

MARKETERS, DOLLS AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF FASHION

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ABSTRACT

Well-dressed, well-appointed dolls epitomize our ideal of the well-dressed person. Fashionably dressed dolls have been the objects of our admiration and affection, as well as our disdain. But, their role as emissaries of fashion has yet to be explored by marketing professionals. Dolls of various types and sizes have been used by marketers for centuries to promote a range of products in the fashion industry, from fashionable clothing itself to the many products that support the industry. As technology advanced and sumptuary legislation was lifted, dolls were used to promote products and services to an ever-widening market for fashionable attire. The form of the dolls depended upon macro forces, but their presence was constant. This paper explores the historical evolution of dolls as promotional tools used by marketers to spread fashion information and products, eventually to mass markets.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of technology and the market intertwined to create varying opportunities for fashion promotion. Early fashion marketers used traveling dolls extensively to promote their products. Later a switch to paper dolls, then fashion magazines and patterns enabled marketers to disseminate images of fashionable fabrics and dress to broader strata of society. The development of the paper pattern, its symbiotic relationship to cheaper cloth, thread and the sewing machine led the way to the would-be fashionable masses. Finally, improvements in lighting and window technology led the way for the widespread use of mannequins.

What might have been once described enthusiastically as a democratic tendency to make high fashion accessible, has also been described as a tyranny of style. At the same time, the youth of today have become less concerned with what Paris has to say on the subject of dressing well. Nevertheless, like the nobility of yesteryear, modern "queens" of society (celebrities or screen/stage stars) consider high fashion as important as those who visited Charles Worth from the thrones of Europe and the "watering holes" of America. In this paper we cannot examine the entire history of haute couture; we are primarily interested in aspects of marketing which brought ideas and information about fashion to markets. Fashion dolls, in some form, were always used as a promotional tool. The form of the doll changed depending upon circumstances in the macro-environment. New industrial technologies enabled marketers to use alternative means to disseminate fashion information, but dolls maintained a role in the marketer's promotional arsenal. This paper explores the history of the use of changing forms of fashion dolls by marketers.

THE REPEAL OF SUMPTUARY LEGISLATION: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A FASHION MARKET

In order to understand the appeal of fashion--and its relationship to the idea of democratization -- one must recognize that it was not until the repeal of sumptuary laws, restricting the wearing of high fashions, that citizens were free to choose their attire. Sumptuary laws are "rules designed to inhibit specified consumption practices on the part of all or some segments of society" (Hollander 1984, p.1). Many (perhaps all) societies have some such restrictions. However, if one assumes that clothing is a means of social identification (Lemire 1991), then the purpose of sumptuary clothing restrictions is to use dress to reinforce social strata. According to McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982, p. 36), "... established hierarchies, which prevented or severely restricted vertical social mobility, remained remarkably faithful to the costumes which distinguished men's place in that hierarchy." Sumptuary laws were designed for the aristocracy, to "... reinforce their elite

status, to restrict the grandeur to a few, and to guarantee their sense of separateness" (p. 37).

According to Lemire, all sumptuary legislation was lifted in England by 1604 (1991, p. 69). [Exhibit 1 provides a time line of important developments in fashion marketing]. This meant everyone ostensibly could dress fashionably. McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb argue that the demand for fashionable clothing is a constant characteristic of human nature (1982, p. 34). They find evidence of demand for fashions among broader groups of society in England in the 1500s (p. 38). Despite the fact that law had made fashionable dress legal for anyone, production of fashionable clothing was limited to tailors and dressmakers. Initially only those who could afford to pay a tailor had access to fashion goods.

As the market grew, fashionable clothing was "supplied through both legitimate and illegitimate routes" (Lemire 1991, p. 68). Marketers played a critical role in supplying this growing market, as illustrated by Lemire's descriptions of the thriving second-hand clothing trade of the 1700s. Seizing an opportunity, a tremendous variety of marketers added second-hand clothing to their existing lines. In examining insurance company records, Lemire found the bulk of second-hand clothing in the inventory of dealers, tailors, yard goods retailers, and pawnbrokers. In addition, people whose main occupation was that of skilled artisan or craftsman "wheelwright, cooper, silversmith, goldsmith, watchmaker, buckle maker, caned chair makers..." and food and other consumer products retailers, kept inventories of second-hand clothing. Innkeepers, alehouse keepers and hairdressers also dealt clothing part-time. One of the results of the open-dress codes was that clothing theft became a commonplace means of supplying the market. One commentator in the 1700s derided the "second-hand Gentry" (p. 76).

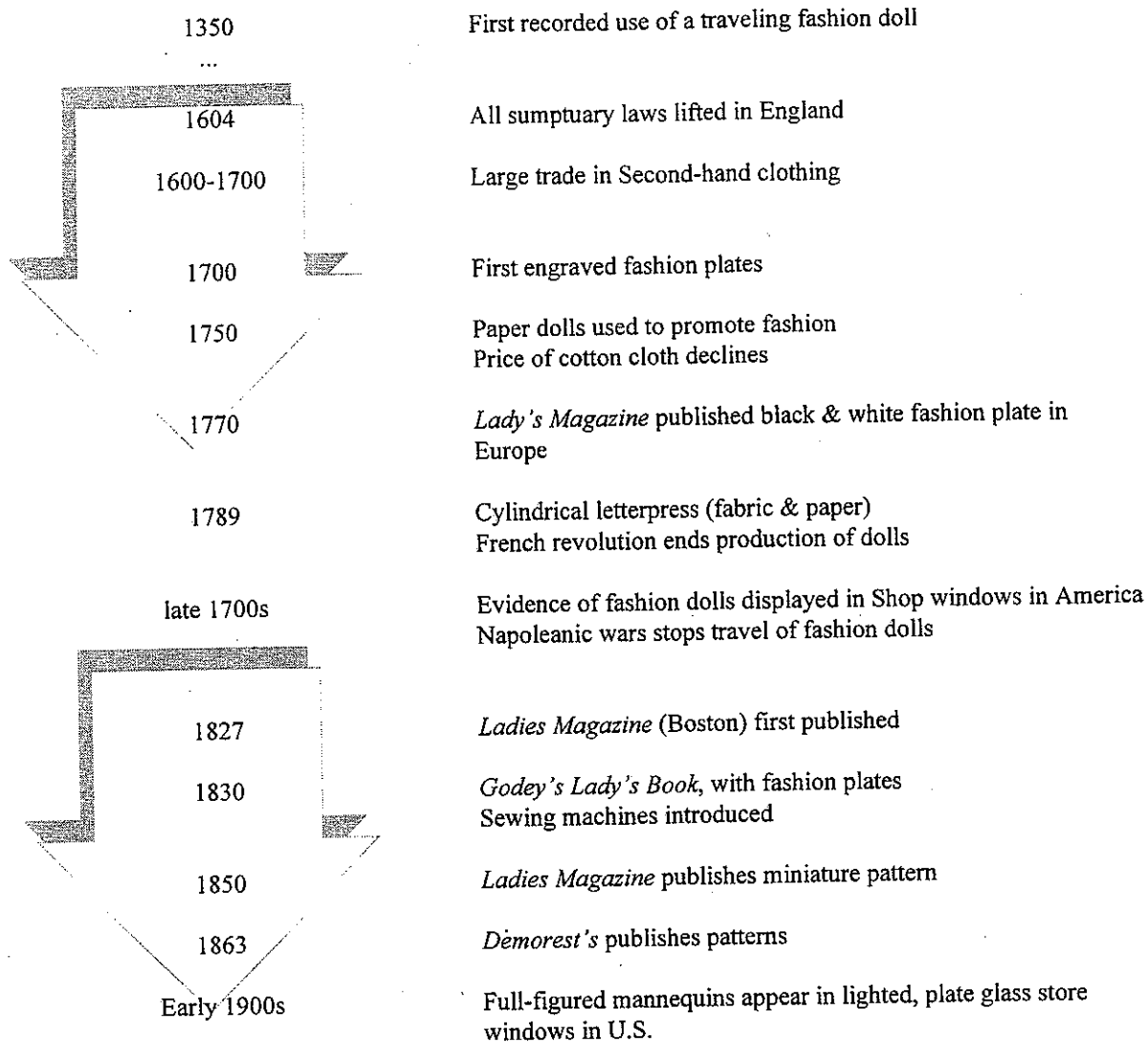
Lemire notes repeated calls for reinstatement of sumptuary laws to stave off the "visual homogenization, the creeping democratization of society through the spread of fashion" (p. 69). However, once trends were set in motion, there was no turning back. McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb note that "the fashionable few" became "legislators of taste," but were no longer the sole beneficiaries of it. Lemire makes the astute observation about the effect of the second-hand clothing trade on the development of a market for ready-to-wear clothing. Consumers now became accustomed to the idea of being able to find the one "right" garment in their size, ready-to-wear (p. 77), although marketers would not be able to supply this expectation until the 20th century. Sizing for everyone became a concern of both manufacturers and retailers, as explored by Kidwell and Christman (1974, pp. 101-109).

FASHION DOLLS

The lifting of sumptuary laws paved the way for a mass market, but clothing makers still needed a means to make consumers aware of the availability of fashion products. Given the speed and cost of travel, limited production and printing technology, marketers turned to fashion dolls as an ingenious promotion tool. Elaborately dressed bisque or porcelain dolls, known as "La Pandora" or "Poupees de la Rue de Saint Honore," after the street where the most prominent Parisian couturiers worked (Jailer 1990, p.63), were sent as emissaries of fashion. The history of dolls has been widely explored; (a visit to any finding guide will show thousands of entries). However, the role of dolls as a marketing tool has received a minimum of attention in the marketing literature (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982 have hinted at the importance of the issue).

The world's first fashion doll may date back to ancient Egypt. D'Aulaire (1991, p.68) reports that a wooden torso [which may have been a fashion doll] was found in King Tutankhamen's tomb not far from his clothing chest (1350 BC). However, the first recorded use in western history is the 14th century marriage of Queen Isabella of Bavaria to Charles VI. She had dolls sent from Paris to show the latest fashions (King 1977, p.47). According to Mildred Jailer (1987, p.40), fashion dolls were the next best thing to a trip to Paris. "These dolls, ranging from a little over a foot tall to life-size, with torsos of cloth, leather or wood, and heads of wood, fabric, wax or porcelain, were stylishly clothed and sent abroad to spread the news of the latest modes" (d'Aulaire 1991, p.70). Life size dolls could also be found as a decorative touch in a woman's boudoir (Jailer 1990, p.63). Moreover, oftentimes the dresses were taken off the doll upon its arrival and worn by the recipient (Jailer 1987, p.40).

EXHIBIT 1
Timeline of Important Events in Doll Marketing History



For the next four centuries, dolls were the main means of fashion promotion. As one doll historian has noted, elegantly dressed fashion dolls appeared in France, Austria, and Germany and served as "living pictures" or models of dress concepts. McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb believe that the French sent out a fashion doll each year; they found a newspaper advertisement for the "*French doll for the year 1712*" (1982, p. 44). Ribeiro (1984, p.51) notes that two dolls were usually sent from Paris: one doll was dressed in court dress (la grande Pandora) and one dressed in fashionable everyday attire (la petite Pandora).

Dolls, as informative and/or persuasive advertising, appear to have followed an "information stream" or path. Once dolls, received from France, had been copied by the court dressmakers, they were displayed in windows of fashionable shops (Ribeiro 1984, p.51). Then, after London shops had tired of them, the dolls were sent abroad to America (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982). According to Ferguson (1982, p.19) the dolls were sent first to the German courts, then to Italy, England, and finally to the colonies. Jailer uses the example of a doll known as "Leonide," a bisque fashion doll which arrived with beautiful costumes later copied by a Salem, Massachusetts, dressmaker for socially-minded clientele (1987, p.42). In 1733, a dressmaker's advertisement in the *New England Weekly* announced the arrival of a doll which could be viewed

at the shop for five shillings or taken home for seven shillings (von Boehm 1932, p.147). Baumgarten (1991, p.103) finds New York city dressmakers advertising the arrival of dolls, "fashions in miniature," in 1757.

Fashion historians believe that dolls were a highly effective means of fashion dissemination, perhaps more informative than present day fashion photography. The dolls were completely clothed, therefore consumers could study minute details of proper attire (Jailer 1990, p.63). In fact, Coleman (1968, p.224) notes an instance in which ladies wore clothing wrong until merchants received the dolls and showed them the correct way. Even as late as 1850, Rondot wrote that "it is now the case that without a doll, merchants would find it difficult to sell their wares" (Coleman 1968, p.224).

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMS THE FASHION DOLL TO PAPER

A confluence of factors emerged around the end of the 1700s to demand and enable new forms of fashion marketing. In 1789, the French revolution put an end to the manufacture of fashion dolls (Jailer 1987, p.41). While in earlier times, the courts had granted special rights of passage to fashion dolls during wartime, Napoleon ended the practice (Baumgarten 1991, p.103). However, advances in printing technology significantly changed the tools available to fashion marketers. Fashion dolls did not disappear, however, marketers turned from dolls to fashion plates in magazines and paper dolls to disseminate fashion information.

Printing

The printing industry--the technology that provided designs on mass-produced fabric as well as mass-produced magazines--is clearly important in our understanding, because the "democratization" of fashion was a combination of technological expertise and a supportive philosophical/political environment. It was on the North American continent where technological developments in printed matter opened the way for new promotional tools for fashion marketing.

The advent of roller printing in 1785 (Kiracofe 1993, p.21), the development of the paper machine in 1812 (Carlton 1970, p.709) and the addition of wood pulp (Britt 1964, p.5) significantly changed the paper industry. Prior to the invention of the continuous paper machine, all paper was made by hand and the size of a single sheet was limited. During this period all paper was made from linen and cotton rags, and the paper mills were often plagued with a shortage of raw materials. The evolution to paper made with wood pulp eliminated the shortage problem. "It has been estimated that by 1886 six men could produce the same quantity and quality of paper as would require 100 men in 1800." (Britt 1964, p.5) The increased paper production and rapid printing methods allowed marketers to switch to more efficient means of fashion dissemination. Magazines and paper dolls could rapidly (by contemporary standards) communicate fashion to a larger market simultaneously.

Early Fashion Magazines

The reach of fashion magazines was broader than fashion dolls. Although some early fashion magazines were targeted at exclusive groups, others were clearly meant to reach lower ranks in society. In England, at the turn of the 18th century, *The Gallery of Fashion* only had a circulation of 450 copies; *The World of Fashion* (1824) had a circulation of 20,000 (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982, p. 48). Ribeiro also mentions cheaper fashion magazines targeted at a wider market; *Cabinet des modes*, begun in 1785, was published every two weeks (1995, p.76). Early printed black and white fashion drawings quickly evolved into hand-colored engravings called fashion plates which were eventually to appear in all the antebellum women's fashion magazines. Sarah Hale published the original fashion plate in Boston in the *Ladies' Magazine* for November 1830 (Finley 1931, p. 9).

Readers of women's magazines were (and are) a constructed community; but this was a community of more than readers--these were women who came to women's magazines for information on fashion, on the latest developments in sewing and sources of income for women. *Godey's Lady's Book*, a then-modern periodical for women, had circulation which reached a phenomenal 150,000 (Mott II 1957, pp. 580-94).

Paper Dolls

According to Ferguson (1982, p.18), "Somewhere, probably in France, in the middle of the eighteenth century, someone created the first paper doll, a paper figure with a change of paper costume. It was probably a handmade delight and a commercial success. Most probably, the first paper doll was created by a dressmaker to show current fashion. This, however, is hypothesis. No one knows for sure, and no one can pinpoint exactly the beginnings of paper dolls." McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) credit the British with using paper dolls to promote fashions (p. 45). Paper dolls had several advantages over fashion dolls. They could be shipped with an entire wardrobe instead of one or two outfits. The dolls were capable of showing multiple outfits and consumers could mix and match. Oftentimes the dolls were printed in black and white to save printing costs, but also such printing allowed consumers to color them as they desired and take them to a tailor to make to specifications. In addition McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb (1982) believe that the British fashion industry was more oriented toward the masses and paper dolls could be transmitted more cheaply to a larger number of people than fashion dolls (also see, Wallach 1982).

With improved paper technology and the tremendous growth of the publishing industry during the 19th century, paper dolls boomed as a promotional tool. Unlike fashion dolls, which were first promotional tools then toys, paper dolls appear to have followed the opposite progression (Ware 1987, p.42). Carefully crafted sets of dolls were given by royalty to their children (Wallach 1982, p.11). These included entire armies of paper soldiers. These figures were printed on scrap or thin cardboard and sold in sheets, booklets, envelopes, or boxes. Because paper was the cheapest and easiest way for manufacturers to spread word about their wares to a wide audience, paper dolls became a common form of advertisement beginning in the 1890's and continuing into the 20th century (Lavitt 1983, p.133).

Later the promotional uses of paper dolls evolved. Paper fashion dolls were used as advertisements for dressmakers, actresses, and dancers. Paper dolls were popular, easy, and cheap to produce, easy to insert into packages and easy to mail (Ferguson 1982, p.68). Paper dolls became a sales promotion tool for products as diverse as thread to sandpaper. The names and slogans found on paper dolls, particularly on the backs along with advertising copy, are some of the most famous brand names in American history, names such as Coca-Cola and Pillsbury (Wallach 1982, p.118) and in the 1920's a family of eight dolls, appropriately attired, were used to promote Munsingwear's long john styles (Baroody 1995, p.49). The merchandising value of these dolls was also discovered by newspapers and added to their supplements to help sell newspapers (Ferguson 1982, p.70). The great continuing popularity of the paper doll led to the inclusion of dolls in almost every family newspaper and magazine during the first thirty years of the 1900's (p.82).

One paper doll, "Dolly Dingle of Dingle Dell," appeared in *The Pictorial Review* more than 200 times. (Ware 1987, p.43) Dolly's debut in the Review was in the March issue of 1913, and continued regularly until this excellent publication ceased in 1933. Her clothing, as many as nine different outfits per month on the paper dolls alone, was the envy and inspiration of sewing mothers everywhere who recreated them for their daughters. When in doubt as to the latest fashion, they turned to Drayton's latest offerings." (Baroody 1995, p.49)

MARKETING FASHIONS THROUGH MAGAZINES AND PATTERNS

Printing technology enabled one more change in fashion marketing in the 1800s. Fashion creators were now able to sell the designs in the form of a paper pattern, separate from the physical fashion market. While supporting evidence does not exist, the idea for paper patterns may have evolved from interchangeable outfits for paper dolls. What is certain is that patterns originated in the same magazines that first published paper dolls.

Paper Patterns

Equipped with sewing machines (patented by Howe in 1846), home seamstresses had the potential to create their own fashions. But it is difficult for a novice to translate a fashion plate (illustration) into a physical product. It is not coincidental that marketers of magazines would seize the opportunity to provide

detailed instructions for sewing garments. As the legend goes, Ellen Curtis Demorest got the idea of simplified sizing and mass-produced paper patterns after watching a maid cut around the paper. Demorest was co-founder, with her husband, of *Demorest's* magazine. A similar tale is told about the maid to the Butterick family by a publicist who wrote the story of that paper-pattern empire (Woodward 1960, p. 42). But the idea of cutting the pieces of a dress and using paper pattern pieces as guide for cloth probably did not originate with the Demorest's or Butterick's maid. According to one historian of the fashion industry, the first miniature (i.e., one page) pattern was illustrated in *Lady's Magazine*, about 1850 (Ewers & Baylor 1970, p.91). Another soon followed in *Godey's Lady's Book*. Both were merely a picture of a design, without directions or charts. Later patterns illustrated the design in miniature, with scanty directions on how to proceed, but they were seized quickly by ladies of the day (Ewers and Baylor 1970, p.91).

There is some evidence that patterns existed nearly a century earlier in 1769. A treatise on tailoring gave details for measuring the customer and cutting out the fabric with paper patterns (Ribeiro 1984, p. 52). However, patterns were scorned by tailors. Even as late as 1910, Hopkins advised young tailors to learn a system of cutting. "One who has to beg, buy or copy a set of patterns is very heavily handicapped...His stock-in-trade is his intellect,... that enables him to go from berth to berth, and from country to country, without a scrap of paper, and to be appreciated as a man of sterling ability ..." (Hopkins 1910, p. 4). It was the Demorests and Butterick who made patterns widely available to the masses of home seamstresses.

The Demorests appear to have seen journalistic products as a means to an end, rather than an end in themselves. Like Louis A. Godey, publisher of *Godey's Lady's Book*, described as a good two-thirds business man (Mott I 1957, p. 581), the Demorests were successful marketers. Their success resulted from their ability to market the *design of a garment separate from the garment itself*. Their paper pattern system began with a dress chart that "would simplify the cumbersome and expensive cut-and-try method of making clothes fit" (Bird 1976, p. 14). A promotion for the dress chart appeared regularly in the magazine with the words "Mme. Demorest's Dress Chart is now given to each yearly subscriber (*Demorest's*, November 1870, p. 217). The pattern played a role as a sales promotion for their magazine, and the magazine in turn was as a sales vehicle for their patterns. And they had picked up an anti-French-fashion thread that was expressed as early as the 1790s: "We have imported the worst of French corruptions, the want of female delicacy....What must we say of some, whom we daily observe, whose dress is studiously designed to display the female form?" (cited in Mott I 1957, p. 140). But the Demorests were to make decorous fashion fashionable. And they were to break the cycle of dependence on the international fashion world and give American women throughout the nation a chance to profit from these developments. The Demorest marketing was wide-ranging. In 1870, along with advertising for aromatic vegetable soap, pianofortes, Dutch bulbous roots (bulbs), and clothes wringers, the Demorests promoted premiums for those selling the magazine and for those organizing clubs of subscribers -- a tracing wheel with the Mme. Demorest label, special complexion cremes, and other Demorest publications, including one called *Demorest's Young America* for boys and girls. The 1870s were the decade of their highest public acclaim. In 1875, they had distributed three million patterns worldwide. A year later, at the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia, the "celebrated pair were revisiting Philadelphia, the city in which their first paper patterns were cut and exhibited....and Mme. Demorest's display in the main building was one of the chief attractions of the fair for women" (Ross 1963, p. 176).

While the Demorest's patterns could be acquired through their own magazines, Butterick's patterns could also be ordered through *Arthur's Home Magazine*, an early general women's magazine published in Philadelphia. Instead of having patterns as premiums, readers could order fashions from T.S. Arthur & Son, 1129 Chestnut St., Philadelphia: "Notice! We are Agents for the Sale of E. Butterick & Co.'s patterns and will send any kind or size of them to any address post-paid on receipt of price and order." Seen in February 1877, for example, is a ladies evening costume with a description that says it is "for evening wear, ruby, garnet, cardinal red and wine colors are again in favor." Clearly *Arthur's* depends on a woman's imagination to translate the sketch into an elegant colored fashion. But the difference in price between *Arthur's* and *Godey's* would make the difference clear: *Godey's* in 1869 offers one year for \$3, while for \$4 both *Godey's* and *Arthur's* can be received.

THE REAPPEARANCE OF "FASHION DOLLS" AS MANNEQUINS

Printing technology did not end the reign of fashion dolls, they were reincarnated in the form of mannequins. The reappearance of the fashion doll was facilitated by several other environmental changes. The movement of people away from rural areas to larger towns and cities along with the development of the large plate glass windows in the late eighteenth century (Kowalski-Wallace 1997, p.80) brought window display into prominence. The addition of lights to window displays in 1910 (Marcus 1978, p.18) was credited with attracting a new urban middle class to stores in the evening. A 1910 article in *Merchants Record* notes "hundreds of men and women who are busy all day must do their shopping after dark, and that there has grown up a large class known as 'window shoppers' who study the display windows after supper, comparing qualities and prices and making up their mind where to do their purchasing..."(p.19).

The display of fashionable clothing on full figured mannequins in store windows began to appear in 1911 after years of partial dress forms without heads. "Such was the allure of the figures that window shopping became a form of entertainment and leisure activity" (d'Aulaire 1991, p.70). The importance of mannequins in attracting customers to the store's goods was noted by L. Frank Baum, "without such displays, the merchant sinks into oblivion. The busy world forgets him and he is left to himself, to rust, vegetate or to fail ignominiously"(p.70). Breward also notes the advantages of mannequins over magazines in his statement, "The cluttered display of a provincial dress-shop window betrays the reality of many women's consumption choices more clearly than the slick designs of magazine layouts or film fantasies"(1995, p.210).

Early mannequins were made of wax with false teeth. There were several problems with these mannequins -- notably the heavy weight and the tendency to melt under the bright lights. Mannequin manufacturers have made several advancements, from wax to plaster to the fiberglass mannequins of today. As the design of mannequins advanced, their use was also enhanced. "The mannequin was no longer simply a clothes rack. It was designed to sell the dress it was wearing, to attract passers-by; it was now part of the street scene and was to become the flattering reflection of possible customers" (Parrot 1982, p.42). Later some mannequins were mechanized to simulate a real moving person, and some displays even included live models among the mannequins.

CONCLUSIONS

The 1950s have been described as the first time highly successful dress designers began to sell directly for the ready-to-wear trade (de Marly 1980, p.207), but the seeds of a democratization of fashion had been sewn centuries earlier. Studying shorter time spans, some authors have concluded that marketers were responsible for spreading the consumption of fashionable clothing. However, by looking at a longer time

new type of fashion doll, were used in window displays and created a new past time, window shopping. During the World War I and its hiatus for the French fashion world, dolls' influence was expressed in fashion shows as we know them today. Edna Woolman Chase, an early editor of *Vogue*, recalls trying to "rack her brains" for a way to fill the pages of her magazine. She recalled doll shows that *Vogue* had given in 1896-98. "Those miniature ladies had been dressed by New York houses," she thought, leading her to ask Henri Bendell, to organize an exhibition of original designs with living models. Given his prestige, she knew other fashion houses would follow suit. Dolls in fashionable attire once traveled to consumers of high fashion, but they have now been replaced by live fashion models who travel the world of fashion both personally and electronically.

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