

Unmasking the Ideology of the “Ideal Woman”

By: Samantha Grillo

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The concept of the ‘Ideal Woman’ has existed for hundreds of years. For the purpose of this paper, I will be examining what was expected of women and how they were viewed in Elizabethan England (1558-1603), Victorian England (1837-1901), the 1960’s mod culture of London, and modern-day societies of England and America. Throughout these four time periods two common trends hold true: 1) societal expectations for women were and are either largely determined by men or decided by women according to what they think men would find most attractive; 2) There is always a very strong materialistic/consumerist’s air about maintaining one’s societal presence. This is an essay on how fashion was used as a device to control women in their societies and how women were viewed in their individual societies throughout history, not simply an essay on the history of fashion.

Elizabethan England: (1558-1603)

Wealthy women of Elizabethan London valued fashion and makeup. The society of the time used appearance to silently declare social status. Based on her portraits, Queen Elizabeth I had golden-red wavy hair, a pale complexion, and increasingly relied on the use of a pale substance called ceruse as she aged. Ceruse is described by the English Historian Liza Picard as “a thick white toxic paste containing mercury, [which] gave a smooth complexion until it melted and turned grey, shiny and smelly” (2016). Ceruse was an early form of very pale foundation. A pale complexion was obligatory for the queen, as Heather Sharnette (M. Phil) states “White skin was fashionable in Tudor¹ times as it was what distinguished the rich from the poor” (2018). The societal construct favored pale skin that exemplified nobility because the wealthy spent their time indoors while the skin of others became weathered by sun and wind while outside working all day. Additionally, Queen Elizabeth I also made use of vermilion, a red pigment that was

applied to the cheeks to add color back into her pale complexion. Vermillion was the 15th century analog to pink blush, which women use today.

Wealthy women of Elizabethan England would dress with fitted bodices that were made to lie flat across the chest ² accompanied by layers of thick skirts. It was considered fashionable to lay a topmost skirt with a slit in the front as to show the patterns of the underskirts. Ornate skirts could have jeweled borders and stitched patterns. The hoopskirt that gave layers of skirt fabric their rounded shape was an object called a farthingale. ³ Those that could not afford the elaborate farthingale settled for a bum roll, which was a rounded, horseshoe shaped section of fabric that was tied around the sides and back of a woman's upper hips under their skirts. This collection of fabric would give a little more shape to the figure but was not as drastic as when a farthingale was used.

Sleeves, a ruff, and other various accessories were worn by wealthy women and would all be separate pieces of cloth which would be pinned in place for the day and then could be rearranged and pinned into something entirely different another day. A ruff was the frill of fabric around the necks of the wealthy. They were worn by both genders and began as a simple small frill at the neck of a shirt that was tied with a band. These frills then developed into giant 'collar' like rings. Restored paintings all show the ruffs as white, but it is believed they came in a variety of pale pinks and yellows for the wealthy, where "Blue seems to have been reserved for prostitutes" (Picard 2016). Originally, the large diameter ruffs would sag under their own weight, but then the Dutch discovered that if you starched them, they would stay stiff. Rain could still cause the ruff to sag, as raincoats were not invented yet, so ruffs (also known as 'bands') were carried in a bandbox in the rain. When a dry destination was reached, maidens would position and pin the ruff for her superior. Hooded cloaks were available, but they often leaked dye

because the chemicals used to treat clothes and make them color-fast were rare in Elizabethan London.

Portraiture and other artwork are the only visual records we have from Elizabethan London to look back at what women were wearing. Fashion had a twofold purpose: to declare social status, but also to symbolize. “Like many Tudor portraits, [*The Armada Portrait*] is packed with meaning and metaphor” (Royal Museums of Greenwich N.D.). According to Picard, “Queen [Elizabeth I] was always pleased to accept presents of valuable garments” (2016) and she often wore a lot of jewelry.⁴ Many of these elaborate accessories seen in her portraits had a superstitious or symbolic reason, such as the mounds of pearl necklaces around Elizabeth’s neck in *The Armada Portrait*⁵ (Gower 1588). The pearls are “symbols of chastity and the Moon” and also symbolized how she was known as the Virgin Queen because she refused to marry and never had any children. (Royal Museums Greenwich, N.D.). From the early 1580s, she was presented as a perpetual Virgin Queen” (Sieve Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, c. 1583). In addition to *The Armada Portrait*, the *Sieve Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* (Mestys, c. 1583) has several objects, such as the sieve, that celebrate and symbolize her virginity and chastity.

Picard notes that “Sapphires and unicorn’s horn averted the plague, coral was useful against witchcraft [and] a bezoar protected against poison.”^{6,7} (2016) Certain semiprecious stones not only displayed the wearer’s wealth, but in the case of Elizabeth I, she used her “gemstones not only to create an image of royal authority in person and in portraiture, but also as a means of asserting her sovereignty and affirming and consolidating the political loyalty of her subjects” (Auble 2011, 46). As far as ‘magical or medical properties’ “The supposed medical and magical properties of precious stones documented from ancient and medieval sources were well known throughout English society and widely subscribed to by monarchs and commoners alike”

which sums up to what degree to which the entire Elizabethan society believed in these objects' importance (Auble 2011, 1). Other fashion choices that also served as symbolism in *The Armada Portrait* (Gower 1588) were embroidered suns on her skirt and sleeves to “signify power and enlightenment” (Royal Museums Greenwich N.D.). These symbols were more than small trinkets; they were attached to garments to convey meaning in portraits and were part of the Elizabethan societal system of people who followed legal guidelines to visually declare their societal status.

Queen Elizabeth I issued the *Proclamation against Excess of Apparel* in 1597.⁸ This proclamation dictated what could and could not be worn by both genders and all statuses. The document asserted a code of dress and an absolute power on the fashion industry of the time. Picard notes that “It was essential that the Queen’s subjects should know their place, and dress accordingly, so that no one could be misled” (2016) and Sharnette states “The Tudor period was an extravagant period, and vanity was perhaps a prime ingredient. Court life was flamboyant and people dressed to impress. As monarch, it was Elizabeth's duty to dress better than everyone else.” (1998-2016) Both statements exemplify how Queen Elizabeth’s power not only came from her lineage but also through how she presented herself. Elizabeth was determined to dictate what was acceptable in society so she issued the *Proclamation against Excess of Apparel*. With this proclamation, she not only maintained power over her domain, but also asserted the power to make cultural trends into visual societal statuses dictated by law.⁹

Based upon the portraits from Elizabethan England and human instinctual theories, men apparently preferred medium sized women and therefore considered ‘medium’ the ideal body type for the Elizabethan society. This theory comes from instinctual and Darwinian arguments. Historian Tracy Adams, and author of sociology and psychology Christine Adams, quote

Psychologist Nancy Etcoff in support of this evolutionary biological conjecture: “Our bodies, reflect not only Darwinian forces which impel us to reproduce, but cultural ones, and social ones...” (qtd. In, Adams & Adams 2015). This quote suggests that the “ideal figure” for a woman for all time periods is partially based upon the male’s instinctual drive to look for visual cues of fertility in a woman as well as the societal preferences of the time. Adams & Adams also assess the theory that “men, [are] hardwired to propel their genes into future generations, [and therefore] chase women endowed with a set of morphological features that signal fertility” (2015). According to Adams & Adams’s interpretations, when it comes to maintaining the human race rather than what ‘trending body type is popular’, men like women with full hips and breasts because they are a sign of fertility. In his review of Nancy Etcoff’s book *Survival of the Fittest: The Science of Beauty*, Stephen Bates describes how Etcoff “Argues that the ingredients of female beauty are mostly markers for fertility” and that “Women with large symmetrical breasts are more fertile, as are women with hourglass torsos.” (1999) Elizabethan women had many children over their lifespans, so they would need practical bodies to maintain their ability to do so. Anyone drastically overweight or underweight would have been less likely to be able to produce children and therefore be less attractive to men of the time.

In Elizabethan London, women were required to answer to their husbands or, if unmarried, women were required to rely on their male family members. In the case of a widow, she would be “a woman in control of her own finances and not under the legal or sexual control of any one man, [and therefore would exist] at the margins of hetero-patriarchal society and accordingly challenged many of its central tenets.” (Goode 2013, 183) Females were taught at home because there were not any schools for girls, and they could not attend universities. Professor Chloe K Preedy of the University of York states that there was often an “exclusively

masculine sphere of dominance and subversion” over women of Elizabethan London. Preedy’s article examines Elizabethan literature and notes how sonnets reflected contradictions raised with a female as the dominant monarch when the social expectation of the time was that all women answered to men. Elizabeth turned down all her suitors because she did not want to have to answer to anyone. During the “first few decades of her reign, Elizabeth presented herself as a marriageable virgin, but always reserved the right to choose her own husband and even whether or not she would marry at all.” (Sieve Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I N.D.)

Queen Elizabeth I was a woman ahead of her times purely because she was a woman in power in an era of subversive men whose preferences dictated the social ideals for women of the time. Elizabeth used her royal power to govern men and women alike and dictate what everyone in her domain could wear. Elizabeth’s regulation of public apparel not only made sure it was obvious she was the only one dressed well enough to be the queen, but also to set up a sort of visual societal hierarchy. She dressed lavishly so that other wealthy women would envy her, and her reign was one of decorative trinkets and beautiful and elaborate portraits.

Victorian England: (1837-1901)

Women of the Victorian Era dressed to maintain their respectability in society but also to match what they believed men of the time found attractive, even if that put their bodies in danger. All of the Tudor’s legislation that explicitly dictated who could wear what, such as the *Proclamation against Excess of Apparel*, had been repealed by Parliament in 1604 “because of pressure felt by the professional classes” and King James I’s had “lower born favorites”, but societal expectations for women’s dress and manners continued. (Kirtio N.D, 26). Literary student, Hannah Aspinall, states that “the female body has long been idealized, objectified and

fetishized” which “can be seen particularly in Victorian culture” (Aspinall 2012). Aspinall also states that “Social rules and guidelines on how the female body should look, and how it should be dressed, objectified the body and encoded femininity within these rules [of Victorian culture]” (Aspinall 2012).

A woman’s hair was “an important symbol in constructing identity” because “it was the only female body part – except the face – on constant display” (Aspinall 2012). Hair could be easily manipulated into a multitude of styles and could be used to express oneself. There were societal expectations that governed women’s hairstyles because how a woman did her hair was used to visually display the “social and moral position of the woman” (Aspinall 2012). If a woman was married, she was expected to wear her hair up and bound and cover it during certain respectful events. A woman’s level of chastity was also implied by how her hair was styled, where covered hair “was considered to be the epitome of genteel womanhood” and “free flowing, loose hair was considered to be unchaste and a characteristic of a morally depraved woman” (Aspinall 2012). The concept of a ‘fallen woman’ was developed to represent women who did not meet the moral standards set by the Victorian society. The image of the ‘fallen woman’ is often portrayed in art of the time with long, flowing locks, emphasizing the extreme symbolism of hair in Victorian culture.¹⁰

The corset’s obsessive use by Victorian women would prove to be the most controversial and loved garment of female wear in the 1800s. Victorian women used ‘stays’ or corsets extensively. Stays of the Victorian era were rigid, supported with whalebones, and were made with layers of heavy fabric sometimes stiffened with glue. The newer corsets were smaller and a less boned version of the stiff stays used in the 1700s and the corset would be improved and reinvented until the trend died out in 1889. The corset helped Victorian women acquire “high

rounded breasts, long well-rounded limbs... the ideal every woman hoped to obtain” (Waugh 2004, 37). Aspinall states that the “majority of middle-class women and large numbers of working-class women wore corsets on a regular basis” (2012). Nineteenth century observer Hayden Brown recounted the case of a woman worrying her daughter is purposely tying her corset too tight, a practice called ‘nipping’ or ‘tight-lacing’. Brown introduced the situation with “Wise mothers sometimes exercise a watchful eye over the waists of their daughters.” (Brown 1899/2015 reprint, 50). This circumstance gives the impression that women and even young girls wore corsets, but ‘nipping’ was seen as risqué. Women would hide the fact that they ‘nipped’ and would deny that they did, even though it was a common practice in Victorian England and women had the mindset that every women ‘nipped’. Brown reported that “Those who really nip will never believe that others exist that do not. They are certain that nearly all nip, but that only some can be as successful as they themselves are” (2015, 50). This quote offers an interesting but disturbing explanation of women’s perception of nipping from Victorian England.

The practice of ‘nipping’ was done to narrow a woman’s waist to the “ideal feminine shape” (Aspinall 2012) of Victorian society: a complete hourglass with no limitations but that of the body to how pinched the center of their waist could be with a wide bosom and hips.¹¹ Women thought men of their society would find this excessively cramped and unnatural figure extremely attractive. The practice also represented a woman’s ability to have an appetite of moderation. Women with smaller waists were regarded to hold a higher social standing, declaring a woman to maintain sound morals and be chaste.¹² Paradoxically, the use of the corset began as a moral practice to obtain a shapely figure to be appealing to men but overtime the corset’s use became a sort of sexualized feminine obsession where women would appear proper and innocent, but actually would disfigure their bodies to heighten their chance of being visually

appealing to men. Aspinall states the corset “represents the female control over male desires, and the male’s control over the female body” and describes the corset as a motive by which women were “oppressed by society and sexualized under male dominance” (2012), emphasizing the male-dominated societal standards of Victorian England.

‘Nipping’, though, would prove to cause more issues than expected, perhaps even explaining why women are perceived as faint-hearted, because in the 1800s women’s bodies would often give out from the corset’s pressure and cause them to faint. Corsets limited the effectiveness of their bodily functions by displacing their organs and reducing the strength of their muscles over time (Aspinall 2012; Brown 2015). Tying corsets too tight would restrict their lung’s ability to expand, compress all their organs, reduce their blood circulation and was even recorded to be the cause of a woman’s death. Brown recounts a post-mortem examination of a body of woman wherein the coroner found her “corset [to be] very tightly-laced” and “that [her] death was due to syncope from heart disease” and that “her being so tightly-laced had caused the attack of syncope and death” (Brown 1899/2015 reprint, 46). Those that maintained some function while wearing their ‘nipped’ corset would not be able to move fluently, bend their waist, or eat substantial amounts. Corsets would prove to be controversial as Brown clearly condemned their over-use but stated the practicality of the general use of a corset. The Rational Dress society, formed in 1881, spoke out against the corset and other restrictive fashions, but its effects were limited due to the social acceptance of the use of the corset. It was only the act of tightlacing that was considered taboo.

Slightly before Victorian England, in the early 1830’s, women were switching from large hip-pads called ‘bustles’ to stiffened petticoats. Many types of petticoats were tried until the horse-hair kind was found to be the most popular in 1839. The word “crinoline” was derived

from the French language and “described any artificial petticoat of the nineteenth century” (Waugh 2004, 93). The crinoline was a structured underskirt that would end up being much like a farthingale from Elizabethan England. When the weight of women’s typical dress increased, the petticoat had to be modified to include a cage made of steel wires in 1856. Throughout the 1800s the shape and size of the typical crinoline fluctuated to increase convenience for the wearer and follow fashion trends. Images from the 1800s show that the crinoline was bell shaped in 1856, 1858, and 1860 but then became more flattened in the front in 1862, 1864, and 1866. (Waugh 2004, 114). The crinoline allowed a woman to shape her hips along with placement of certain bunches of fabric. When the crinoline became less popular in the late 1800s, the average woman was reluctant to expose her natural hips. By 1890 the crinoline was abandoned altogether. Women became more comfortable with their body shape, although their shape “was provided, not by nature, but by a very expert corsetiere” (Waugh 2004, 97). Women only were comfortable showing their bodies once their shape had been permanently modified by the effects of wearing corsets for years.

Societally, prostitution was a common practice in Victorian England for women who could not find work due to poverty or other inconvenient situations. Society viewed female prostitutes as morally loose women but saw men who used these prostitutes as just average men. Male usage of brothels was “widely acknowledged as a way to vent their animalistic sexual desires that they would not be able to express with their chaste wives” such as the popular sadomasochistic practice of flogging prostitutes (Aspinall 2012). Furthering the discrimination between the sexes, the *Contagious Diseases Act* of 1864, and its amendments of 1866 and 1869, legalized prostitution but allowed police officers to stop women and check them for STDs but made no mention of stopping to check men.

Furthering the topic of sexism of the time, “respectable Victorian society largely disregarded the female sex drive” (Aspinall 2012). There was a “universal marketing” of “unmarried woman” through marriage arrangements where her ‘value’ was based upon her societal status, “economic fortune, virginity and virtue and her overall success” as stated by British Parliament member Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1836 (qtd. in Hallum 2016, 1). Women were displayed at balls and dances where they “incorporated a plethora of etiquette-related customs” (Hallum 2016, 2). The society of Victorian England possessed a highly sexualized yet repressed sexual culture. Female authors of the time challenged “conventions as to what constituted decent female behavior in literature” to the point that “their inclusion of passionate heroines into their texts was controversial” (Aspinall 2012). ‘Respectable women’ refuted these descriptions and were offended by these women who created female characters that “disregarded the traditional idea of ‘femininity’” (Aspinall 2012). Pornography pamphlets became popular after the invention of the printing press, and even though *The Obscene Publication Act of 1857* attempted to limit the distribution of the papers they were still widely dispensed. Victorian women were stripped of their sexuality or condemned for it, regulated by societal restrictions as tight as their corsets.

1960’s Mod Culture of London

Fashion designers of the 1960s fueled a revolution of both male and female mod fashion, beginning with the first generation of young consumerists in England. American film critic, author and blogger, Shawn Levy sums up the new opportunities of the 1960’s generation: “you could find a bold, spirited and crucially, *employed* generation of young people with educations, access to birth control, [and] freedom from mandatory military service” (2003,7). These

teenagers began to break away from the traditions their parents had practiced and one result of this was the change in fashion. The 'ideal age' for both genders would move from being financially stable at middle age to being young and a consumer, and these young people spent their money on clothes. Levy quoted Sir Ian McKellen who felt that he was "brought up to think that you would peak in middle age... And suddenly it was all knocked on the head. Suddenly forty was old" (qtd. in 2003, 6). The trends of the 1960s were purely ephemeral, and it was not uncommon for the trends to change from week to week. The fashion movement that took place on Carnaby Street was initially focused on men, with the popularity of the street first starting with homosexual men such as menswear designer John Stephan who found success with his shop unusually quickly. The fashions of early mod culture stood out for being extreme and colorful, styles only homosexual men wore in England before the 1960s. Levy stated that "roughly the time the Beatles were being put into smart collarless suits by Brian Epstein, young men in London began to feel comfortable in wild colors that would've made their dads and grandpas blush in shame" (2003, 104). The fashions of Carnaby Street would expand to encompass a whole generation of men who wanted to break away from the traditional attire and culture of the time, and more and more people would gain financial success and popularity by feeding on the cultural movement. London became the place to be. Shawn Levy states "The coolest clothes and hair and movies and music, the most modern manners and mores and modes of speech and social intercourse – all of it was coming out of London" (Levy 2003, 184). At the same time as Beatlemania was racing through America and LSD was being used by intellectuals in the belief it would extend their imagination to unseen dimensions, more and more stores were opening to feed the fast-paced consumerist's mod culture. Boutiques and stores like Biba would open on King's Road, a street that would become a very sought after and very pricy area, and young girls

would spend their weekly clothing trips there. Mods rejected the societal norms of the previous decades, but ironically, 1960's society would come to adopt uniqueness as a mainstream value. Although women were wearing shorter skirts and higher heels, there was no obvious female sexualization for male satisfaction. Women were deciding for themselves that they wanted to be more scandalous with their fashions and more 'adventurous' with the popularization of the birth control pill, and it was a female designer who made the miniskirt, not a man.

Women's fashion would come to include boxy shapes and miniskirts in a style described as "bright, tailored minimalism" (Victoria and Albert Museum 2018). Mary Quant, a famous mod designer of the time, "was given credit widely for inventing what came to be called the miniskirt" (Levy 2003, 185). The miniskirt was a thrill for designers who competed to see who would make their hemlines shorter. The skirts was also loved by males who enjoyed seeing a lot more of women's legs and loved by women who felt the skirt helped show off their bodies. English actress Lynn Redgrave stated "for the first time, I appreciated being tall because it became quite the thing for the first time to put on a pair of really high heels and a really short skirt, even if it didn't suit you that well. It felt very freeing, especially as I felt so shy and insecure about my body and my look. [The miniskirt fashion trend] gave you something to hang on to, something to transform yourself with" (qtd. in Levy 2003, 185). Redgrave sums up the feeling that mod fashion allowed a lot of girls who never were able to express themselves before the cultural change of the 1960s. From the men's point of view, as journalist Peter Evans put it, "The miniskirt was a piece of magic" and "Suddenly all women were attractive" because the skirts showed much never-before-seen leg (qtd. in Levy 2003, 185). To pair with these miniskirts, as Lynn Redgrave mentions, "really high" blocky heels were worn, and the raincoat made of PVC was invented by Quant. Mary Quant's daring designs would later inspire other

women designers like Marion Foale and Sally Tuffin to produce “quirky day wear and code-breaking trouser suits for women” (Victoria and Albert Museum 2018).

Designers were experimenting with colors, patterns, shapes, and even different unconventional materials such as plastics and synthetic fibers. The idea of the ‘paper dress’ which was “made of cellulose, rayon or polyester” and were “disposable garments [first] created in 1966 as a marketing stunt for an American company... epitomized... the quest for a truly modern form of clothing” (Victoria and Albert Museum 2018). Designs would also resemble a futuristic look that used “space-age materials, often white or silver or some other bright hue” (Levy 2003, 186). Although futuristic fashions and materials were experimented with, it became fashionable to take an old clothing piece and pair it with the mod apparel. Levy notes some “discarded fashions up for sale: flapper dresses, Victorian bustles, Boer War helmets, antique military jackets... what a contemporary travel guide called “cleaned and darned exotica” (Levy 2003, 191). The popular mod boutique named “Granny Takes a Trip” encompassed the mod’s appreciation for antique styles and psychedelic drug usage of the time.

Popular mod fashion designer, Ossie Clark, is famous for creating fashions of flowing dresses that were inspired by fashions from the past. His clothes were “fluid and drapey and revealing all at once – in key places it fit so exactly that you couldn’t wear a bra or panties” (Levy 2003, 193). His dress was extremely sexualized yet his approach followed the trend of the time: liberation and freedom of dress- literally. He candidly acknowledged “You’re meant to be able to lift your dress up and pull down the top and have sex anywhere” (qtd. in Levy 2003, 193). Mod consumerists often used drugs, so Clark included small pockets to store these substances.

The mod culture brought new trends in makeup. While adults were applying modest makeup such as “lipstick and blue eyeshadow as [their] mothers would have done”, the newer

generation was “applying [makeup] with brushes and using [their] face[s] as a canvas” (Levy 2003, 187). Makeup was now colorful and done with attention to color-scheme. Colored nail polish was created in 1965, along with mass produced false eyelashes and waterproof mascara. Contouring one’s facial structure with darker shades and lightening the foremost parts of the face with something similar to highlighter also began with Mary Quant’s makeup line.

Hairstyling would was a form of personal expression as well, but instead of following the societal guidelines, women and men would go out of their way to get haircuts that would make most of their parents cringe. Vidal Sassoon became just as popular as Mary Quant, but instead of fashion he practiced hairdressing. His designs were new and creative and his most recognizable styles are noted to be “wide square curls”, “asymmetrical designs”, and “bob[s] adorned with ringlets” (Levy 2003, 188). The most recognizable haircut of the mod generation done in the 1960s was the Beatles’ mop-top.

Famous British model, Twiggy, found her fame as a model in 1960’s London. Levy described her as “childlike, sexless, domestic, familiar, painfully ordinary, and very, very white” (2003, 211). Twiggy was roughly 112lbs, 5’ 6” tall, 17 years old, and in high school when she was found by the unsuccessful Justin de Villeneuve who was 10 years older than her. He fell in love with her strange beauty and saw her potential to be a model. Twiggy recalled that she “went from total obscurity to full-time working model in a matter of days” when she was named face of 1966. (qtd. in Levy 2003, 213). Fashion writers of the time commented “[Twiggy looked like] one half orphan of the storm, the other purely aesthetic” and that she “bore the strange appraisal of a Martian”. (qtd. in Levy 2003, 213). Her slender figure and pale skin offered society a much different perspective of the female body and her look was coveted by industries in both England and America. She was exceptionally thin, with a bust of 30”, waist of 22”, and hips of 32” and as

Levy puts it “she didn’t, like Jean Shrimpton seem an epitome of wholesome English girlitude, nor, like [the large breasted] Marianne Faithfull, did she mix a sense of the angelic with a lusty body” (Levy 2003, 211). Twiggy herself even remarked on her figure as “not really what you’d call a figure, is it?” and her mannequin look-alikes had to be given more in the chest area to actually hold up the clothes on display (qtd. in Levy 2003, 214). Photography and modeling was highly sexualized in the 1960’s where many girls “had been discovered by the photographers themselves and were often romantically involved with them” (in Levy 2003, 214). Twiggy was romantically involved with Justin at the time, effectively putting her off-limits to the selfish photographers who were accustomed to making girls famous with their backing. The key to Twiggy’s fame was the fact that she was looked at as a beautiful person who did not meet the standard female body ideals of the time. Levy described her as “sexless” as mentioned beforehand, suggesting that she truly emblemized the mod culture because she was in it for her uniqueness, rather to advertise and sexualize women like other models were doing at the time.

The mod movement of the 1960s encompassed younger generations, including both men and women, where people aimed to do everything they could to stand out from previously accepted norms. Beginning with homosexual men and an unsaid competition of masculinity through ‘queer fashion’ of bright colors and eccentric styles, there was a limited interaction between the sexes in some cases. Levy quoted a mod saying “It’s your mate you want to impress, not particularly the girls” (qtd. in 2003, 108). Levy also quoted a woman recalling the 1960’s saying “It got to be a big deal to have a conversation with a guy... We thought we were very lucky if one of those gorgeous creatures actually *danced* with us” (qtd. in 2003,109). Overall, women were still attracted to men and men were still attracted to women, but the mod movement offered something greater than a movement towards sexualization. Sexuality was still a large part

in the mod's movement but for once it seemed like the fashion was not solely to impress the other sex, but to also enjoy the simple creativity of a new and adventurous wardrobe and young freedom. "Youth, once something to endure, transformed in the span of a few years of British sensations into a valuable form of currency, the font of taste and fashion, the only age, seemingly, that mattered" (Levy 2003, 6). Youth consumerism was a major driving point of the 1960s and although some stores liked to cater to the working class with reasonable prices, everyone felt the need to maintain their style with the rapidly changing trends of the day, requiring them to frequently purchase the next set of clothes to remain relevant. Levy states that mod culture "helped cement the very notion of ephemerality in popular culture" (2003, 9). The mod generation's values of personal freedom liberated women from the excessive grasp of male-dominating societal expectations of the past, but the 1960's obsessive consumerist culture heavily mirrors the capitalist society seen in English and American beauty culture today.

Modern-day Societies in England and America

With technology advancing exponentially, people are now able to modify their bodies and broadcast themselves across social media. Modern day consumerism continues to define how wealthy women portray themselves to the public, although as technology has advanced, these materialistic changes are no longer limited to clothing, but now include the human body itself.

Modern day English and American beauty industries are connected through international relations. The same makeup, hair, fashion, and other beauty ads are constantly displayed through social media, the internet, and television commercials in America and England, suggesting there is no meaningful separation between American and English beauty culture. For this reason,

British and American women may be examined almost interchangeably to exemplify the values, standards, and pathologies that have come to characterize female “beauty” in contemporary London.

Alicia Douvall, a former British model with the reputation for her addiction to cosmetic surgery, “has had more than 330 cosmetic procedures and operations” and “claims to have spent more than £1 million [\$1.5 million] on ... operations” (Fletcher 2013).¹³ Douvall has been treated for an addiction to cosmetic surgery after her obsession to look just like a *Barbie* doll, where she stated she once “took a Barbie doll to one medical consultation to show them exactly what I was after” (qtd. in Fletcher 2013). Douvall is an extreme case of British models who use consumerists means to obtain what they thought was the ‘ideal figure’. She underwent these surgeries because “she had undergone so many potentially dangerous and painful operations and procedures – at one point at the rate of one a week – because she was convinced she was ugly” (Fletcher 2013). Douvall has since been treated for her addiction, and as of 2013, has fought to have legislation to require “patients [to] have a 30-minute consultation with their surgeon where they are properly assessed – physically and mentally – before being booked in for cosmetic surgery”, identifying the psychological effects the idea of the ‘ideal woman’ can have on people. Unfortunately, Douvall had to go through over 300 cosmetic surgeries to identify that it was not her body that was the issue, but how she grew up to see herself – a viewpoint that would not be helped by the pressure of ‘perfect bodies’ seen in modern day media. Furthering the psychological aspect of having cosmetic surgery readily available to those with money, Kevin Hancock of the British Association of Aesthetic and Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS), states “A sizeable minority of those seeking cosmetic surgery aren’t psychologically suitable for a life-changing procedure – particularly if they seem excessively concerned about an imagined defect,

or worry their perceived flaw is unduly affecting other aspects of their life” (Fletcher 2013).

Douvall has not undergone any more operations for years but cosmetic surgery is still being used today for models and public female figures, a popular American example being the females of the Kardashian-Jenner families.

Public American female figures of the Kardashian and the Jenner families are the epitome of modern consumerists who currently maintain their beauty to preserve their social status on everyone’s social media. Many of the Kardashian and Jenners are known use cosmetic surgery to obtain unnaturally large lips, busts, and rears, which are all very popular in social media models of modern day. Like the nipping women of the Victorian Era, the Kardashians and Jenners are reluctant to admit to their cosmetic surgeries, but speculations based on how their bodies have drastically changed over the years have been made by fans everywhere.

Cosmopolitan and *Hollywood Life* provided a list of the cosmetic work fans suspect the Kardashians and the Jenners have received and these lists include lip surgery, breast augmentation, major facial work with the use of fillers, and butt implants.¹⁴

The cost of a cosmetic surgery is immense. American radio host, author, and business woman, Paula Begoun, also known as “The Cosmetics Cop” states “Depending on the type of filler, the effects can last anywhere from six months to two years; for semi-permanent or permanent fillers, the effects can last up to five years, and there are reports of even longer-lasting results” and according to Doctor Terry Loong of popular London skin care clinic, *WI Knightsbridge*, “the general starting price for facial fillers is from £500 per syringe”, which is about \$670 per a syringe (Begoun 2016; qt. in Marie Claire (UK) 2018). Fillers are very expensive for something one may have to repetitively inject to maintain the fillers’ effects. Douvall and the females of the Kardashian-Jenner family are just a few examples of famous

female public figures who spend mass amounts of money in order to maintain their appearance and adhere to the ridiculous societal ideals for a woman's body in modern day. With an increase in the procedures being done in both America and the UK, the idea of affordable and artificial body modification becomes more mainstream.¹⁵ The "ideal body shape" for a woman has changed to unrealistic standards of extreme curviness and with a thin waist and big lips, and it seems as though the only thing modern society isn't willing to ask women to do is go back to the Victorian corset.

A more natural female beauty image found in Britain is Demi Rose Mawby. While I have lived in Britain, Demi Rose Mawby's image has appeared on my social media and on posters numerous times. A massive billboard flaunting Mawby's voluptuous bathing suit-clad figure even greets me whenever I return home from southern London. Ostensibly placed there to advertise her *I Saw it First* collection, the image may have even greater impact by subliminally acclimating a new generation of Londoners to the idea that female beauty does not require starvation (even if that "healthy diet" message is not explicitly promoted by the media or the advertisers themselves).¹⁶ Her website, *demiroseofficial.com*, does not give much information on her giving the sense the British fashion industry is obsessed with just the image of her, rather than what she can offer society as a woman rising into prominence in British beauty culture.

In both England and America there are beautiful women who use their status to have their voice heard about how women are viewed in society. British actress Kate Winslet, who is most famous for playing the lead female role in the movie *Titanic*, believes there is more to a woman than just matching the societal beauty standards. London newspaper, *Evening Standard*, quotes Winslet stating "When I walk into a room, I hope to have interesting conversations with people; I'm not interested in whether people look at me or not. In fact, quite the opposite" and

“There's something sort of uncomfortable to me about seeing women who are clearly presenting themselves in a way that's designed to make people stare, but not for the right reasons” (Sporn 2018). Winslet is discussing red carpet fashion and believes female celebrities are being dressed by designers in a way that sexualizes them rather than relies on their natural beauty. Instead, she values the conversation that she and others can offer, putting her personality rather than her body shape and appearance to the forefront of her priorities. Winslet still dresses up for the red carpet and other events but maintains more modest dresses than some. She has also been quoted saying “I resent that there is an image of perfection that is getting thinner and thinner” making note on what media tends to want their women to look like in modern England and America (Wood 2018).

American actress Jennifer Lawrence follows Winslet's viewpoint on how public female figures should display themselves. Lawrence was cast as a girl named Katniss for a fictional trilogy called *The Hunger Games*. Lawrence was then asked to lose weight to look more like Katniss, who was supposed to be thin due to a dystopian society's low access to food. Jennifer refused and told the *New York Times*, “I'm never going to starve myself for a part ... I don't want little girls to be like, ‘Oh, I want to look like Katniss, so I'm going to skip dinner.’” (qtd. in Wood 2014). Lawrence supposedly received a lot of criticism for her stubbornness from “female as well as male [critics]” including the *New York Times* who believed her “womanly figure makes a bad fit for a dystopian fantasy about a people starved into submission” (qtd. in Wood 2014). Winslet and Lawrence are both famous female actresses that use their fame to show the everyday women that self-worth, comfort, and health comes before what others expect of you, even if your being paid thousands of dollars by a theatrical enterprise.

Modern day women are bombarded with social expectations and images of female sexualization but nonconformist generations are fighting against outdated and sexist standards. A historic gentlemen's club, Playboy mansion, is still very popular today, mainstream media is advertising expensive beauty products, and women are still being sexualized, but they are also standing up for themselves. Feminism has had its ups and downs since its major beginnings in the 1960s, but modern day women are advancing feminism more than in any of the past few decades. *Fortune* states "The 2017 women's marches were one of, if not the largest, protests in American history, drawing crowds of over 3 million nationwide. And while 2018 saw those numbers decline, there were still plenty of marchers all across the country" stating that modern day American society is seeing a change where women are determining what they want for themselves.

Using myself, as someone who identifies as female and who grew up in modern America as a primary source, I would say I often noticed fashion trends that ran through the high school, but I was never one to follow them. There were PINK yoga pants, thigh high boots, Nike and Vans sneakers and other clothes that cost so much just because of the brand name on them. I never really thought much why girls dressed the way they did in high school, but as I've grown up I've noticed that some women dress to match what they think men want, some women dress to maintain their social status in the eyes of other woman, and some women just wear whatever the hell they want. As far as body type goes, skinny has always been in, but now there is a secondary ideal that involves a thin waist but a large rear-end and bust – the 'hourglass shape' with extreme proportions.¹⁷ There are constantly tutorials on my *Instagram* feed for gym workouts to obtain larger breasts and a rounder butt simply because I am in the demographic these societal ideals are attacking. In modern day, women, especially millennials, are taking to the

streets for women's marches, and feminist causes. Makeup is still popular (especially nude shades and shiny highlighter), and large lips (real or modified), long hair, tight clothes, heels, and a curvy shape with a small waist is what I see mostly in media from those trying to match the societal 'ideals'. I also see pictures showing that the photos on the internet of all these *Instagram* models make use of camera angles and lighting, and they have regular bodies too (for the most part) but they just know how to pose to accentuate parts to the camera. Women like Russian-American Body Positive Activist Khrystyana have risen to international fame from showing themselves to have a real body yet still be a successful and beautiful model.¹⁸

Conclusion

Wealthy Elizabethan and Victorian women were both limited by tight bodices and massively structured skirts. These structured clothing items were used to give woman the appearance of a curvier shape; a shape that women of those times thought men would find ideal. In modern day, wealthy women use cosmetic surgery to modify their bodies to also obtain a curvier shape because they think that shape is what men prefer. The mod generation of the 1960s sexualized woman not with an artificial body shape, but by beginning the trend of showing more skin with miniskirts and tight high-heeled boots. In all four time periods, woman must have possessed a decent amount of money to afford the fashions of the time, integrating materialism and consumerism into the idea of the 'ideal woman'. Female fashion trends were abundantly used to represent one's social status, to create a faux profile of a naturally curvy body, and to sexualize them through the social idealizations dictated by men. In all time periods, women were limited by their attire - Elizabethan woman wore tight bodices and thick skirts that limited their movements, Victorian women could not bend over and many could barely eat with the tightness

of their corset. Mod women would not have been able to bend over without flashing those behind them with the tininess of their miniskirts and both mod and modern women have been tripping over their high heels since the trend's invention - furthering the Elizabethan idea that a wealthy woman dresses to impress, not to work.

There are some discrepancies between time periods where some societies did not so strongly exemplify my thesis. Elizabethan England did not strongly sexualize the image of women, as Victorian, mod, and modern-day cultures would come to. Modern day female ideals are not *as* dictated by men, but the underlying male preference of female beauty is still clearly evident. Modern-day models are popular for their sexualized advertisements and other mainstream media regarding the sexual female image.

Growing up in modern society as a female, it has been a constant decision whether or not to forfeit one's maneuverability or comfort for wearing a fashion trend. In America, a body positivity movement has broken out on social media where women show their true body types without photoshop or camera manipulation. I have seen more and more body types on runways, and more companies include plus size and petite fashions. The modern world for women is changing, and even though there are the underlying structural social preferences dictated by men that have been present throughout history, women are now finding more ways to express themselves personally, rather than worrying about what society wants them to be.

Endnotes:

1. Tudor London overlapped with Elizabethan London, where the former started in 1485 with the crowning of the first monarch with “Tudor” as their surname (Henry VII), and the latter beginning in 1558 when Queen Elizabeth Tudor 1st was crowned. Both time periods ended with her death in 1603.
2. This flat bodice can particularly be seen in the 1595 oil painting, *Portrait of Mary Fitton* (Unknown).
3. The structural distinction of a farthingale can be seen in Queen Elizabeth’s *The Ditchley Portrait* painted in 1592. (Gheeraerts)
4. I found this very funny and true to the Queen’s hilarious personality. Ivan the Terrible once sent “two ermine gowns, with a proposal of marriage. She kept the furs but refused the proposal.” (Picard, 2016)
5. *The Armada portrait* (Gower, 1588) of Queen Elizabeth I shows her draped with pearls. I visited the museum this famous painting is housed in not knowing it was there, and I am disappointed to say that I somehow managed to not see this painting on my brief look around the Greenwich museum.
6. I read *The Use of Unicorn Horn in Medicine* (Jackson, 2004) which overviewed how the unicorn was viewed throughout history. Jackson did not particularly mention the Elizabethan era but it seems as though the myth of the unicorn was never ‘solved’. There were many theories recorded about the unicorn’s origination and there seemed to be a common trend of the elusiveness of the unicorn resulting in the belief of its rarity and the horn’s amazing healing properties.

7. Bezoar were essentially stones that formed in animals' intestines. I found their use for supernatural properties absolutely disgusting, although I understand their 'use' was part of England's culture of the time. I do not recommend looking up images of a bezoar.
8. The actual article exists in The British Library but was 'translated' and summarized by Liza Picard in 2016.
9. This sentence made me realize that Queen Elizabeth I (and I am sure other kings and queens throughout history) were monarchs and the "Face" of their time – The 16th's term, "Face" was the person whose fashion everyone wanted to emulate and the one that set the coming trends with the most outlandish outfits. The thing is, though, due to *The Proclamation against Excess of Apparel*, no one could reach her exact look without breaking the law.
10. The image of a 'fallen woman' can be seen in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Lady Lilith*.
11. According to Aspinall, "corseted waist measurements varied between 20 and 23 inches, waist sizes of 18 to 16 inches were not considered exceptional" (2012). For reference, I measured my waist at its thinnest point and it was roughly 28". I am not twig-thin but I also consider myself a fit female. I also measured my upper thigh and found that to be equivalent to the average corseted waist. I feel terrible for what women put themselves through to achieve this look.
12. According to Aspinall, the term "loose morals" originated with the trend of the corset, where 'loose' women unbound by a corset were considered sexually promiscuous and lacked sound morals.
13. The estimate for £1 million ~ \$1.5 million comes from the average exchange rate of December 2013 (Yearly Average Rates 2018).

14. Fillers are used to make skin look more youthful by injecting substances into the body to make that area produce collagen. Collagen is a protein which gives skin its youthful look, and the body typically stops producing it naturally in one's late 20's. The substance they inject into the body differs from the separate kinds of fillers.
15. Modern day English and American consumerist culture are now interconnected through a global network of beauty products, fashions, and social media. Market research and business intelligence portal, *Statista*, has 24.1% of the worldwide cosmetic surgeries done in 2011 in Europe, and 28.5% in North America, placing the two locations 3rd and 2nd respectively, with Asia first at 29.5%. In 2016, 4.53 million people underwent cosmetic surgery in the past three years, with the United States having the highest number of plastic surgeons at 6,600 but with the United Kingdom with only 865. This drastic difference results from the strict licensing needed for people to become cosmetic surgeons in most of the UK, where in America there is not as much regulation. *Statista* also shows a bar graph of the percent increase of cosmetic surgery in the UK from 2015-2018, with liposuction with the most increase of 20%, but all types given with a positive increase. Another graph is given displaying "Growth in number of selected nonsurgical cosmetic procedures performed in the U.S. between 2012 and 2017" showing a 217% increase of nonsurgical fat reduction and a 116% increase of laser skin resurfacing for erasing skin blemishes.
16. Realizing Demi Rose Mawby's repeated image as a sign of her prevalence in British beauty-culture, I researched who she was and what she has accomplished and was surprised to only receive images of her. These images were all titled by news outlets commenting on her figure and how revealing her clothing was. Headlines like "Demi Rose Mawby flaunts her pert posterior and famous curves in a bronze thong bikini and a

plunging red swimsuit” and “Demi Rose parades her sensational curves in extreme plunging one-piece and flaunts her posterior in sheer trousers on beach in Mexico” appear from the *Dailymail* website (2018). I was disappointed that media only seemed to care about her appearance and not what she could have offered as a public figure.

17. Many of the Kardashian-Jenner female family members match this elusive and impossible hourglass shape with surgery. Demi Rose Mawby is believed not to have had surgery but is known to exemplify this hourglass shape.

18. I know Khristyana from the television show, *America's Next Top Model*, where woman once had to meet certain body requirements to apply but they have since recently removed all age, height, and size limitations.

Please visit <https://sites.google.com/view/ideal-woman-gallery-grillo> to view artwork that coincides with this project.

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