
15. M. MacLean Helliwell, "Woman's Sphere," *Canadian Magazine*, February 1903, p.384.
16. Grace E. Denison, "The Evolution of the Lady Cyclist," *Massey's Magazine*, April 1897, p.284.
17. "About Women," *Canadian Queen*, July 1891, p.280.
18. Advertisement, Crompton Corset Co. of Toronto, *Ladies' Journal*, September 1895, n.p.
19. "Breathing Exercises for Women," *Canadian Good Housekeeping*, March 1905, pp.254-55.
20. Ella S. Atkinson, "Women and Money," *Canadian Magazine*, June 1893, p.277.
21. "Necessities of a Modern Wardrobe," *Ladies' Journal*, July 1890, p.5.
22. J.L. Payne, "A New Social Problem," *Lake Magazine*, September 1892, p.118.
23. *Ibid.*, p.119.
24. Annie Merrill, "The Woman in Business," *Canadian Magazine*, September 1903, p.408.
25. "Will Not Go Out to Service," *New Dominion Monthly*, April 1871, p.248.

26. "Anything But Housework," *Ladies' Journal*, April 1884, p.8.
27. Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," in *Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930*, eds. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1974), pp.74, 81.
28. "Morning Callers," *Canadian Queen*, September 1890, p.253.
29. "Female Education," *Canadian Illustrated News*, 4 June 1870.
30. "Kingston Women's Medical College," *Dominion Illustrated*, 29 August 1891.
31. "The Women's Medical College of Toronto," *Dominion Illustrated*, 23 May 1891.
32. B.J.T., "University Women," *Canadian Magazine*, December 1904, p.183.
33. B.J.T., "Girls' Colleges," *Canadian Magazine*, February 1905, p.377.
34. This trend is clear in the early 1870s in the *New Dominion Monthly* and continues uninterrupted into the early years of the twentieth century as reflected in the *Canadian Magazine*.
35. Thorstein Veblen, "The Economic Theory of Women's Dress," in *Essays in Our Changing Order*, ed. Leon Ardzooni (New York: Viking Press, 1934), p.68.
36. M., "Dress As It Is," *New Dominion Monthly*, April 1876, p.299.
37. "Review of Fashion," *Ladies' Journal*, September 1884, p.15.
38. Collard, *Clothing in English Canada*, p.40.
39. "Review of Fashions - March," *Ladies' Journal*, March 1885, p.10.
40. "Children's Fashions," *Ladies' Journal*, September 1884, p.18.
41. "About Corsets," *New Dominion Monthly*, April 1873, p.239.
42. "Spring Print Dresses," *Ladies' Journal*, April 1884, p.6.
43. "The Tea-Gown," *Canadian Queen*, August 1891, p.330.
44. "Charming Women," *Ladies' Journal*, September 1895, p.27.
45. C.R. Carson, "Modern Dress," *Canadian Monthly and National Review*, February 1872, p.128; M., "Dress As It is," pp.296-97; "Fanny Fern of Women's Fashions," *Canadian Illustrated News*, 30 March 1872.
46. Jean Graham, "The Hideous Hats," *Canadian Magazine*, November 1907, pp.86-87; Jean Graham, "The Scavenger Skirt," *Canadian Magazine*, September 1906, pp.471-72.
47. Denison, "The Evolution of the Lady Cyclist," p.281.
48. Annie Merrill, "Tawdry Apparel," *Canadian Magazine*, March 1905, p.471.
49. Three works which deal at least in part with sexuality illustrate these problems well. Duncan Crow, *The Victorian Women* (London, Eng.: Geo. Allen & Unwin, 1971) contains some perceptions of symbolism in female dress but is too brief and too subjective. J.C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (London, Eng.: Hogarth Press, 1930) relies heavily on Freudian analysis. Despite some thought-provoking comments it tends to be vague. Geoffrey Squire, *Dress, Art and Society 1560-1970* (London, Eng.: Studio Vista, 1974) takes an art history approach; fanciful and poetic, its value is questionable.
50. "The Dress of Girls," *New Dominion Monthly*, February 1876, p.154.
51. Quentin Bell, *On Human Finery* (London, Eng.: Hogarth Press, 1976), p.24.
52. Brett, *Women's Costume in Ontario*, p.6.