



Reveal or Conceal?



**Complete texts of the exhibition
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1. Reveal or Conceal?

A well-turned ankle peeking out from under a long hoop skirt, an expanse of thigh in a miniskirt, an exposed midriff in low jeans – revealing a woman's body has always been as much a part of Western fashion as concealing it.

Because we conceal our bodies with clothing, revealing them can be powerful. Controversial new fashions tantalize us with their erotic potential, and shock us with their threat to social order. In spite of or because of their impact, these styles often become fashionable.

With each decade of the past century, clothing revealed more of the female body, and women seemed to gain ever greater physical comfort and social and sexual freedom. But did they really? Revealed or concealed, the female body is contested terrain for changing social attitudes and practices.

1.1. A Matter of Choice

Contemporary fashion appears to offer a great deal of personal freedom. Women make minute individual choices every day about how to dress and what to conceal or reveal, based on their own ideas about what feels comfortable, and what looks appropriate or good. In the past, being fashionable implied a much lesser degree of personal choice. Women often chose to wear styles that we now see as uncomfortable or constraining, but which at the time they felt were the most comfortable and appropriate from among the options available to them.

- Fashion plate, *The Queen*, August 6, 1887, (detail), McCord Museum, M2007X.3.1.36

1.2. Whose Bodies?

This exhibition is rich in images of women's bodies. These images were chosen for the way they portray the fashionable ideal to which most women aspired in their time.

Period fashion illustrations and advertisements are very useful for understanding women's appearance because they show shared cultural ideals of how a female body should appear. On the other hand, these images normalize bodies, smoothing away variations in size, shape, age, race, class and sexual orientation. Portrait photographs and snapshots reflect more of the actual spectrum of individual women's dressed bodies. Even in these more realistic portraits, however, the influence of the fashionable ideal on the sitter's clothing, body and stance is always very present.

Only in the past four decades have fashion images attempted to reflect any of the broad cultural diversity of the real women who wear Western fashion. Today's fashion magazines and advertisements may seek to portray a range of visible ethnicities, yet they nonetheless continue to favour a single physical body type, tall and slender.

- Miss Vessot, Montreal, 1881, photograph by Notman & Sandham, McCord Museum, II-62641.1
- Miss Guilmartin, Montreal, 1885, photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-77923.1
- Miss Massey, Montreal, 1886, photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-79684.1
- Mrs. Bethune, Montreal, 1886, photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-80577.1
- Miss Raymond, Montreal, 1886, photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-81102.1
- Unidentified Dakota woman, 1880-1890, photograph by D. F. Barry, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, B-681

1.3. What is Fashion?

This exhibition looks at fashionable Western clothing of the past century and a half that gained popular acceptance and became mainstream. Fashion is a process of change. The objects of fashion presented here have been chosen to represent moments and stages in this process. Fashionable apparel was available to the majority of people in Western countries by the mid-19th century. Only in the past hundred years has the adoption of Western dress become a worldwide phenomenon.

- Miss Delong, Montreal, 1871, (detail), photograph by William Notman, McCord Museum, I-69025
- Dress, about 1874, on mannequin, photograph by Marilyn Aitken, McCord Museum

1.4. Absent Bodies

How can we give life to the garments in museums, to show how they transformed living women's bodies, and how women's bodies gave them life? Garments on static, rigid mannequins can only tell part of the story. Historic images provide a

graphic complement, showing just how short a skirt was worn, or how low a neckline could go.

We custom design and make a mannequin for each individual garment. The mannequin must fit the garment and give it the correct silhouette for its period. It must not damage a fragile garment. Light levels in the galleries are kept low to preserve the condition of delicate fabrics and colours.

- Mannequins in preparation for *Reveal or Conceal?*, photograph by Marilyn Aitken, McCord Museum

1.5. How Did We Get Here?

The concept of Western fashion that we know today began in Europe in the Middle Ages. Until the early 20th century, the way clothing covered women's bodies changed little from the medieval model.

- Catherine Parr (reproduction), about 1545, attributed to Master John, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG-4451
- Queen Henrietta Maria (reproduction), about 1635, artist unknown, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG-1247 : A long skirt hid the legs and any suggestion of their existence, setting off the upper body in its tight-fitting bodice.
- Madame de Pompadour (reproduction), 1759, François Boucher (1703-1770), reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of The Wallace Collection, London : A confined waistline, shaped by stays, later known as a corset, was the erotic focus, along with selective exposure of shoulders and breast cleavage, though this exposure varied in form in different historical periods.
- Madame Récamier (reproduction), 1802, Baron François-Pascal-Simon Gérard (1770-1837), The Gallery Collection/Corbis, 42-18300201 : A very brief period at the beginning of the 19th century saw dresses become far more revealing, with very sheer fabrics and low cut bodices.
- Angela Georgina Burdett-Coutts (reproduction), 1847, Sir William Charles Ross (1794-1860), National Portrait Gallery, Londres, NPG-2057 : Early in the 19th century, fashionable dress again reverted to a more traditional mode of concealment.

2. Modesty Uncovered: Ambiguous, Contradictory, Complex

2.1. The Eroticism of Concealment

Since strategically revealing part of the body is often considered provocative, concealing it is usually thought to be more modest. Yet concealment can actually accentuate eroticism. What seems excessively modest today in fact had erotic overtones in the 19th century. The fashionable garments of the period covered a woman's body almost entirely, but drew attention to its shape and emphasized its sexual attractiveness.

2.1.1. Skirting the Issue

In the 19th century, long skirts hid women's legs. The fashionable hemline varied slightly, but at most times covered the ankle bone. Fashions in the shape of the skirt also changed. Even though legs were hidden, they did not lack sexual appeal; in fact, allusions to their "hidden plumpness" often stimulated the erotic imagination.

- Day dress and shawl, 1862-1864, Silk taffeta, cotton lace, Shawl, gift of Mrs. Sheila Aubé, McCord Museum, M965.112.1.1-2 and M974.24.4
- Dress, about 1888, Silk lace over silk satin, Gift of Miss Estelle Holland, McCord Museum, M20281.1-2
- Dress, about 1900, Label: A. S. Knight, New York, Silk lace and net over silk satin, Gift of the Junior League of Montreal, McCord Museum, M22148.1-2

2.1.2. Hoops and Bustles

The devices used to support and shape the skirt created an erotic appeal of their own. The hoop crinoline swayed as the wearer moved, perhaps tantalizing observers with glimpses of an ankle. Bustles exaggerated the shape of the buttocks. The fullness below set off the closely outlined bust and narrow waistline, shaped by a stiffened corset.

- Hoop crinoline, 1865-1868, Cotton tape, metal hoops, Gift of Mrs. Nancy Price, Mrs. John A. Rolland and Mrs. Janet Beattie, McCord Museum, M992.119.1
- Hoop crinoline, 1869-1872, Cotton tape, metal hoops, McCord Museum, M20952

- Bustle, 1880-1890, Glazed cotton twill, metal coils, Gift of the Estate of Clara C. Benson, McCord Museum, M967.27.23
- Braided wire bustle, “Queen” model, About 1886, Label: Brush & Co., Toronto, Braided wire, cotton tape, Gift of Mrs. George S. Currie, McCord Museum, M969.15.41
- Bustle, 1900-1910, Silk covering, probably hair stuffing, Gift of Mrs. Raymond Caron, McCord Museum, M973.1.39

2.2. Modesty in Context

Whether clothes seem excessively modest, just decent, or blatantly erotic all depends on social context – a shared understanding of their meaning and their appropriateness to a particular place and time. In the context of physical activity like sports, women often wear garments that expose more of their bodies. Given the need for greater physical freedom, it seems logical that sports clothing should reveal more, although in many other settings, a similar degree of exposure might appear provocative.

In the 19th century, in the context of formal occasions like balls and theatre, women who normally concealed their upper bodies from neck to wrist were allowed to bare a great expanse of skin without embarrassment. The revealing, low-necked style of evening gowns worn on these occasions was ironically known as “full dress.”

2.2.1. Flesh and Formality

In the 19th century, formal social occasions like balls demanded that women wear “full dress,” which ironically meant bare shoulders, arms and perhaps even exposed cleavage. This style of gown, also known as *décolleté*, was not regarded as sexually provocative at such events, where social behaviour was closely circumscribed.

Although *décolleté* full dress was widely accepted and worn, not everyone agreed it was appropriate. Doctors declared it unhealthy in cold weather. Etiquette books decried it as immodest on young women and vulgar on older women.

- Dress with evening bodice, and separate day bodice, 1874, Silk faille, pleated cotton net, silk net and silk satin trim, Gift of the Estate of Clara C. Benson, McCord Museum, M967.27.6.2-4

2.2.2. Less Was More

In 19th-century Canada, one formal event where full dress was obligatory was the opening of Parliament in Ottawa. While some women voiced complaints, these centred more on the time of day rather than any reluctance to bare cleavage. It was humiliating, they said, to show so much flesh in the daytime, rather than in the evening when full dress was usually worn.

- Dress with day bodice, and separate evening bodice, 1868, Warp-printed silk taffeta, silk satin and cotton lace trim, Gift of Mrs. Norman L. C. Mactaggart, McCord Museum, M975.41.1.1-3 : Frequently, 19th- and early 20th-century dresses were made with both a day and an evening bodice, which could be worn interchangeably with a single skirt. This economical practice allowed the wearer to have two dresses for little more than the cost of one, at a time when fabric was very expensive and labour very cheap.

2.2.3. A Royal Blunder

In 1878, Canada's new Governor General, the Marquess of Lorne, and his wife, Princess Louise, arrived in Montreal and invited the citizens to meet them. Following customary British court etiquette, their aide-de-camp published an invitation requiring all women to wear low-necked dresses. "Dresses fastening up to the Throat" were forbidden, but if she had a medical certificate, a female guest could get away with a "square-cut" dress, which covered her shoulders.

Journalists called the invitation a major political blunder. They criticized the Governor General and his wife for weeks for failing to understand the subtleties of Canadian society, such as the cold November weather, the Catholic Church's moral stance on indecency, and the modest means of many local women who did not own a formal low-necked dress.

- Advertisement, *Montreal Herald*, November 30, 1878
- Excerpt, *L'Opinion publique*, December 12, 1878
- "Square cut" evening dress , About 1873, Label: A. Corbay, Paris, Plaid silk taffeta, silk faille, knotted silk fringe, Gift of Miss Estelle Holland, McCord Museum, M20277.1-2

2.2.4. "Happily Conway Won't Wear a Low Dress"

How observers interpreted a woman's bare shoulders and cleavage depended on her social status. Décolleté evening wear was taken for granted as "proper," not provocative, on privileged women who could attend formal functions. Women

whose class or ethnicity made them of lower social status faced a different set of expectations about sexuality and modesty. For these women, showing the same amount of cleavage would be viewed as a deliberate provocative display.

Feo Monck, sister-in-law of Canada's Governor General from 1861 to 1868, noted in her diary that her personal maid, Conway, had been invited to a ball. Her diary entry revealed the class distinction she made between herself and her servant, and her relief that contemporary dress codes would reinforce that difference: "Happily Conway won't wear a low dress."

- Evening dress, 1903, Cotton velveteen, silk taffeta trim, Gift of Mrs. Philip Magor, McCord Museum, M974.41.4.1-2
- Corset cover, 1900-1910, Embroidered linen, Gift of Mrs. C. Walsh, McCord Museum, M966.51.56 : A corset cover is an undergarment worn over the corset and under the bodice. Most women wore plain, functional corset covers. Those with embroidery and ornamentation had more erotic appeal but were more likely to be worn by women of privilege and means.
- Corset cover, 1890-1900, Heavy cotton twill, Gift of the Westmount Historical Society, McCord Museum, M975.4.13

2.3. Hide and Peek

More than what one wears, the way one wears it conveys complex and sometimes contradictory messages. Some dress practices play with and challenge existing norms about revealing and concealing. When women reveal body parts and items of clothing that are ostensibly intended to be concealed, they push the boundaries of acceptable exposure in new directions.

2.3.1. A Well-turned Ankle

Respectable 19th-century women supposedly avoided displaying their ankles, and yet the shoes, boots and stockings they wore to cover them were often designed to attract attention. The sway of the hoop crinoline was notorious for offering a tantalizing glimpse of stocking.

- Boots, About 1875, Label: Alph Girard, Paris, Silk satin, elastic, metal buckle, Gift of Dr. Sean B. Murphy, McCord Museum, M974.21.5.1-2
- Boots, About 1880, Label: E. C. Burt, New York, Kid leather, Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Walter C. Wonham, McCord Museum, M20435.1-2
- Stockings, 1890-1900, Silk knit, Gift of Mrs. William R. Bentham, McCord Museum, M21463.1-2

- Stockings, About 1870, Lisle (cotton knit), McCord Museum, M969.1.41.1-2
- Stockings, 1890-1900, Lisle (cotton knit), Gift of Mrs. Raymond Caron, McCord Museum, M973.1.42.1-2
- Stockings, About 1890, Silk knit, Gift of Mrs. F. H. Cundill, McCord Museum, M21876.1-2
- Stockings, About 1870, Silk knit, Gift of the Bartlett Morgan Family, (Mireille and Elizabeth Morgan), McCord Museum, M2002.37.7.1-2
- Lady Negotiates a Gate, about 1860, hand-colored print by W. H. J. Carter, Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis, HU059991

2.3.2. Sidestepping It Altogether

Some innovations in exposing the body create no disturbance or shock whatsoever, if they seem inspired by aesthetics rather than provocation. Evening sandals of the 1930s exposed more of the feet than any other mainstream form of footwear in centuries, but did not generate much moral censure. Fashionable sandals became progressively barer over the following decades, and caring for the feet and toenails became part of appropriate body grooming.

- Evening sandals, About 1936, Lamé, metallic leather, Gift of Mrs. Nora Murchison, McCord Museum, M974.19.51.1-2
- Evening sandals, 1939, Label: Fashion Shoe Shop, Montreal, Silk satin, leather, Gift of Mrs. Donald N. Byers, McCord Museum, M975.20.13.1-2
- Evening sandals, About 1935, Label: S. Mendelsohn Inc., Silk satin, leather, Gift of Mrs. Donald N. Byers, McCord Museum, M983.15.7.1-2

2.3.3. A Touch of Propriety

Covering the hands to prevent intimate contact through touch was once a crucial part of public modesty. As lifestyles became more casual, gloves became almost obsolete in the 1920s, except for wear in church and at formal balls and parties. In the 1960s, they quietly disappeared.

- Gloves, About 1860, Kid leather, Gift of Mrs. George S. Currie, McCord Museum, M969.15.55.1-2

- Gloves, About 1875, Label: Gants Proville, Paris, Kid leather, Gift of Miss Estelle Holland, McCord Museum, M20318.1-2
- Gloves, About 1930, Kid leather, Gift of Michèle Gervais and H. Paul Mandeville, McCord Museum, M2006.71.2.1-2
- Gloves, 1950-1960, Label: Simpson's, Embroidered kid leather, Gift of Mrs. Charlotte Grayburn Millen, McCord Museum, M986.9.4.1-2
- Miss McKinnon, Montreal, 1878, (detail), photograph by Notman & Sandham, McCord Museum, II-50849

2.3.4. A Veil of Secrecy

Until relatively recently in Western fashion history, a hat or head covering was essential to appropriate public dress. In the 19th century, some bonnets and hats incorporated a sheer net or lace face veil. A woman could maintain privacy and modesty by avoiding a viewer's direct gaze, and her face could even appear more attractive when partially hidden. Small face veils remained fashionable on dressier hats until these disappeared from mainstream fashion in the early to mid-1960s. Today, sunglasses function in a similar manner: they allow the wearer to see outwards while obscuring her eyes and gaze from the direct gaze of others.

- Mourning hat and veil, About 1904, Silk, silk crape, Gift of Mrs. Armand Mathieu, McCord Museum, M972.123.11 : Hiding the hair with a veil had been common for married women in the Middle Ages. This practice lingered in Western fashion in ceremonial and religious dress, as well as in ritual mourning attire. The tradition of wearing veils for mourning disappeared in the early 20th century.
- Wedding veil, Mid 19th century, 20th century alterations, Belgian point de gaze lace, synthetic tulle, Gift of Mrs. Jane E. Ganim, McCord Museum, M2000.94.1: Veiling the face is still popular at weddings, a vestige of the head-covering tradition in Western culture. This wedding veil was worn by twelve brides from 1912 to 1976, all members of the same family.
- Bonnet veil, 1830-1850, Silk net, McCord Museum, M971X.51
- Veil for sun protection, 1830-1850, Silk net, Gift of Mrs. A. F. G. Edgelow, McCord Museum, M972.122.5 : In the 19th century, veils in shades of blue and green were intended to protect the face from the sun.
- Hat, About 1940, Label: Fanny Graddon, Montreal, Felt, feathers, silk and cotton net veil, Gift of Mrs. Leslie McCulloch, McCord Museum, M976.31.2

- Cocktail hat, 1955-1960, Label: Best & Co., New York, Ostrich feathers, synthetic net veil, Gift of Mrs. Isabel Barclay Dobell, McCord Museum, M966.54.12
- Mrs. Fisher in mourning dress, Montreal, 1886, photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-80811.1
- Mrs. Lee, Montreal, 1920, (detail), photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-239735
- “Se voir telles que les autres nous voient”, *La Canadienne*, January 1920, © Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2002-2006

2.3.5. Negotiating Concealment

The practice of some Muslim women in the West of concealing their hair, and sometimes their faces and the outlines of their bodies, has become a site of negotiation by pushing the boundaries of concealment. This voluntary covering contrasts starkly on many levels with the more revealing dress expected in Western society.

- Young Muslim women, 2007, photograph by Marilyn Aitken, McCord Museum

2.3.6. “I See London, I See France, I See Someone’s Underpants”

(traditional children’s rhyme)

Today, visible undergarments seemingly test the limits of acceptable exposure, but a closer look reveals some ambiguity. Bra straps and waistbands of thong panties, deliberately designed to attract attention, peek out from under tank tops and waistbands. Ironically, though, the current fashion is for the remaining portions of these undergarments to be invisible. A “panty-line,” or bulge at the top of the thigh created by an elasticized leg, is considered an unsightly fashion faux-pas. Today’s bras, in spite of their decorative straps, feature moulded foam cups, which obscure the true contours of the breasts under a fitted t-shirt, and prevent any provocative jiggle.

- Bra and thong panties, 2007, Label: Grenier, Nylon and spandex, Courtesy of C. J. Grenier Ltd.
- Thong panties, 2007, Private collection
- Young women with exposed bra straps, 2007, photograph by Marilyn Aitken, McCord Museum

- *Kelly is a total slut. It doesn't even look like she's wearing underwear,* cartoon by Thomas Bros., www.CartoonStock.com

2.4. Sexual Liberation

New ways of dressing to reveal the body have time and again been equated with declining sexual morality. At least twice in the 20th century, women's fashion became emblematic of sexual liberation, and revealing clothing took the blame for all sorts of social ills. Does fashion actually drive the sense of heightened sexualization that causes moral outrage, or is "sexier" clothing merely a symptom of changing social values?

2.4.1. The Roaring Twenties

The loose, unrestricting clothing of the 1920s drew attention to the movement of the woman's body beneath it. The sense of mystery about the body that concealing clothing had created for the previous generation was gone. Exposed calves and even knees were a novelty. Women enthusiastically adopted short skirts while shocked letters to the editor decried them in the press. The brazen and sexually liberated "flapper" was the archetype of the fashionable and youthful women of the decade.

- Coat, About 1925, Silk lamé, silk taffeta, Gift of Mrs. Herbert Vineberg, McCord Museum, M21327
- Day dress, About 1926, Silk chiffon, Gift of Mrs. Thain W. MacDowell, McCord Museum, M22291
- Evening dress, About 1927, Attributed to Chanel, Silk charmeuse, silk lace, Gift of Mrs. Frederick Cleveland Morgan, McCord Museum, M20220.1
- Shoes, 1922, Label: Mendelson & Bros., Lamé-covered leather, Gift of Mrs. John F. Atchison, McCord Museum, M969.46.4.1-2
- Cloche hat, 1927, Straw, silk ribbon, Gift of Mrs. Colin W. Perry, McCord Museum, M980.6.5
- Stole, 1920-1940, Fox fur, silk, Gift of Mrs. Fred Benger, McCord Museum, M976.39.9
- Step-in slip, About 1925, Silk crêpe-de-chine, Gift of Ms. June Chisholm, McCord Museum, M2007.12.4

- Brassiere, 1920-1930, Silk knit, Gift of Mrs. Thain W. MacDowell, McCord Museum, M22233
- Powder puff, About 1930, Celluloid, Gift of Mrs. Nora Murchison, McCord Museum, M988X.32.1
- Miss Grant, Montreal, 1929, (detail), photograph attributed to Robert E. Cooper, gift of Ms. Marjorie D. Cooper Gawley, McCord Museum, M2004.94.34.17

2.4.2. The Swinging Sixties

A revolution in dress was part of the great social change that took place in the late 1960s. Miniskirts and hot pants, and a greater expanse of women's legs in the public gaze, became symbols of an unprecedented sexual and social freedom. The new revealing styles were analysed, celebrated and censured wherever they were enthusiastically taken up.

- Minidress, 1968, Label: Eaton's Ensemble Shop, Printed crinkled cotton, Gift of Mrs. Carol Kouri, McCord Museum, M988.57.2
- Minidress, 1967, Silk dupioni, Lent by Joan Marshall
- Raincoat, About 1967, Designed by Lydia Sperlich, Plastic over woven synthetic braid, Gift of Mrs. Lydia Sperlich, McCord Museum, M972.118.2
- Boots, About 1965, Vinyl, Gift of Mrs. Saul A. Silverman, McCord Museum, M978.103.23.1-2
- Hot pants and hat ensemble, 1971, Designed by Donald Richer and Anita Pineault, Kid skin, Gift of Donald Richer, McCord Museum, M972.119.2.1-2
- Roman sandals, About 1971, Label: Saks Fifth Avenue, Suede, leather, Gift of Mrs. L. M. Hart, McCord Museum, M983.5.5.1-2
- Mini-slip, About 1969, Printed nylon crepe, Gift of Mrs. Elizabeth Lewis, McCord Museum, M976.36.8
- Hot roller set, 1965-1975, Lady Sunbeam, Gift of Ms. Soryl Rosenberg, McCord Museum, M2004.27.1.1-4
- Makeup, 1967, Mary Quant, Gift of Miss Betty Guernsey, McCord Museum, M981.13.4

- Woman near sculpture, Sherbrooke Street, Montreal, about 1967, (detail), photograph by David Wallace Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.2.2.50

3. Modesty, Mobility, Modernity: A Key Shift, A New Repertoire

3.1. Who Wears the Pants?

Trousers are now taken for granted as suitable for women, and many claim they offer more comfort and freedom than skirts. A century ago, such an option was virtually unimaginable. The gradual acceptance of pants for women in Western fashion challenged centuries-old ideas of what was physically comfortable, appropriate and modest on women's bodies.

Trousers had long been exclusively male garments. In women's fashion, divided lower garments emulated masculinity and were as shocking as an immodest display of skin. Although pants concealed the legs, they also outlined them and emphasized the division between them, both aspects of the female body that Western social standards required to be hidden. Yet even while pants were still taboo, women recognized that they offered better coverage for some physical activities, and they sometimes managed to wear them in discreet ways.

3.1.1. Immodest Unmentionables

For centuries, the respectable undergarment for women was the voluminous sleeved chemise, which acted as a barrier between the body and outer clothing, but did not pass between the legs. Petticoats were worn over the lower body. Women began to wear drawers, as underpants were known, early in the 19th century. Even though they were hidden, drawers gained acceptance only slowly because they were modelled on a male garment, which was considered indecent for women.

- Chemise, About 1810, Handwoven linen, Gift of Mrs. Donald A. MacInnes, McCord Museum, M974.38.1

3.1.2. Open Drawers

Throughout most of the 19th century, women's drawers were made with the crotch area open to facilitate bodily functions. A chemise was tucked into the opening on the inside, providing additional coverage over the upper thighs; one or more petticoats were also worn over the drawers. The earliest drawers were quite long, although they began to be made shorter in the late 1860s, once the risk of having ankles and calves revealed by the swaying crinoline had disappeared.

- Drawers, 1840-1870, Cotton, braid appliqué, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Bartram, McCord Museum, M977.33.4

- Drawers, About 1860, Cotton, lace insertion, Gift of Miss Estelle Holland, McCord Museum, M20316
- *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, December 1860, McCord Museum, M21951.1-22

3.1.3. Drawers for Warmth

Women sometimes wore drawers for additional warmth and practicality, although these were carefully hidden. In 1870, in a letter to a fellow Englishwoman who was planning to emigrate to Canada, author Juliana Horatia Ewing described how she had observed Canadian women and children wearing flannel drawers. "Ladies wear them out of doors over everything except crinoline and outer skirts. Strong warm protection against the cold will save much in sickness and worry."

- Drawers, About 1900, Silk twill, Gift of the Bartlett Morgan Family (Mireille and Elizabeth Morgan), McCord Museum, M2002.37.5
- Drawers, 1860-1875, Wool flannel, cotton, McCord Museum, M965.79
- Drawers, About 1900, Wool flannel, Gift of Mr. Châteauguay Perrault and Mrs. Valérie Migneault Perrault, McCord Museum, M999.54.50
- Letter from Juliana Horatia Ewing, September 16, 1870, Hunter Archaeological Society, Sheffield Archives, HAS 65/37

3.1.4. Bloomerism

In the 1850s, a few women proposed an innovative alternative to the fashionable dress. The bloomer costume was named after Amelia Bloomer, one of its earliest and most enthusiastic proponents. The trouser costume was widely ridiculed, however, and only a very few women appeared in it publicly. The profoundly gendered nature of trousers in Western dress at this time meant that women simply could not wear bloomers and be considered feminine.

- Bloomer Costumes or Women's Emancipation, 1855-1860, Harry T. Peters "America on Stone" Lithography Collection, Division of Domestic Life, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

3.1.5. Decorative Drawers

Drawers in the second half of the 19th century were simultaneously modest and erotic. A profusion of lace, embroidery and ribbon trim helped to distance them from their masculine origins. As they became more decorative and thus more feminine, their connotations of modesty increased. No longer just marginally decent, they became required under petticoats. At the same time, their hidden ornamentation made them more sexualized and erotically charged.

By the turn of the century, closed styles with a centre crotch seam became available. It would take another decade, and a fashion for shorter skirts, before these fully replaced the open style.

- Open drawers, 1875-1900, Cotton, cotton lace, Gift of the Estate of Mrs. B. M. Hallward, McCord Museum, M972.75.19
- Open drawers, 1875-1900, Cotton, cotton lace, Gift of the Estate of Mrs. Louise McDougall, McCord Museum, M967.14.2
- Closed drawers, About 1900, Cotton, silk ribbon, embroidery, Gift of Mrs. A. Livingstone, McCord Museum, M968.21.3
- Ladies' French Open Drawers and Ladies' Closed Drawers, *The Delineator*, June 1903 and September 1903

3.1.6. Shorter Drawers

Undergarment design responded to shorter skirts and more fitted clothing. A closed centre seam replaced the earlier crotch opening, offering more coverage of the intimate areas of the body in response to the smaller volume of the skirt. Drawers lost their function of providing warmth and hiding ankles and knees, but still offered greater privacy for the lower body.

- Drawers, 1920-1930, Cotton, Gift of Mrs. Fred Dubé, McCord Museum, M978.111.3
- Drawers, 1920-1930, China silk, Gift of Mrs. Armand Mathieu, McCord Museum, M972.123.18
- Drawers, 1923, Cotton, Gift of Mrs. Thain W. MacDowell, McCord Museum, M22279
- Drawers, About 1935, Label: Simpson's, Silk crepe-de-chine, Gift of Mrs. S. Boyd Millen, McCord Museum, M977.104.2

- Advertisement, P. P. Martin & Cie, Montreal, *La Revue Moderne*, June 1929

3.1.7. Bloomers to Panties

By the 1930s, “panties” was the new term for short fitted undergarments, while “bloomers” referred to fuller undergarments fitted at the leg openings. The undergarment styles illustrated in this sewing manual from the 1930s indicate the options available in this transitional decade. Eventually, elastic made increasingly narrower leg openings even more fitted. By the 1950s, panties became the short undergarments with elasticized legs and waist worn today.

- *Underwear and Lingerie*, 1935, Women’s Institute of Domestic Arts and Sciences. Scranton, PA., Private collection
- Drawers, 1920-1930, Silk charmeuse, Gift of Mrs. Philip Wait, McCord Museum, M981.17.2
- Drawers, 1939, Silk charmeuse, Gift of Mrs. Donald N. Byers, McCord Museum, M983.15.10.2
- Drawers, About 1942, Label: Mme Malouf, Montreal, Silk charmeuse, Gift of Mrs. Louise Hurtubise Bousquet, McCord Museum, M2000.41.68
- Panties, 1960-1969, Printed nylon knit, Gift of Ms. Ruth Pidduck, McCord Museum, M2004.126.3

3.1.8. Timidly Trousered

Once women got used to pants being accepted for certain sports, they gradually adopted them in other contexts. In the 1920s and 1930s pants became part of ensembles for casual and beachwear, sometimes called lounging pyjamas. This dress is a timid attempt at a trousered garment, even for the 1930s. A closer look shows that it has been slashed and seamed to create leg openings near the hemline.

- Pant dress, 1930-1940, Cotton and rayon, Gift of Mrs. Elsie Schufelt, McCord Museum, M979.12.3, Designed for Women

3.1.9. Designed for women

Trousers grew more common for women by the 1940s, though their femininity was still questioned and their appropriateness limited. Women wishing to appear

attractive in pants now grew increasingly conscious of the shape of their hips, buttocks and legs. In 1943, Chatelaine carried a fashion article entitled “If You Must Wear ‘Em” debunking all the reasons women might not wish to wear pants, beginning with “Women weren’t made to wear trousers.” Women struggled to figure out how their pants should fit.

- Pantsuit, 1942, Label: Gaby Bernier, Montreal, Pinstripe wool flannel, Gift of Mrs. L. M. Hart, McCord Museum, M966.37.103.1-2

3.1.10. Pantsuits Prevail

By the late 1960s, pantsuits were accepted almost everywhere during the daytime, except in some restaurants, offices and religious institutions. It took even longer for the dressy pantsuit to gain currency for formal wear. Pants were now almost wholly feminine, and only in the most formal of situations did they still carry connotations of a borrowed masculine garment.

- Pantsuit, 1965-1970, Label: Courrèges, Cotton piqué, Gift of Mrs. Carol Kouri, McCord Museum, M985.17.1.1-2
- Beach pyjamas, *T. Eaton Co. Catalogue*, (French Edition), Spring-Summer, 1934, Used with permission of Sears Canada Inc.

3.1.11. “You’ve Come A Long Way, Baby”

(slogan from a cigarette advertisement of the 1970s)

Playfulness in the colours, fabrics and design of pants for women in the 1970s reinforced a widening distance from their menswear origins. Women universally accepted them as both attractive and physically comfortable.

- Pantsuit, About 1971, Label: Sambo, Printed silk, Gift of Mrs. Jennifer Leith, McCord Museum, M2001.100.2.1-2
- Pants, 1970-1975, Polyester double knit, Gift of Mrs. Jennifer Leith, McCord Museum, M2001.100.4

3.1.12. If You Can Sit, They Don’t Fit

Once trousers had become a common part of women’s wardrobes, a return to masculine styles for inspiration challenged what was modest and comfortable for women yet again. “Unisex” jeans of the 1970s, in identical styles for men and women, shocked because they narrowed the gap between the styling and cut of male and female versions. Women wearing tight-fitting jeans revealed the outline of their hips, buttocks, and thighs, without showing any skin. Ironically, jeans

have long meant casualness and comfort, although the fashionable feminine option is to wear them skin-tight. By the 1990s, denim incorporating spandex allowed jeans to become even closer fitting.

- Model in pantsuit, *The Montrealer*, July-August 1969, (detail)
- Group of young people, from the series *Les quartiers populaires*, Montreal, 1973-74, (detail), photograph by Roger Charbonneau, Roger Charbonneau collection, MP-1980.391.1

3.1.13. The Long and the Short of It

By the 1940s, newly fashionable shorts extended the boundaries of women's modesty in divided garments. Women enjoyed wearing shorts in casual summer settings and donned them for sports, although even through the 1950s, uniforms often hid them with a tunic or skirt.

Around 1970, shorts entered the realm of high fashion and more formal settings as "hot pants." Women wore hot pants in velveteen and other dressy fabrics in many situations where shorts would formerly have been totally inappropriate. Newspapers of the period registered shock at seeing so much of women's legs on display, although these were usually covered with tights and boots.

- Short suit, About 1945, Label: Li'l Audrey, Home Frocks Ltd., Printed cotton piqué, Gift of Mrs. Denyse Labelle-Cenerelli, McCord Museum, M2006.45.3.1-2
- Gym tunic ensemble, 1959-1960, Label: Rebco, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Rayon, Gift of Ms. Marjorie D. Cooper Gawley, McCord Museum, M2004.94.5.1.1-3
- Playsuit, About 1960, Label: Eaton's, Cotton matelassé, Gift of Mrs. Carol Kouri, McCord Museum, M990.90.2
- Hot pants, 1971, Label: Jax, Cotton velveteen, Gift of Mrs. L. M. Hart, McCord Museum, M983.37.1
- Montreal High School Girls' First Basketball Team, 1926, photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-27069
- Unidentified woman in shorts and short top, 1940s, gift of Mr. Paul Noël, McCord Museum, MP-1999.31.4.187

3.2. Hemline History

A key shift in the centuries-old way women covered their bodies in fashionable Western dress took place in the first quarter of the 20th century. At this time of major social change and women's increased participation in society, a whole new repertoire of clothing styles accompanied a radical change in ideas about femininity and the physical presentation of female bodies.

Over the course of about 20 years, women replaced ankle-length skirts with knee-length ones, and a tightly corseted silhouette with a straighter, looser one. If these changes suggested new ideas about physical comfort and freedom in clothing, they also created a new consciousness of how the female body should ideally appear, and a new preoccupation with the parts of it that were now on public view.

3.2.1. From Trousers Concealed ...

Even when respectable women could not be seen in pants, they still sometimes wore them for sports but hid them from view under a long skirt. Women had ridden side-saddle for centuries, in part because skirts, the only acceptable feminine lower body covering, imposed it. Hidden pants added to a woman's sense of security, even if she did not ride astride. These trousers are a rare example of a divided outer garment for a woman from a period when such clothing was almost never exposed.

- Riding habit: jacket, skirt, trousers, About 1895, Wool doeskin, Gift of Mrs. George S. Currie, McCord Museum, M969.15.22.1-2 and M969.15.77 : These women's trousers actually belonged to an even earlier riding habit before they were worn with this one, but remaining in good condition as the outer fabric of the skirt took most of the wear.

3.2.2. ... to Trousers Revealed

At the end of the 19th century, as women enthusiastically took up bicycling, divided garments became more accepted for sports. Not all cyclists found the idea of trousers a comfortable one. Most photographs of Montreal women dressed for cycling through the 1910s show a more modest skirt. By the 1920s, trousers were exposed in sports dress like this riding habit, and women were comfortably riding astride in them.

- Riding habit: jacket and breeches, 1920-1930, Wool covert cloth, Gifts of Mrs. Jacqueline L'Espérance and Mrs. S. Boyd Millen, McCord Museum, M969.38.9.1-2 and M976.18.5.1-2

- Woman in bloomers on bicycle, about 1895, donated by Corbis-Bettmann, F2055
- Mrs. Kennedy and bicycle, Montreal, 1897, photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-120688.1

3.2.3. 1898

This “tailor-made,” or woman’s suit, was the most practical and comfortable wardrobe option for a working woman. Far from being viewed as restricting, overwhelming evidence suggests such outfits provided satisfaction and pleasure to the women who chose to wear them. Beneath the jacket, women wore a loose shirtwaist, a departure from the fitted bodices previously worn with dresses. The overall silhouette emphasized a narrow waistline and gave an “S” curve to the torso.

- “Tailor-made” suit: jacket and skirt, About 1898, Wool doeskin, velveteen collar, Gift of the Higginson Family, McCord Museum, M2003.12.2.1-2

3.2.4. 1912

Women who wore their skirts at the fashionable length unabashedly revealed the tops of their shoes, not to mention the outline of their hips. The overall silhouette was straighter and narrower, with somewhat less emphasis on a defined waistline.

- Suit: jacket and skirt, About 1912 , Tussah silk shantung, silk braid, Gift of Mrs. Gordon A. Rutherford, McCord Museum, M976.35.2.1-2 and M968.14.2.1-2

3.2.5. 1915

Women gradually wore shorter and shorter hemlines over the next few years. By the First World War (1914-1918), skirts reached their shortest, with a slightly higher waistline. Revealing the ankles was now no longer taboo, as long as boots covered them.

- Suit: jacket, skirt, and bodice, 1915, Label: Miss Dupont, Montreal, Wool broadcloth, silk facings, silk embroidery, Gifts of the Estate of Mrs. Ethel McCaffrey and the Estate of Mrs. Sheldon Stephens, McCord Museum, M983.130.3.1-3 and M20411.1-2

3.2.6. 1918

Many women adopted a slightly longer hem length, but did not go back to covering their ankles. Over the next ten years they shortened their skirts again, presaging the variable hemline that we know today. Gone was the aura of mystery about the lower half of women's bodies that skirts had created up until a decade earlier.

- Suit: jacket and skirt, 1918, Label: Maison Bernard, New York, Silk faille, silk embroidery, Gifts of Mrs. Isabelle Panet-Raymond and the Estate of Mrs. Sheldon Stephens, McCord Museum, M2004.163.1.1-2 and M20412.1-2

3.2.7. 1922

Though the fashion was now for slightly longer skirts, women who wished to keep the shorter styles resisted. A group of Montreal women founded the "No Longer Skirt League" and received international attention for sticking with their shorter hemlines.

Narrower skirts outlined the pelvis and hips. As shoes had become more fashionable than boots, ankle bones and an expanse of stocking were now on view for good. Exposing the lower legs was no longer immodest, and fashion journalists gave advice on how to make ankles appear slim.

- Suit: jacket, belt, and skirt, 1922, Wool tricotine, Gifts of Mrs. Rose Christie and Col. Gavin Lang Ogilvie, McCord Museum, M983.117.2.1-4 and M974.134.4.1-2

3.2.8. 1926

By the mid 1920s, women's legs and feet, not to mention their unconstricted bodies, were on display in the new straight knee-length dresses. Fashion writers showed a much greater awareness of the shape of exposed ankles and legs. There was general agreement that only a slender and well-proportioned body, with well-shaped legs and arms, looked good in such clothing.

- Dress and jacket ensemble, 1926-1927, Label: Jean Patou, Wool crepe, embroidery, Gifts of Mrs. Fred Benger and Miss Ellen Goode, McCord Museum, M976.39.12.1-3 and M969.49.2.1-2

4. Fashionable Immodesty: But Why?

4.1. The Shifting Erogenous Zone

The questions “Why do women dress this way?” or “Who do women dress this way for?” are too broad to answer easily. What they acknowledge is that there is power in the eroticized female body.

One of the most popular explanations for changes in body exposure in women’s fashion is that of the “shifting erogenous zone.” This popular theory holds that our boredom with a particular emphasis on one part of the body stimulates a change so that a different area becomes the new focus. The theory of the shifting erogenous zone is a gross oversimplification. Our culture may abhor visual boredom, but can the driving force behind changes in fashion really be the desire to attract and seduce?

- Dress, 1927, Silk chiffon, Gift of Montreal Symphony Women’s Committee, McCord Museum, M975.40.1.1
- Dress and cape, 1934, Attributed to Jeanne Lanvin, Wool crepe, cotton net, sequins, Gift of Mrs. Jeffrey Chapleau, McCord Museum, M968.30.2.1-2
- Dress, 1946, Label: Balenciaga, Holt Renfrew, Silk satin, Gift of Mrs. Alvin Walker, McCord Museum, M974.111.3.1-2
- Dress, 1950, Label: Nina Ricci, Nylon net, lace, Gift of Mrs. Duncan Hodgson, McCord Museum, M974.48.1.1-4
- Dress, 1956, Nylon net over taffeta, Gift of Mrs. Wilson Leslie, McCord Museum, M973.21.6.1
- Dress, 1969, Label: Christian Dior, Silk chiffon, silk satin belt, Gift of Mrs. Jacqueline Léon Simard, McCord Museum, M975.36.1

4.2. What Makes Clothes Erotic?

Why do some garments, or the way they are worn, take on erotic appeal? Why are garter belts and stockings erotic? Is it where and how they are worn on the body? The way stockings may be easily unhooked from the belt? What is certain is that the garter belt has taken on a very different meaning since its function became obsolete, thanks to changes in stocking manufacture.

4.2.1. Horizontal Garters

For centuries women attached knit stockings around their legs with ribbons or garters. They were tied above or below the knee.

- Stocking garters, About 1830, Wool needlepoint on canvas, ribbed silk (elastic added in 20th century), Gift of Mrs. Gordon Dorey, McCord Museum, M984.150.59.1-2

4.2.2. Vertical Garters

From the third quarter of the 19th century onward, women clipped their stockings to vertical elasticized bands, still known as garters. Often these garters hung down from the bottom of the corset. Patented metal clips and new rubber elastic made this system possible. This way of holding stockings was thought healthier, since tying stockings on the legs cut off circulation.

- Corset with silk-covered elastic garters, 1900-1910, Figured silk, metal stiffening, Gift of Mrs. A. Murray Vaughan, McCord Museum, M968.7.59

4.2.3. A Better Option

From the 1890s through the 1910s many women preferred a separate “pad hose supporter,” a belt worn around the waist and held in front by a corset stud. Four elastic straps with clips attached to the stockings. The tension on the elastics forced a woman into a posture that made her stomach appear flatter, or so the advertisers said.

- Advertisement, C. J. Grenier & Cie., *Montréal Mode*, May 1, 1904 : The C. J. Grenier Ltd. lingerie company, based in Montreal, has been in business since the 1860s.
- Hose supporter, “Favorite” model, 1900-1910, Label: Kleinert’s, Cotton sateen, elastic, Gift of the Estate of Luc J. Béland, McCord Museum, M2004.101.20
- Hose supporter, *T. Eaton Co. Catalogue*, Spring-Summer, 1908, used with permission of Sears Canada Inc.

4.2.4. Nudity by Imitation

As women exposed more of their legs in the shorter skirts of the 1920s, the range of stocking colours expanded from the standard black, brown and white, to those intended to imitate various paler shades of skin. Although an opaque fabric modestly concealed the legs, stockings in a woman's skin tone hinted at nudity. Women also chose stockings with pointed heel reinforcements to make their legs appear more slender in the new shorter skirts and low shoes.

- Miss M. Keely, Montreal, 1928, (detail), photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-285328
- Advertisement, Luxite Hosiery, *Canadian Home Journal*, June 1920
- Stockings, 1915-1925, Silk knit, lisle toe and top, Gift of Miss Lily S. Hendry, McCord Museum, M978.3.6.1-2
- Stockings, 1910-1920, Label: Hanan & Son, Silk knit, Gift of Mrs. F. H. Cundill, McCord Museum, M21880.1-2
- Stockings with pointed heel reinforcement, 1920-1930, Label: Kayser, Silk knit, Gift of Mrs. Thain W. MacDowell, McCord Museum, M22235.1-2
- Stockings, About 1920, Silk knit, Gift of Dr. Barbara P. Kraft, McCord Museum, M981.1.5.1-2
- Stockings, 1920-1925, Label: Orient, Made in Canada, Silk knit, lisle tops and feet, lisle and silk heels, Gift of Miss Lily S. Hendry, McCord Museum, M978.3.7.1-2
- Stockings, 1920-1930, Silk knit, Gift of Mrs. W. R. B. Bertram, McCord Museum, M965.136.94.1-2
- Stockings, 1920-1930, Label: Venus Pure Silk Hosiery, Made in Canada, Silk knit, lisle tops, heels, and toes, Private collection
- Stocking repair kit, 1920-1930, Real Silk Hosiery Mills Inc., Gift of Mrs. Louise Hurtubise Bousquet, McCord Museum, M2000.41.122

4.2.5. “Turned Up Nose, Turned Down Hose...”

(popular song of the 1920s)

Many photographs from the 1920s show stockings rolled down below the knee, suggesting that some women were ready to expose their legs to a greater degree than the stockings themselves allowed. Such a practice ostensibly offered more freedom of movement because the stockings were detached from the garters. It also made a more obvious erotic statement that the thighs beneath the skirt were bare.

- Donalda at Saint-Eustache, 1928, (detail), photograph attributed to Robert E. Cooper, gift of Ms. Marjorie D. Cooper Gawley, McCord Museum, M2004.94.31.2

4.2.6. Making Do Without Stockings

Rayon stockings appeared in the 1920s and nylon stockings about 1940, to replace the more costly silk. With rationing for the war effort, they were both soon withdrawn from the market. Women had a harder time finding stockings of any sort, and yet, bare legs with a skirt were simply indecent. The solution was a range of cosmetic products. After applying makeup to their legs, women pencilled a line down the back to imitate a seam, creating a masquerade of being clothed. Women had been shaving their legs through the 1920s and 1930s, but with no fabric covering their legs in the 1940s, shaving became a must.

- Advertisement, The Story of the Missing Stockings, Orient, *Toronto Globe*, November 26, 1943
- Advertisement, L’histoire du bas manquant, Orient, *La Presse*, November 26, 1943
- Advertisement, Elizabeth Arden Velva Leg Film, *Chatelaine*, July 1943
- Advertisement, Elizabeth Arden Velva Leg Film, *La Revue Moderne*, May 1945
- Paint On Stockings, 1940, (detail), Hulton Archive/ Getty Images, 3314204
- Stockings, 1938-1943, Label: Clearophane Ringless Orient 505, Made in Canada, Silk knit branded as Clearophane, Gift of Mrs. Fred Benger, McCord Museum, M976.39.31.1-4
- Stockings, semi-service for daytime wear, 1940-1953, Label: Orient, Made in Canada, Rayon knit, Gift of the Estate of Luc J. Béland, McCord Museum, M2004.101.25.1-2

4.2.7. Seemly Seams

Stockings were known as “nylons” following the Second World War, after the new fibre of choice. Nylons were much sheerer than silk or rayon stockings had ever been. Rather than opting for the seamless “bareleg” style introduced in the late 1940s, women continued to prefer nylons with centre back seams and heel reinforcements, a visual reminder that their legs were covered. Women eventually rejected seamed stockings in the 1960s.

- Seamed nylon stockings with pointed heel reinforcement, 1947-1955, Nylon knit, fully fashioned, Gift of J. M. M. Griffiths, McCord Museum, M2005.142.1.1-2
- Seamed nylon stockings with dark seam and shaped heel reinforcement, 1947-1955, Label: Weldrest, Nylon knit, fully fashioned, Gift of Mrs. Kathleen Simpson, McCord Museum, M2001.80.8.1-2

4.2.8. Garter Gap

By 1966, as women dared to wear increasingly shorter skirts, they ran the risk of revealing the bare part of the thigh between the garter and the stocking. This exposure was found indecent and unattractive. Options for avoiding “garter gap” included a panty girdle with garters inside the leg openings, which might also show beneath the skirt. A separate garter belt was a bit more daring, since it implied no girdle at all. Wearing longer stockings covered more of the upper thighs, but ultimately none of these options was completely satisfactory.

- Garter belt, “Secret Lady” model, 1960-1970, Label: Exquisite Form, Cotton broadcloth, elastic, Gift of the Estate of Luc J. Béland, McCord Museum, M2004.101.19
- Panty girdle, 1965-1970, Label: Youthcraft, Nylon and spandex power net, Gift of Mrs. Brenda Boggs Comber, McCord Museum, M2007.62.9
- Garters, 1960-1970, Label: Donahue Corporation of Canada, Ltd., Elastic, Gift of Susan Alain, McCord Museum, M2005.24.5
- Garters, 1960-1970, Label: Donahue Corporation of Canada, Ltd., Elastic, Gift of Susan Alain, McCord Museum, M2005.24.6
- Advertisement, H. R.’s Hip Hipsters, Holt Renfrew, *Montreal Star*, May 30, 1966

4.2.9. Two Become One

When miniskirts gained popularity, manufacturers realized the potential appeal of a single undergarment incorporating two stockings but requiring no garters, belts or girdles. By 1969, female consumers had shown their overwhelming preference for pantyhose. Initially, customers were dissatisfied because pantyhose sagged at the knees and the sizing was poor. Some women continued to make do with separate seamless nylon stockings, as they were considerably cheaper than pantyhose and offered the option of replacing only one if there was a run in the other.

- Seamless stockings, 1960-1970, Label: Miracle Mart, Nylon knit mesh, Gift of Mrs. Louise Hurtubise Bousquet, McCord Museum, M2000.41.56
- Seamless stockings, 1960-1970, Label: Eatonia Cantrece, Nylon knit, Gift of Mrs. Kathleen Simpson, McCord Museum, M2001.80.7.1-2
- Seamless stockings, 1960-1970, Label: Duchess, Nylon knit mesh, Gift of Mrs. Evelyn Shadowitz, McCord Museum, M2005.138.3.1-3
- Seamless stockings, 1960-1970, Label: Simpson's, Nylon knit mesh, Gift of Mrs. Carol Kouri, McCord Museum, M2000.101.3

4.2.10. Hot on the Heels

With pantyhose modestly covering their upper thighs by the late 1960s, women exposed more of their legs in ever shorter skirts, and then in 1971, in hot pants. Hosiery design responded, becoming more playful. Bare legs were considered very poor taste in hot pants, and so Can Can launched its "Hotpants Colours" line to appeal to that market segment.

- Pantyhose, About 1971, Label: Can Can, Nylon knit, McCord Museum, M971.100.1
- Fishnet pantyhose, 1969-1971, Nylon knit, McCord Museum, M979.25.4

4.2.11. Never Say Never

With no more need for girdles and garter belts to hold up their stockings, many women gladly discarded them. Once their functional purpose was obsolete, garter belts became fetishized and eroticized, apparent in the way these garments are designed and marketed today.

- Advertisement, Grenier, 2007, Courtesy C. J. Grenier Ltd.
- Garter belt and panties, style 678, 2007, Label: Grenier, Fabriqué au Canada, Nylon and spandex lace, Courtesy of C. J. Grenier Ltd.

4.3. Skin Sells

When clothing reveals a woman's body beyond the fashionable norm, heads turn. Whether in a picture or in the flesh, an exposed eroticized body draws attention, and is simultaneously provocative and disturbing. This power is often used to sell everything from soap to automobiles, turning the revealed female body into another commodity for sale. Women also revel in this power and use it for their own purposes and pleasure.

4.3.1. Skin is In

In fashion design, styles that expose the body in new and daring ways are certain to draw attention. Though they usually never become mainstream, their shock value has definite impact. In 1964, American designer Rudi Gernreich made waves around the world with his topless bathing suit. Although the topless design received widespread media attention, few suits were actually sold.

- Peggy Moffitt in Rudy Gernreich's Topless Swimsuit, 1964, William Claxton, courtesy Fahey/Klein Gallery, Los Angeles.

4.3.2. Underwear as outerwear

Music and movie stars and other media personalities often test the limits of acceptable body exposure. In the 1980s when Madonna exposed her bra and wore lingerie in her performances, she created a sensation with her daring and novel blurring of public and private garments. By 1990 on the Blond Ambition tour, her star persona had become closely associated with an exaggerated yet rebellious and powerful sexuality, epitomized by her "cone" bras and corsets designed by Jean-Paul Gaultier.

- Cone bra worn by Madonna, About 1990, Label : Jean-Paul Gaultier, Paris; Madonna, synthetic satin, elastic, Museo de la Moda.
- Madonna performing in 'Blond Ambition' Tour, 1990, photograph by Kevin Winter/DMI/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images, 50424855

4.3.3. Wardrobe Functions or Malfunctions

Public interpretations of these acts of exposure can be contradictory. They may be viewed as exploitive and objectifying, yet many celebrities undeniably enjoy exposing their bodies and getting reactions. Whether intentional or through a “wardrobe malfunction,” exposing their bodies beyond the norm guarantees stars media attention.

- Janet Jackson’s “wardrobe malfunction” at Super Bowl XXXVIII, February 1, 2004, photograph by Pierre Ducharme, Pierre Ducharme/Reuters/Corbis, DWF15-568071: Although the shocking incident where Jackson’s breast was revealed by Justin Timberlake on CBS television was initially portrayed as an accident, her subsequent apology suggested some degree of intent.
- Record album, Diane Dufresne, *À part de d’ça j’m sens ben*, 1973, Private Collection
- CD, Mitsou, *Yaya*, 1994, Private Collection

4.4. Marketing Immodesty

Marketing and advertising practices help to create a perceived need for women to reveal their bodies in fashionable ways. A new market niche recently appeared for adult-style clothing emphasizing female sexuality for increasingly younger girls – first teenagers, now pre-teens, and even younger children. Girls in this age group may enthusiastically adopt these styles, with little understanding of how adults see them.

4.4.1. Grown-up Looks

A glimpse of girls’ clothing from the past shows that it is not so much the way that girls reveal their bodies, as the way clothing *defines* them, that generates concern. From the 1830s through the 1860s, girls of all ages might bare their shoulders in fashionable dresses. Such styles do not appear to have been perceived as sexualized, though today many find similar exposure of the shoulders in early teenage girls’ attire eroticized and disturbing.

- Miss McFarlane, Montreal, 1867, Photograph by William Notman, McCord Museum, I-28242.1

4.4.2. Training corsets ?

Until the early 20th century, girls wore corsets. Although those worn until adolescence did not attempt to give an adult sexualized form to the body, they were considered essential for habituating even very young girls to the future requirements of adult dress.

- Child's corset-waist, 1890-1910, Label: Made in Canada, Cotton sateen, stiffening material, Gift of the Estate of Luc J. Béland, McCord Museum, M2006.110.1
- Ladies' and Children's Waists, *Carsley (S.) Co Limited Catalogue*, Spring-Summer, 1902

4.4.3. Little Women

The advent of the training bra in the 1950s exploited a newly recognized adolescent market. It also signalled the beginning of a trend towards the earlier sexualization of girls' bodies.

Today, adult-style undergarments manufactured for very young pre-teen girls have pushed this trend much further. Bras are manufactured in sizes so small that they are clearly for girls with no breast development. Words or slogans referring to physical attractiveness on undergarments and other clothing also reinforce the message to girls that they are the objects of a sexual gaze.

- Girl's training bras and undergarments, 2007, Private collection

4.4.4. Moral Outrage

Just as earlier fashion trends that were seen as sexualizing provoked a degree of moral outrage, the sexualization of increasingly younger girls, particularly through revealing clothing, has incited a great deal of concern from many quarters : parents, schools, and the media, to name but a few.

- *Maclean's Magazine*, January 1, 2007

5. Wearing the Body: Clothed, Yet Undressed

5.1. Getting into the Swim

Bathing suits encapsulate some of the inherent contradictions in ideas about modesty and bodies. They are meant for public viewing, and yet for swimming they need only provide minimal body coverage. Bathing suits map boundaries of modesty in what they conceal, but they simultaneously draw attention to those same areas. Changes in the fashionable bathing suit indicate changing ideas about the ultimate limits of revealing.

5.1.1. Dresses, Tights and Boots...and Dive in!

Bathing suits of the late 19th century to the end of the Second World War covered most of a woman's body except perhaps for her lower arms and legs. They usually consisted of a one-piece garment of a woven fabric, often wool, with a short-sleeved bodice and knee-length trousers covered by a separate skirt. Women typically wore stockings and canvas bathing boots with such suits, but choosing to go without them was a small first step towards uncovering the body at the beach.

- Bathing suit (skirt missing), 1890-1900, Wool serge, Gift of Mrs. Mary L. Duclos, McCord Museum, M992.115.2
- One-piece bathing suit, "Waterwitch" model, About 1912, Label: Athletic Suit Co., Toronto, Wool and cotton blend, Gift of Miss Iveagh Munroe, McCord Museum, M983.129.1.1
- Two-piece bathing suit, 1910-1918, Cotton sateen, Gift of Eaton's of Canada, McCord Museum, M991X.1.1.1-2
- Two sisters at Oka, about 1905, gift of Mrs. Pamela Smart Morrison, McCord Museum, M2002.25.1.18
- Irene K., Nantasket, 1915, gift of the Estate of Mrs Claire-Aimée Marie Girard Dufault, McCord Museum, MP-1994.71

5.1.2. Clinging Wool Knits

More-fitted bathing suits were in vogue by the late teens, thanks to knit fabrics, which provided good coverage when dry but revealed a great deal of the body beneath once they were wet. The long bodice in one-piece suits continued to simulate the effect of a skirt over trousers. At the beginning of the 1920s, women

revealed their knees and in the 1930s, the tops of their thighs. Sleeves disappeared in the teens and manufacturers began to offer swimsuits that revealed more of the shoulders and back in the 1930s. A suntanned body became highly fashionable.

- One-piece bathing suit, About 1920, Label: Oberon, Cotton knit, Gift of Mrs. William R. Bentham, McCord Museum, M965.169.48
- Bathing suit with “sun tan back”, 1930-1940, Label: Monarch Knit, Wool knit, Gift of Félicienne Manie-Côté, McCord Museum, M999.92.1
- Bathing suit with halter neckline, 1930-1940, Label: Jantzen, Made in Canada, Wool knit, Gift of Ms. Marjorie D. Cooper Gawley, McCord Museum, M2004.94.2
- Bathing suit with open back, 1935-1940, Wool knit, Gift of Mrs. Kay Blair, McCord Museum, M994.34.1
- Group at Strathmore, 1925, photograph attributed to Robert E. Cooper, gift of Ms. Marjorie D. Cooper Gawley, McCord Museum, M2004.94.29.192
- Marjorie [in bathing suit on display] and Eddie at Virginia Beach, 1937, photograph attributed to Robert E. Cooper, gift of Ms. Marjorie D. Cooper Gawley, McCord Museum, M2004.94.37.93
- Félicienne Côté in bathing suit [on display], about 1935, gift of Félicienne Manie-Côté, McCord Museum, MP-1999.36.1
- Advertisement, Monarch Knit Fitz-U bathing suits, *Chatelaine*, July 1932

5.1.3. Making Beaches Moral Again

In reaction to women exposing more of their bodies in fashionable bathing suits, the *Ligue catholique féminine* (Catholic Women’s League) in Quebec had its own modest bathing suit designed and manufactured for wear on Quebec beaches. By 1935, major stores in Montreal and Quebec City were advertising the bathing suit for the then substantial price of \$3.98. Surprisingly, this suit has a divided skirt instead of the more modest imitation skirt over the hips. Nonetheless, narrower leg openings line the full legs, ensuring coverage even in the water. Out of the water, women concerned about modesty might also wear a towel with a drawstring as a cape.

- Bathing suit recommended by the *Ligue catholique féminine*, About 1935, Label: Regent Knitting, Wool knit, Gift of Huguette and Lucie Beaupré, McCord Museum, M2006.21.4

- Beach towel cape, 1929-1935, Label: Henry Morgan & Co., Cotton terrycloth, Gift of Mr. Stanley Wendell Wegler, McCord Museum, M999.71.1
- Le Costume de bain L.C.F., *Le Devoir*, May 18, 1935
- Label, L.C.F. by Regent, in bathing suit on display, photograph by Marilyn Aitken, McCord Museum
- Advertisement, Dupuis Frères, *Le Devoir*, June 19, 1935

5.1.4. Glamour Girls

Swimsuits of the late 1940s and 1950s took their inspiration from fashionable evening dress. Created from stiff and shimmering fabrics, and very form-fitting, some went so far as to mould the body with boned bodices. Many were strapless or had removable straps, ensuring an even suntan in an evening gown.

- Bathing suit, 1948-1955, Label: Gabar, New York, Synthetic taffeta, Gift of Mrs. Herbert Vineberg, McCord Museum, M990.62.2
- Bathing suit, “Boned sheath” model, 1954, Label: Rose Marie Reid of California, Cotton and synthetic Lastex, Gift of Mrs. L. M. Hart, McCord Museum, M967.25.111
- Unidentified woman on Ontario beach, late 1940s, gift of Mr. Paul Noël, McCord Museum, MP-1999.31.4.3

5.1.5. The Great Divide

By 1946, women had the option of revealing a new area of the body, the midriff, in the daring new two-piece bikini, which became the catalyst for a whole new design approach to swimwear. Early bikinis exposed a narrow part of the midsection above the navel. Through the 1950s and 1960s, the bikini bottom was worn ever lower, and the leglines moved ever higher.

By 1965, Cole of California had reinvented the one-piece bathing suit with its daring “Scandal suit” styles with mesh inserts, although many of these were no more revealing than a bikini.

- Bikini, 1958-1962, Label: St. Michael, Marks & Spencer, Woven cotton, Gift of Mrs. Armgard Stanger, McCord Museum, M986.43.1.1-2 : The donor of this bikini remembers that it was considered very daring in early 1960s Quebec when she first wore it.

- Bathing suit, “Scandal suit” model, 1965-1970, Label: Cole of California, Nylon, with nylon, cotton, and rubber mesh, Gift of Mrs. Betty Issenman, McCord Museum, M981.32.1
- Armgard Stanger in bikini (on display), about 1960, lent by Mrs. Armgard Stanger
- Betty Issenman in bathing suit (on display), 1965-1970, lent by Betty Issenman

5.1.6. A Closer Fit

Elastic fibres and fabrics revolutionized the way swimwear fit, and by the time spandex was introduced in the early 1960s, bathing suits hugged every body contour. By the 1980s, women were exposing more of the upper thighs and hips than they ever had previously, and necklines sometimes plunged to the navel.

- Bathing suit, Mid-1980s, Label: Les Jumelles, Nylon and spandex, Lent by Judith Desjardins
- Claudette Lefebvre in bathing suit (on display), 1985, lent by Judith Desjardins

5.2. The Malleable Body

Garments worn directly on the skin speak intimately of the major changes in the way women have managed and disciplined their bodies for fashion. Shaping undergarments, once known as “foundation garments,” produce uniform and fashionable bodies, closer to an ideal shape. These garments take on erotic associations because of their proximity to sexual anatomy and the pleasing forms they create. At the same time, a moulded, managed body has long been perceived as more modest than one which is not.

5.2.1. 18th-century Stays

Stays made of linen and whale baleen moulded the 18th-century woman’s torso into a fashionable conical shape. The high projecting bustline resulted from the lack of shaping around the curve of the breasts. This pair of stays is not entirely typical of the period, as its horizontal boning at the bust indicates it was intended for physical activity, like riding.

- Stays, 1785-1790, Cotton, whale baleen and cord stiffening, linen tape straps, Gift of Mrs. Hamilton, McCord Museum, M969X.26

- Tight Lacing, or Fashion before Ease, printed by Bowles & Carver after a painting by John Collet, London, no date, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1969-111

5.2.2. Corsets and Curves

19th-century women corseted their torsos in garments whose curved pieces and seams provided more shape for their breasts. Steel boning, stronger and more bendable than whale baleen, also increased shaping possibilities. By the 1880s, Coraline, a cord made from agave plant fibre, made some corsets still more flexible.

- Coraline corset, “Flexible hip” model, 1882-1885, Label: Warner Bros., Cotton sateen, Coraline stiffening, McCord Museum, M19621
- Advertisement, Dr. Warner’s Coraline corsets, *Harper’s Bazaar*, January 9, 1886, Collection des livres rares, Université de Montréal
- Coraline corset, “Flexible hip” model, 1882-1885, Label: Warner Bros., Cotton sateen, Coraline stiffening, McCord Museum, M1962
- Advertisement, Crompton Corset Co.’s celebrated Coraline corsets, *La Presse*, September 12, 1885

5.2.3. Corsets and Comfort

Because women wore corsets for both modesty and sexual attractiveness, they remained essential undergarments, in spite of attempts at dress reform. The straight-fronted “health” corset, fashionable around 1900, was touted as both healthier and more comfortable.

- Catalogue, *La Divine Créature and C/B À la Spirite corsets*, New York, About 1905, McCord Museum, M2007X.6.1
- Corset, 1900-1905, Label: Le Merveilleux, Paris, Silk satin, metal stiffening, Gift of Mrs. George Daly, McCord Museum, M969.25.5
- Corset, 1885-1890, Embroidered silk satin, metal stiffening, McCord Museum, M20317
- Mrs. Campbell, Montreal, 1892, (detail), photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-99313

5.2.4. Bust Improvers or Blouse Distenders

A very top-heavy silhouette was fashionable in the first decade of the 20th century. Women who wished to add more volume to their bust might wear a “bust improver.”

- Blouse distender, 1905-1910, Label: Crompton Corset Co., Toronto, Cotton sateen, stiffening, Gift of Church of St. John the Evangelist Women’s Guild, McCord Museum, M977.122.1
- Bust improvers, probably “Dr. Warner’s health dress forms”, 1880-1900, Cotton, plant fibre stiffening, Canadian Museum of Civilization, H-74 a-c
- Bust improvers, 1900-1910, Cotton net, plant fibre stiffening, Gift of Mrs. William Van Horne, McCord Museum, M970.23.8.1-3
- Miss Wilson, Montreal, 1903, (detail), photograph by William Notman & Son, McCord Museum, II-144931
- Blouse distender, *W. H. Scroggie Limited Catalogue*, 1902
- Ladies’ featherbone dress forms, *Carsley (S.) Co Limited Catalogue*, Spring-Summer, 1902

5.2.5. The New Brassiere

Corset shapes followed the fashionable silhouette from 1910 to 1920. As women dressed with less emphasis on their waistlines, new corset styles covered and shaped less of the torso. The lack of upper body covering led to the design of the brassiere.

- Corset, About 1915, Cotton coutil, steel stiffening, Gift of the Estate of Luc J. Béland, McCord Museum, M2004.101.16.1-2
- Bust support for full figures, 1914-1920, Cotton broadcloth, Canadian Museum of Civilization, D-10898
- Brassiere, 1914-1920, Cotton twill, cotton lace, Gift of Mrs Hubert Sénécal, McCord Museum, M987.181.6
- Corset, About 1915, Label: P. C. Corsets, Cotton coutil, steel stiffening, Gift of Miss Adele Stuart, McCord Museum, M976.4.5
- Brassieres, 1916, *T. Eaton Co. Catalogue*, Spring-Summer, 1916, used with permission of Sears Canada Inc.

- R. & G. Corsets, 1916, *T. Eaton Co. Catalogue*, Spring-Summer, 1916, used with permission of Sears Canada Inc.

5.2.6. The *Bandeau*

By the 1920s most women had adopted the brassiere. The simple cut of brassieres and *bandeaux*, or short brassieres, could not support or separate the breasts. Instead, these garments flattened the bust by compression. Women still wore corsets around their hips.

- *Bandeau* brassiere, 1925-1930, Silk crepe-de-chine, cotton lace, Gift of Mrs. Geneviève Devault-Clément, McCord Museum, M2000.105.1
- Corset, 1925-1935, Label: C. C. À la Grace, Cotton-backed silk satin, Gift of Mrs. Marie-Hélène and Mrs. Lucie Brousseau, McCord Museum, M2004.38.1
- *Bandeau* brassiere, About 1925, Label: Fairy, Silk satin ribbon, cotton lace, Gift of Mrs. Thain W. MacDowell, McCord Museum, M22234
- Brassiere, 1920-1930, Label: Numode Brassieres, Dominion Corset Co., Cotton dobby, Gift of Mr. Alexander Stalker, McCord Museum, M990.93.2
- *Bandeau* and corset, *T. Eaton Co. Catalogue*, Spring-Summer, 1926, used with permission of Sears Canada Inc.
- Pink dobby brassiere, *T. Eaton Co. Catalogue* (French edition), Mid-summer sale, 1928, used with permission of Sears Canada Inc.

5.2.7. Elastic – Before and After

Brassieres of the 1930s were constructed to separate the breasts and provide some support. Many bras, as they were coming to be known, were delicate lingerie articles, without boning or elastic, and might even be made at home.

Elastic eventually changed the way foundation garments were made and fit. The pink surgical elastic step-in girdle provided the ultimate in freedom and comfort. “Tea rose” was a very popular lingerie colour in this decade.

- Brassiere, 1934, Silk charmeuse, cotton lace, Gift of Ms. Kathleen Fee, McCord Museum, M2003.80.1

- Step-in girdle, About 1930, Probably Grenier, Elastic, Gift of Mrs. Marie-Hélène and Mrs. Lucie Brousseau, McCord Museum, M2004.38.2
- Bandeau brassiere, About 1935, Label: D'Allaird's, Silk charmeuse, cotton lace, Gift of Mrs. Brenda Boggs Comber, McCord Museum, M2007.62.6
- Girdle, About 1935, Silk or rayon taffeta, rayon satin, elastic, Gift of Mrs. Herbert Vineberg, McCord Museum, M979.36.1
- Silk crepe-de-chine brassiere and drawers, *T. Eaton Co. Catalogue* (French edition), Spring-Summer, 1934, used with permission of Sears Canada Inc.
- Bandeau brassieres and girdles by Grenier, *Army & Navy Mail Order Dept. Store Catalogue*. Army & Navy Bankers' and Manufacturers' Liquidation Sale, Fall-Winter, 1932-1933

5.2.8. New patented styles

By the 1940s, support, shaping and uplift were recognized as essential elements for fashionable presentation of the breasts. Bras now made breasts more obvious and prominent. They could be conceptualized as malleable body parts, and standardized into a typology of cup sizes.

Bras and girdles were now technically sophisticated garments with elastic and numerous component parts, whose designs were patented and production licensed. The Wonder-bra, with its diagonal slash feature, was a U.S. design licensed by the Canadian Lady Corset Company, who produced it in Canada under that name. The Nu-Back corset and Gothic bra were Canadian designs produced by Dominion Corset.

- Brassiere, Gothic Cordtex 'Elfin' model, 1940-1950, Label : Dominion Corset Co., Cotton, Gift of Mrs Gisèle Trépanier, McCord Museum M2005.147.4
- Girdle 'Nu-Back' model, 1940-1965, Label : Dominion Corset Co., Cotton sateen, elastic, Gift of Musée des Arts Décoratifs, McCord Museum M982.17.3
- Brassiere, Wonder-bra 'Diagonal Slash' Model, 1940-1945, Label : D'Amour, Rayon satin, Gift of Mr Barry Nadler, McCord Museum M2007.57.2
- Advertisement, Nu-Back girdle, *Chatelaine*, November 1943
- Advertisement, Nu-Back girdle, *La Revue Moderne*, March 1950

- Advertisement, Wonder-bra brassiere, *Toronto Star*, November 4, 1941
- Gothic bras, *Dupuis Frères Limitée Catalogue*, Spring-Summer, 1948, Archives-HEC Montréal, Fonds Dupuis Frères, P049

5.2.9. Circular Stitching and Cinched Waists

In the postwar period, women chose bras that incorporated wire, foam padding, and stitching in concentric circles to mould their breasts into a very stylish pointed contour. Fashionably shaped large breasts and a nipped-in waist were now synonymous with glamour.

An elasticized girdle, obscuring any outline or jiggle of the individual buttocks, was essential for everyday wear. For special occasions, a woman could wear a waist-cincher, not unlike the corsets of the previous century, to create an even more slender silhouette.

- Bra, "Equalizer" model, 1950-1955, Label: Exquisite Form, Rayon satin, Gift of the Estate of Luc J. Béland, McCord Museum, M2004.101.15.1
- Waist-cincher, 1947-1950, Label: Warner's, Rayon satin, elastic, Gift of Mrs. James M. Hoult, McCord Museum, M975.9.6
- Girdle, "Lelong" model, 1945-1950, Label: Dominion Corset Co., Rayon satin, elastic, Gift of Mrs Gisèle Trépanier, McCord Museum, M2005.147.3
- Girdle, About 1940, Cotton herringbone twill, Canadian Museum of Civilization, D-5037
- Advertisement, Warner's cinch belt, *New York Times*, March 1, 1948
- Advertisement, Lelong girdle, *La Revue Moderne*, March 1950

5.2.10. Going Strapless

To wear the strapless evening dresses of the 1950s, women needed a new bra style that would stay in place on the body without straps. Although strapless bras were already on the market, many women often found they provided insufficient shaping, support or comfort. They could instead don a one-piece garment known as a corselette, that functioned as both bra and girdle. Women achieved the desired hourglass body shape with very elastic nylon "power net" fabric, which in the early 1960s was enhanced with the new spandex fibre.

- Girdle, Le Gant “Whittler” model, 1962-1970, Label: Warner’s, Nylon and spandex power net, Gift of Mrs. Isabel Barclay Dobell, McCord Museum, M970X.49.1
- *Vogue*, April 1, 1962
- Corselette, About 1957, Label: Christian Dior, Creation by Lily of France, Nylon power net, nylon lace, Gift of Mrs. Isabel Barclay Dobell, McCord Museum, M21970
- *Vogue*, April 15, 1957
- Strapless bra, “Naughty Marietta” model, 1948-1958, Label: La Trique, Nylon lace, elastic, McCord Museum, M970X.50.1
- Girdle, “Queen of Diamonds” model, About 1959, Label: Lily of France, Nylon power net, Gift of Mrs. Isabel Barclay Dobell, McCord Museum, M963.6

5.2.11. Now You See Them, Now You Don’t

In the 1960s, its maker claimed that more women in Canada wore the Gothic bra than any other model. But as women adopted more casual clothing, and a much more natural upper-body silhouette, many looked for more minimal bras to replace the standard option of stiff woven fabric with pointed cups. Rudi Gernreich’s “No-Bra” catered to women who wished much less coverage and support without discarding the bra altogether.

As women sought less constraining foundation garments, panty girdles, easily worn under pants, became the fashionable way to mould the lower body. But once pantyhose eliminated the need for a girdle to hold the stockings, the ideal of a moulded lower body quickly disappeared. By the end of the decade, the demand for girdles was so low that they virtually disappeared from the market.

- Bra, Rudi Gernreich “No-Bra” model, 1965, Label: Exquisite Form, Sheer nylon knit, Gift of Miss Betty Guernsey, McCord Museum, M981.13.1
- Panty girdle, About 1968, Label: Formfit Rogers, Acetate, cotton and spandex knit, Gift of Mrs. Saul A. Silverman, McCord Museum, M971.102.60
- Bra, Gothic Cordtex style “1321” , 1964-1970, Label: Dominion Corset Co., Cotton broadcloth, elastic, McCord Museum, M964.10.3

- Panty girdle, 1960-1965, Label: Alpa Girdles of Grace, Nylon and spandex power net, Gift of the Estate of Luc J. Béland, McCord Museum, M2004.101.12
- Girdle, “Daisyfresh” model, 1965-1970, Label: Dominion Corset Co., Nylon power net, satin lastex, Gift of the Estate of Luc J. Béland, McCord Museum, M2004.101.13
- Advertisement, Gothic Cordtex 1321 bra, *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, March 1967
- Advertisement, Daisyfresh girdle, *La Presse*, March 19, 1970
- Advertisement, Rudi Gernreich “No-Bra”, *La Presse*, January 20, 1965

5.2.12. “Wonderful, Wonderful...”

(jingle from a bra advertisement of the 1960s and 1970s)

By the early 1970s, many women were choosing not to wear a bra at all. Those who still wished to shape their breasts with a bra could choose from many fashionable variations in fabric, style and type of support. The market was finally ready for the push-up and plunge style first designed by Wonderbra in 1961, as the look of breasts pressed together and pushed upwards became popular. At the same time, many women who simply wanted less of a bra opted for more minimal moulded cup styles with no seams.

- Bra, Wonderbra style “1300”, 1965-1969, Label: Canadelle, Nylon lace and power net, Gift of Mrs. Sari Nadler, McCord Museum, M2007.54.3
- Floral bra and panty set, About 1970, Label: Kayser, Nylon knit, McCord Museum, M971.96.3.1-2
- Push-up bra, 2007, Goodshot/Corbis 42-15704897

5.2.13. Staying Abreast

New manufacturing techniques have pushed bra design in novel directions. Fabric can now be moulded over foam rather than seamed, allowing the breasts to have a very smooth rounded shape under close-fitting t-shirts. Push-up bras using cushions of foam, gel, water and air are designed to respond to the aesthetic of a high, full bustline.

- Bra, ‘Extreme gel push-up’ model, 2007, Label : La Senza, Nylon and spandex, Private Collection

5.2.14. Shaping Up

Moulding the body with undergarments is not entirely passé. Contemporary versions emphasize secrecy with names like “secret slimmers,” “tummy tamers” or “power panties.” As with girdles of the past, women wear them to create an ideal more slender shape, but unlike earlier girdles, their purpose is not to provide modesty by controlling the jiggle of the buttocks. Instead, women don shapewear to compensate for what they cannot achieve through diet, exercise and youth.

- Shapewear undergarment, “Slim-cognito” model, 2007, Label: Spanx, Nylon and spandex, Courtesy of Sox Box Accessories Inc.
- Shapewear undergarment, “Tummy Tamer” model, 2007, Label: Silks, Nylon and spandex, Courtesy of Sox Box Accessories Inc.
- Shapewear undergarment, “Hidden Assets” model, 2007, Label: Fashion Essentials, Polyester, cotton, nylon, Private collection

5.3. What’s Next?

As it has become fashionable for women to reveal more of their bodies in their clothing, it seems that more areas of women’s bodies need work to correspond to a fashionable norm. Despite the seeming freedom of choice and movement that contemporary fashion allows, maintaining a disciplined body is a growing preoccupation among women.

5.3.1.

Body toning through exercise and diet has replaced body shaping by corsets and girdles.

- Woman controlling skin at the waist, photograph by Miles, Miles/zefa/Corbis, 42-15280004

5.3.2.

In the past decade, the range of surgical cosmetic procedures has expanded and this body-shaping option is growing in popularity.

- Doctor preparing woman for breast enlargement, 2005, Pixland/Corbis, 42-17394532

5.3.3.

Not content with improving the shape of the body, many women are also embellishing its surface. Tanning became fashionable in the 1920s but recently cosmetic products have replaced the sun, creating the illusion of a suntan. By the 1970s and 1980s, hair removal from the pubic area became necessary for modesty in a bathing suit.

- Woman sunbathing in bikini, Corbis, 42-16702984

5.3.4.

Tattooing and body piercing, long common in many non-Western cultures, have become very fashionable in the past decade, particularly among younger women.

- Flower belly button ring, Image 100/Corbis, RF4473332

5.3.5.

As women show more of their bodies in briefer and simpler clothing, the exposed skin itself has provided a new surface for embellishment.

- Dragonfly tattoo on woman's back, Larry Williams/Corbis, 42-18042223

Column Texts

Regulating Modesty

Why do institutions attempt to control how women reveal and conceal their bodies? Why do such regulations usually fail and disappear?

Figure Flaws

How have women's bodies come to be perceived as a series of imperfections? Who establishes what is perfect?

Who Dares to Bare?

What aesthetic and moral standards about body exposure have we internalized? What gets negative and positive reactions?

The Last Word is Yours

Has freedom in fashion really increased women's freedom? Is the concept of female modesty disappearing or taking on new forms?

Credits of the exhibition *Reveal or Conceal?*

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Hélène Joly, French translation
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